

HONR 3331.01: CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Spring 2017 | Online Course | Honors College | CRN 23937

Course Description

This course will examine several key issues of our time -- class, race, gender identity, and creativity -- through personal memoirs that engage with larger national narratives. The goal of the class is to provide provocative material that will inspire as well as educate. The course is divided into four units, which each cover a separate topic. Please be aware that some of the content for this class may contain adult themes and content, including profanity, violence, and nudity. If this bothers you, then you may want to sign up for another class.

Instructor

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Required Books

- J.D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of Family and Culture in Crisis* (New York: Harper, 2016).
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015).
- Kenji Yoshino, *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights* (New York: Random House, 2007).
- Patti Smith, *Just Kids* (New York: Ecco, 2010)

Course Organization

Unit I – January 22 to February 11 | J.D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of Family and Culture in Crisis*

From a former marine and Yale Law School graduate, a powerful account of growing up in a poor Rust Belt town that offers a broader, probing look at the struggles of America's white working class. *Hillbilly Elegy* is a passionate and personal analysis of a culture in crisis—that of white working-class Americans. The decline of this group, a demographic of our country that has been slowly disintegrating over forty years, has been reported on with growing frequency and alarm, but has never before been written about as searingly from the inside. J. D. Vance tells the true story of what a social, regional, and class decline feels like when you were born with it hung around your neck. A deeply moving memoir with its share of humor and vividly colorful figures, *Hillbilly Elegy* is the story of how upward mobility really feels. And it is an urgent and troubling meditation on the loss of the American dream for a large segment of this country. (Harper)

Unit II – February 12 to March 4 | Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*

In a profound work that pivots from the biggest questions about American history and ideals to the most intimate concerns of a father for his son, Ta-Nehisi Coates offers a powerful new framework for understanding our nation's history and current crisis. Americans have built an empire on the idea of "race," a falsehood that damages us all but falls most heavily on the bodies of black women and men—bodies exploited through slavery and segregation, and, today, threatened, locked up, and murdered out of all proportion. What is it like to inhabit a black body and find a way to live within it? And how can we all honestly reckon with this fraught history and free ourselves from its burden? *Between the World and Me* is Ta-Nehisi Coates's attempt to answer these questions in a letter to his adolescent son. Coates shares with his son—and readers—the story of his awakening to the truth about his place in the world through a series of revelatory experiences, from Howard University to Civil War battlefields, from the South Side of Chicago to Paris, from his childhood home to the living rooms of mothers whose children's lives were taken as American plunder. Beautifully woven from personal narrative, reimagined history, and fresh, emotionally charged reportage, *Between the World and Me* clearly illuminates the past, bravely confronts our present, and offers a transcendent vision for a way forward. (Spiegel & Grau)

Unit III – March 5 to April 1 | Kenji Yoshino, *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights*

Seldom has a work of such careful intellectual rigor and fairness been so deeply touching. Yoshino, a law professor at Yale and a gay, Asian-American man, masterfully melds autobiography and legal scholarship in this book, marking a move from more traditional pleas for civil equality to a case for individual autonomy in identity politics. In questioning the phenomenon of "covering," a term used for the coerced hiding of crucial aspects of one's self, Yoshino thrusts the reader into a battlefield of shifting gray areas. Yet, at every step, he anticipates the reader's questions and rebuttals, answering them not only with acute reasoning, but with disarming humility. What emerges is an eloquent, poetic protest against the hidden prejudices embedded in American civil rights legislation—legislation that tacitly apologizes for "immutable" human difference from the white, male, straight norm, rather than defending one's "right to say what one is." Though Yoshino recognizes the law's potential to further (and hinder) liberty's cause, he admits that his "education in law has been an education in its limitations." Hence, by way of his unsparing accounts of self-realization, he reveals that the struggle against oppression lies not solely in fighting an imagined, monolithic state but as much in intimate discourse with the mother, the father and the colleague who constitute that state. As healing as it is polemical, this book has tremendous potential as a touchstone in the struggle for universal human dignity. (Publishers Weekly)

Unit IV – April 2 to April 22 | Patti Smith, *Just Kids*

In *Just Kids*, Patti Smith's first book of prose, the legendary American artist offers a never-before-seen glimpse of her remarkable relationship with photographer Robert Mapplethorpe in the epochal days of New York City and the Chelsea Hotel in the late sixties and seventies. An honest and moving story of youth and friendship, Smith brings the same unique, lyrical quality to *Just Kids* as she has to the rest of her formidable body of work—from her influential 1975 album *Horses* to her visual art and poetry. (Ecco)

Grading Structure

This class is divided into four units that correspond to the dates listed above. Each section of the course will include a discussion board and book review assignment.

Assignment	Due Date	Points
Vance Book Review	Feb 11	100
Coates Book Review	March 4	100
Yoshino Book Review	April 1	100
Smith Book Review	April 22	100
Discussion Board	Weekly	100
TOTAL		500

A=500-450

B=449-400

C=399-350

D=349-300

F=299-0

Technical Information

Students registered for this course should be familiar with Blackboard.

For technical problems, please contact Tech Support at SHSUOnline.

Email: delta@shsu.edu; Phone: 936.294.2780; <http://distance.shsu.edu/tech-support/>

Classroom Rules of Conduct

Students will refrain from behavior in the online classroom that disrupts the learning process and, thus, impedes the mission of the university. Inappropriate behavior on the discussion board or via email may be reported to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action in accordance with university policy.

Visitors in the Classroom

Only registered students may participate in this online course. Exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis by the appropriate professor. In all cases, visitors must not present a disruption to the class. Students wishing to audit a class must apply to do so through the Registrar's Office.

Academic Dishonesty

All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials. For a complete listing of the university policy, see: [Dean of Student's Office](#)

Student Absences on Religious Holy Days Policy

Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Section 51.911 (a) (2) defines a religious holy day as: “a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20....” A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence.

University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). The instructor will complete a form notifying the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed. For a complete listing of the university policy, see the following: <http://www.shsu.edu/dept/academic-affairs/documents/aps/students/861001.pdf>.

Students with Disabilities Policy

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until you register with the Counseling Center. For more, see: <http://www.shsu.edu/dept/academic-affairs/documents/aps/students/811006.pdf>.