

**Honors 201B**  
**Sophomore Honors Seminar**  
**Spring 2005**  
**Tuesday & Thursday 10-11:15**  
**Code: 13514**  
**University Hall 239**

**John Ibson**  
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**Office Hours: TR 2:30-4:30,**  
**and by appointment**  
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**Required Reading:**

Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*

John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America*

Linda K. Kerber and Jane Sherron De Hart, editors, *Women's America: Refocusing the Past*, fifth edition

Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*

David K. Shipler, *A Country of Strangers: Blacks and Whites in America*

Beth Loffreda, *Losing Matt Shepard: Life and Politics in the Aftermath of Anti-Gay Murder*

The class examines some important ways in which politics and culture have intersected in the United States in the past century. There are many definitions of "politics," but for our purposes you should think of politics very broadly, as the contest for power in a society. "Culture" too has many definitions, but for us it will be the beliefs, symbols, and values of a particular group of people. This semester we'll focus on four issues of tremendous political and cultural importance in recent American history: social class, race, gender, and sexual orientation.

This class is the second semester of the special honors seminar that combines the learning goals of the two sections of the university's general education requirements that pertain to American History, Institutions, and Values. These, then, are the several learning goals that the seminar will address:

To understand critically the historical development of American institutions and values and their impact on the individual and collective lives of Americans.

To assess critically how the Constitution of the United States and government under the Constitution have shaped American democracy and contemporary American society.

To understand critically the political culture of citizen participation, including political parties, pressure groups, public opinion and the electoral process.

1. American History

Courses in American History include the following as principal goals for student learning.

To recognize the significance of important cultural, intellectual, moral and political struggles that have shaped contemporary American society.

To recognize the significance of the contributions of various ethnic and gender groups to American history, political institutions and values within contexts of cultural accommodation and resistance.

2. Government

Courses in Government include the following as principal goals for student learning.

To assess critically the Constitutions of the United States and of California, and the operation of representative democratic government under those Constitutions.

To explain the processes and interaction between and among local, state and national government, with particular reference to California.

To understand critically the structures, functions, and processes of the three branches of government and resulting public policies.

To assess critically behavior and institutional practices in United States and California politics.

## Course Requirements

Because this class is a seminar, there will be no lectures or instructor's monologues. Instead our class sessions will be devoted to our **discussions** of reading assignments or of material that you or I bring to class—such as slides, videos, or CDs—to help us better understand points brought up in the readings. I hope that we will together create an atmosphere in which all of you will want to speak in our discussions, but I also recognize that we may all learn a great deal by being attentive listeners. Because a good seminar depends on widespread student involvement, **attendance at each class meeting is required.** If you must miss a class, please inform the group ahead of time, if possible, when you will be missing.

Beginning with our coverage of the Kasson book, on **each Tuesday** of a week that has reading assigned, you are to bring **a list of five questions** prompted by that week's reading. I will collect your questions and use them to enhance our discussions. The questions you devise, then, should be ones that you think would be good to talk about.

Around the middle of the semester, at the time indicated on the Course Outline, you are to prepare, outside class, an **essay of about 1,000 words** in which you

identify and discuss what you believe to be the seminar's most significant topics, insights, and unanswered questions up to that point in the course. At the end of the semester, you are to prepare a similar **essay of about 1,500 words** that covers our entire 15 weeks together. This essay will be due during Finals Week, on Tuesday, May 24.

Finally, you are to prepare an **ethnography of at least 1,500 words** that critically examines the political and cultural significance of a particular place that you have visited at least once during the semester. ("Ethnography" is simply the word that people in cultural studies use for a critical analysis of the cultural workings of some specific place, be it a laundromat, a dance club, or one of countless other possibilities.) You should not have visited the place that you study (or any place very similar to it) before this seminar; ideally, it should be a place that you at least initially imagine will make you feel like an "outsider." We'll discuss this assignment from time to time in class. You must notify me in writing of the place you will study by Tuesday, March 15. We'll devote our last week to a discussion of your ethnographies.

### **Grading:**

The quality of your participation in the seminar discussions—your attendance, speaking, listening, and discussion questions—will constitute 40% of your course grade. The final essay will count 30%, the ethnography 20%, and the midterm essay 10%.

The criteria for grading the midterm, ethnography, and final will be: understanding (50%), originality (20%), evidence (10%), clarity (10%), organization (10%).

