Identity in American Culture
AMST418R  Fall 2012

Offered online via ELMS (powered by Blackboard). To log in, go to http://elms.umd.edu

Dr. Kelly
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Class meetings: AMST418R is an online class. There are no face-to-face meetings of the class and no occasions for online chat.

Prerequisite: At least three credit hours of prior coursework in American Studies.

Course description: “Who do you think you are? If you tell me your age, your occupation, your place of birth . . . you haven’t told me anything. I want to know what you love. If we know what you love, we can make a life for you.”

So went a radio pitch (presumably for some kind of self-enhancement service) broadcast in the D.C. area several years ago on the area’s classical music station. This commercial pitch is interesting for several reasons: it is clearly about identity—who one really is; it implies that who one really is and the quality of one’s life are closely linked; it suggests further that there may be many listeners for whom identity and the quality of their lives are problematical enough that they might be customers for an expert service aimed at helping them uncover who they truly are—and giving them the tools to realize a fuller life appropriate to that true identity. And since the target audience consisted of adults, the commercial implies that identity is an ongoing process, that we are never “finished,” so to speak, that “self-fashioning” is a lifelong project.

Drawing on fiction as well as historical and sociological scholarship, AMST418R explores questions associated with identity in contemporary American society. What is “identity,” anyway? How do I come to possess my identity? What choice, if any, do I have along the way to shape who I can be? Readings for the course include novels (R. L. Stevenson’s Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde) and Mark Twain’s Pudd’nhead Wilson, an historian’s reflections on a “postethnic” America, and a collection of essays in honor of the centennial of the birth of psychologist Erik Erikson, whose psycho-social approach to identity has been especially influential.

“Ethnicity is a cultural resource that people tend to emphasize in circumstances where it is advantageous and to deemphasize in circumstances where it is disadvantageous.”

--Murray G. Murphey
“If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country.”

–E. M. Forster

“For every Southern boy fourteen years old, not once but whenever he wants it, there is the instant when it’s still not yet two oclock on that July afternoon in 1863, the brigades are in position behind the rail fence, the guns are laid and ready in the woods and the furled flags are already loosened to break out and Pickett himself...[is] waiting for Longstreet to give the word and it’s all in the balance...” (emphasis added)

–William Faulkner

“Adam was but human–this explains it all. He did not want the apple for the apple’s sake, he wanted it only because it was forbidden. The mistake was in not forbidding the serpent: then he would have eaten the serpent.”

–Mark Twain

“In overhauling his golf game, Tiger Woods has lost his identity.”

--Sally Jenkins, The Washington Post, August 10, 2011

“In a speech in Minneapolis in 2006, [Michele] Bachmann spoke of growing up with ‘the emotional struggles of not having a strong father in my life.’ Two years after her father left, Bachmann joined a high-school prayer group. She had been brought up a Lutheran, but she knew little about the Bible. With the help of the members of the prayer group, she explained in the speech, she became a born-again Christian:

I didn’t know I wasn’t a believer. But they knew I wasn’t a believer, and they started praying for me. And all of a sudden the holy spirit started knocking on my heart’s door and I could hear the Lord tug me and call me to Himself, and I responded on November 1st of 1972, and I knew that I knew that I had received Jesus Christ as my lord and savior and that my life would never be the same after I made that commitment, because I knew what darkness looked like. I knew it from my home life. I absolutely understood sin, and I wanted no part of it. When Jesus Christ came in and cleaned out this dark heart, that was light. That was rest. That was peace. It was refreshment. Why would I ever want the world? I knew what that had to offer. This was great. That didn’t mean that I woke and all of a sudden I had money, all of a sudden I had position, all of a sudden I had education. It didn’t. But what it meant was that all of a sudden I had a father.”

--Ryan Lizza, The New Yorker, September 15, 2011

“Americans’ self-identity springs from the beliefs on which this country was founded, including the belief that no one is better than anyone else simply by virtue of their birth.”


July 4, 2012

Course Goals:

1) To offer a coherent and inclusive conceptual framework for thinking about identity.

2) To document the diversity of social and personal identity in the United States.

3) To demonstrate the role of cultural factors such as values in shaping identity.
4) To provide opportunities for improving writing skills, with emphasis on writing that is clear, precise, concise, and well organized.

5) To develop skill in marshalling textual evidence in support of an argument.

**Grading:**

Point values for the writing assignments are as follows:

- First post to Discussion Board (due September 4): Diagnostic
- Second post (due September 23): 20 points
- Third post (due October 7): 30 points
- Midterm paper (due October 22): 100 points
- Final paper (due December 14): 150 points

**Textbooks required for the course:**

The following books have been ordered for the course and are available at the University Book Center. All are required reading.


Used copies of these texts are widely available from online booksellers such as Amazon.com or alibris.com. Electronic texts of Twain’s *Pudd’nhead Wilson* and Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* are available online at books.google.com.

