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Spring, 2009  
Office hrs. Weds. 9:30-12:00  
and by appointment

## ETHNIC AMERICA

“Give me your tired, your poor  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

[Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus,” 1886, inscribed on the  
base of the Statue of Liberty]

“We consistently have fallen for the old melting-pot concept. But there never was  
a melting pot; there is not now a melting pot; and if there were, it would be such a  
tasteless soup that we would have to go back and start all over again.”

[Black activist leader, Bayard Rustin, 1972]

Ethnic America is a course in which we examine several ethnic groups in the United States, how they interrelate, and the nature of a country which has sometimes been called “The United Nations in miniature.” While we will examine the nature of American ethnicity in general, the course will focus on Irish, Italians, Jews, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans as representative, and we will look at them through literature and film. Most Americans came to this country seeking opportunity or escaping persecution, and this is true of five of the above groups. African-Americans, however, were for the most part dragged here in slavery, and Native Americans, or American Indians, were the original inhabitants of this continent from whom, it may be said, the rest of us took it and, in the process, engaged in considerable genocide. So while immigrant groups are at the center of our course’s interests, and the United States continues to be the world’s greatest immigrant-receiving nation, our focus will be on the strategies of survival of American ethnic groups in general; how they handle the tensions between maintaining their separate cultures and, at the same time, reach out to other Americans to join a common destiny,.

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### BOOK LIST

John Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*  
Nella Larsen, *Passing* and *Quicksand*  
Abraham Cahan, *Yekl*, *The Imported Bridegroom* and *Other Stories*  
Mario Puzo, *the Godfather*  
Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*  
Julia Alvarez, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*  
Edwin O’Connor, *The Last Hurrah*

All books are available in the Douglass-Cook bookstore on Nichol Avenue at Lipman Drive.

- Wed. Jan. 21           INTRODUCTION I.  
The Semantic Problem
- Mon., Jan. 26           INTRODUCTION II.  
The Melting Pot vs. the Salad Bowl
- Wed. Jan. 28           INTRODUCTION III.  
excerpt from film “Three Days on Big City Waters”  
  
also: “The Things They Say Behind Your Back,” “A Short Guide to Comparative Religions,” and “The Whole World as 100 People”

### **NATIVE AMERICANS**

- Mon. Feb. 2            read: *Black Elk Speaks*  
and Wed. Feb. 4
- Mon. Feb. 9            film discussion, *Little Big Man*\* (asterisks connote film on reserve)

PLEASE NOTE: In the course of the semester, you will be seeing a number of films in the music/media room of the Douglass library. These films will be placed on reserve, and you will watch them on video monitors (unless you prefer to rent them and see them privately). I list below the ample hours of the music/media room. Each film will be placed on reserve for two weeks **before** their discussion in class and removed immediately afterwards. The hours of the media room are as follows: Monday thru Thursday, 9 a.m. to 10 p.m.; Friday, 9 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.; Sunday, 12 noon to 8 p.m.

### **AFRICAN-AMERICANS**

- Wed. Feb. 11           film (in class) *Ethnic Notions*
- Mon. Feb. 16           Nella Larsen’s *Passing*
- Wed. Feb. 18           Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand*
- Mon. Feb. 23           film discussion, *Do The Right Thing*\*

### **JEWISH-AMERICANS**

- Wed. Feb 25           read Abraham Cahan’s *Yekl*
- Mon. March 2           film discussion *Hester Street*\*

- Wed. March 4 read the other stories in the book
- ITALIAN-AMERICANS**
- Mon. March 9 read Mario Puzo, *The Godfather*
- Note: On this day we will have a brief, midterm quiz based on all reading (up through and including the first half of *The Godfather*) and all lectures and class discussion. Quiz must be taken on this day. No makeups.**
- Wed. March 11 Puzo's *the Godfather (continued)*
- Mon. March 23 film discussion, *Godfather II\**
- ASIAN-AMERICANS**
- Wed. March 25 read: Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*
- Mon. March 30 Film in class, *Who Killed Vincent Chin?*
- Wed. April 1 NO CLASS
- Mon. April 6 **HISPANIC-AMERICANS (LATINOS)**
- read: Julia Alvarez, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*
- Wed. April 8 Alvarez (continued)
- Mon. April 13 film discussion of *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez\**
- IRISH-AMERICANS**
- Wed April 15 read Edwin O'Connor, *The Last Hurrah*
- Mon. April 20 O'Connor (continued)
- Wed. April 22 discussion of the film *The Last Hurrah\**
- Mon. April 27 film in class *Fires in the Mirror*
- NOTE: TERM PROJECTS DUE IN CLASS ON THIS DAY WITHOUT FAIL. LATE PAPERS WILL BE PENALIZED WHATEVER THE EXCUSE**
- Wed. April 29 discussion of the film *Fires in the Mirror*

Mon. May 4

## SUMMING UP THE COURSE

Wither ethnicity in America?

### FINAL EXAMINATION:

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#### GRADING POLICY

Your term grade will be based on four factors: the midterm quiz, the final quiz and essays, your term paper, class participation and attendance. Be sure to note the date of the midterm quiz, March 9 and the date your term projects are due, April 27. Your term projects will be returned to you at the final examination, on Thursday, May 7, 8:30-11:00 in our room. I do not give makeup examinations so you must be present on the two examination dates.

Further, let me say at once that once the course has ended there will be no possibilities of extra credit work. Such after-the-fact activities are manifestly unfair to everyone else in the course who has done the work all along and who haven't been given special opportunities to improve their grade. Such opportunities in a course should either be offered to everyone or no one in my opinion. The time to work on a course is *now*, not when the course is over.

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#### TERM PAPER

The most important factor in your course grade will be your term project.

Since our readings are extensive (seven books) and, in addition, you are required to see six films on reserve, I am asking you to do a term paper of a largely personal nature, involving little or not library work but a great deal of imagination and originality. What I want you to do is to write an autobiographical essay on your own ethnicity.

For some of us our ethnicity is clear, strongly identify with a single ethnic or religious group (or both), and our ethnicity is an everyday, major ingredient in our lives. For others, our ethnicity is blurred at best. We are made up of a little of this, a little of that (Heinz 57 varieties). Nevertheless, even for those of us with no ethnicity at all to speak of, who think of themselves as no hyphenated in any way but as "just American" there are still problems of identity. If nothing else, we may have difficulties relating to those with strong ethnic identities—indeed, we may feel either superior to them or inferior to them or simply insecure in the presence of strong ethnic sentiment. Thus, even those of us with little or no ethnic feeling still must contend with getting along in a remarkably multi-ethnic, multi-cultural country. If even this is not true of you, then you may wish to write about your perceptions of ethnic groups while growing up, the place they occupied in your life, etc. Thus you would be writing not so much an autobiography of your own

ethnicity as about how ethnicity in America impinged on your mind and values and sentiments as you were growing up.

If you have difficulty deciding what to write about and/or how to write about it, come see me in my office. Also, if you are somewhat concerned that your subject matter is controversial or even inflammatory, please be assured that only I will be reading your essays and that I will show them to no one without your specific approval. I say this because I want you to feel free to write how you feel without embarrassment and without a sense that anyone is looking over your shoulder or judging you with any criteria besides the quality of your storytelling and your writing.