I will use the university's new plus/minus (+/-) grading system.

Depending on its severity, academic dishonesty will result in a penalty ranging from a failing grade on a particular assignment to an F in the course.

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

### **1. INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE**

**Tu 2/1**      What are we doing here?

**Th 2/3**      Discussion of questions posed on Tuesday

**2. AMERICAN VALUES AND AMERICAN POLITICS: CULTURE AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF POWER IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICA**

- Tu 2/8 Ehrenreich, Introduction: "Getting Ready" ; One: "Serving in in Florida."  
 Th 2/10 Two: "Scrubbing in Maine."  
 Tu 2/15 Three: "Selling in Minnesota."  
 Tu 2/17 "Evaluation."

**3. SEXUAL POLITICS: SHIFTING BOUNDARIES OF GENDER IN MODERN AMERICA**

**A. Uncertain Power: Alleged Privileges of White Manhood**

- Tu 2/22 Kasson, Introduction, Chapter One: "Who Is the Perfect  
 Th 2/24 Man? Eugen Sandow and a New Standard for America," pp. 3-76.  
 Tu 3/1 Kasson, Chapter Two: "The Manly Art of Escape: The  
 Th 3/3 Metamorphoses of Ehrich Weiss," pp. 77-155.  
 Tu 3/8 Kasson, Chapter Three: "'Still a Wild Beast at Heart':  
 Th 3/10 Edgar Rice Burroughs and the Dream of *Tarzan*," Conclusion, pp. 157-223.

**B. Contested Meanings: Being an American Woman**

- Tu 3/15 Women as Citizens: Kerber, pp. 325-343.  
 \*\*\*\*\*Ethnography topics due\*\*\*\*\*  
 Th 3/17 Autonomy: Kerber, pp. 355-371; 462-471.  
 Tu 3/22 Protest: Kerber, pp. 377-400.  
 Outsiders: Kerber, pp. 414-418; 426-441.  
 Th 3/24 Abortion and Political Culture: pp. 553-563.  
 Women as Citizens: Kerber, pp. 564-579.

**\*\*\*MIDTERM ESSAY SHOULD COVER PREVIOUS MATERIAL\*\*\***

**Spring Recess**

**C. Cold Wars at Home and Abroad: Domestic and International Politics in Post-World War II America**

- Tu 4/5** May, Introduction, pp. ix-xxvi; Chapter 1, "Containment at Home: Cold War, Warm Hearth," 10-29
- Th 4/7** May, Chapter 4, "Explosive Issues: Sex Women, and the Bomb," pp. 80-99
- Tu 4/12** May, Chapters 5 and 8, "Brinkmanship: Sexual Containment on the Home Front," pp. 100-118, "Hanging Together: For Better or for Worse," pp.163-185.
- Th 4/14** May, Chapter 9, "The End of Containment: The Baby Boom Comes of Age," pp. 186-203, Postscript, pp. 205-208.

**4. RACISM OVERCOME? RACIAL POLITICS IN MODERN AMERICA**

- Tu 4/19** Shipler, Chapter Four, "Body," Chapter Five, "Mind," pp. 229-316.
- Th 4/21** Shipler, Chapter Six, "Morality," Chapter Seven, "Violence," pp. 317-408.
- Tu 4/26** Shipler, Chapter Eight, "Power," Chapter Nine, "Decoding Racism," pp. 409-488.
- Th 4/28** Shipler, Chapter Ten, "Acting Affirmatively," Chapter Eleven, "Breaking the Silence," Chapter Twelve, "A Country of Strangers," pp. 489-570.

**5. CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL POLITICS: THE DISTRACTING ALLURE OF HOMOPHOBIA**

- Tu 5/3** Loffreda, Preface, Chapter One, pp. xv-xiv; 1-31
- Th 5/5** Loffreda, Chapters Two and Three, pp. 33-89
- Tu 5/10** Loffreda, Chapters Four and Five, pp. 91-164
- Th 5/12** Loffreda, Chapter Six, pp. 165-184

**6. WHERE WE HAVE BEEN: A DISCUSSION OF YOUR ETHNOGRAPHIES**

Tu 5/17 Ethnography discussion  
Th 5/19 Ethnography discussion

Tu 5/24 **FINAL ESSAYS DUE**