**About the Course Readings**

Readings for the course are blocked out by week. You are expected to complete all readings assigned by the end of each week. Within that expectation, however, you are free, of course, to schedule your reading to accommodate your semester’s responsibilities to work, family, etc. Experience suggests, however, that it is best to schedule some reading time four or five times a week rather than to try to crowd a week’s reading into one day or even two.

In addition to the books ordered for the course, you will be reading some articles originally published in scholarly journals. All of these articles are available via the **Electronic Reserves** feature on Blackboard. To access these readings, click on *Electronic Reserves* on the Homepage. You can also access these readings by clicking on *Course Tools* on the *Tools* menu: then click on *Electronic Reserves*, then click on *View Your Electronic Reserves*.

**Course Expectations**

I expect you to:
- Complete all assigned reading by the end of each week.
- Submit written assignments on time.
- Email me with questions about readings that puzzle you.
- Demonstrate the ability to read analytically and critically.

You can expect me to:
- Respond to your emails within 24 hours.
- Provide constructive comments on your posts and papers. If you would like additional comments and suggestions for improvement, please see me during my office hours.

**Discussion Assignments**

**Week 1** (August 29—September 2), **Week 4** (September 17—22), and **Week 6** (October 1—7) require you to post brief responses (not to exceed 500 words) to the **Discussion Board** on the course Web site. There, other students in the class will be able to read your responses. The questions can be found in the **Assignments** section of the Web site.
Paper Assignments

Two longer papers are required, in addition to the three submissions to the Discussion Board. Directions, assessment criteria, and the questions for each paper are posted in the Assignments section of the Web site.

The midterm paper (100 pts) is due Monday, October 22, by noon, in Room 0102 Holzapfel Hall, and covers the reading for the first seven weeks of the course, August 29—October 14.

The final paper (150 pts) is cumulative, covering the entire course reading assignments, and is due Friday, December 14, by noon, in Room 0102 Holzapfel Hall.

Getting in Touch with the Instructor

I will be in my office (0102 Holzapfel Hall) on Mondays between 8 a.m. and noon to discuss the course in person or by telephone (301.405.1356). You may leave a voice mail message at that number at any time. You can reach me by email daily between 7 a.m. and 9 p.m.

If you find yourself encountering difficulty with any aspect of the course or have questions about any of the assignments, please call or e-mail me before the problem becomes acute. It is especially important to reach me if you are experiencing technical problems that are interfering with your access to the online readings.

Schedule of Assignments

Week 1: August 29-September 2

Reading assignment:

Review the course syllabus. Review all of the writing assignments for the course (located in the Assignments section of the Web site).

Robert Louis Stevenson, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (1886).


Writing assignment, Week 1: First Post to Discussions due Tuesday, September 4, by 11 p.m. See Assignments for the questions and further directions.
Week 2: September 4-9 (September 3rd is Labor Day)

Reading assignment:


Week 3: September 10 - 16

Reading assignment:


Weeks 4 and 5: September 17 - 30 (Yom Kippur 9/25-9/26)

Reading assignment:


**Writing assignment, Week 4:** Second Post to *Discussions* due Sunday, September 23, by 11 p.m. See *Assignments* for the questions and directions.

**Week 6: October 1 – 7**

**Reading assignment:**


**Writing Assignment:** Third Post to *Discussions* due Sunday, October 7, by 11 p.m. See *Assignments* for the questions and directions.

**Week 7: October 8 - 14**

**Reading assignment:**

Mark Twain, *Pudd’nhead Wilson* (1894). (Required textbook)
Week 8: Midterm examination due Monday, October 22, by noon in 0102 Holzapfel Hall.

Weeks 9 and 10: October 22 - November 4

Reading assignment:


David Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*, revised and updated 2005. (Required textbook)

Week 11: November 5 - 11

Reading assignment:


Week 12: November 12 - 18

Reading assignment:


Weeks 13-15: November 19 - December 11

Reading assignment:

Amin Maalouf, *In the Name of Identity* (1996). (Required textbook)


Final examination: due on Friday, December 14, by noon, in Room 0102 Holzapfel Hall

University Policies

Please be reminded of the University's Code of Academic Integrity, which is outlined in the Undergraduate Catalog, and the Honor Pledge (available on line at [www.umd.edu/honorpledge](http://www.umd.edu/honorpledge)). The Code's definitions of academic dishonesty are printed in the Schedule of Classes. Students are expected to be familiar with, and abide by, the Code of Academic Integrity and are invited to append the Honor Pledge to their written work.

The Student Honor Council has asked that the following statement be included on course syllabi:

"The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity, administered by the Student Honor Council. This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit [http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/whatis.html](http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/whatis.html)."

Deadlines missed because of illness. If you are ill and cannot submit a written assignment on the date due, please notify me in advance. When you have recovered, email documentation of the illness, signed by a health care professional.
Students with disabilities should contact me at the beginning of the semester to discuss any accommodation for this course.


This syllabus may be subject to change. I will notify you in advance of important changes that could affect grading, assignments, etc. Such changes to the syllabus, however, are unlikely.