BECOMING AMERICAN

HONS 381.01
College of Charleston, Spring 2019
TR 9:25-10:40AM
Maybank Hall, 320

CONTACT
Professor Matthew Cressler
Office: 4C Glebe St., Rm. 105
Office Hours: MW 3-4:30pm
Office: Jewish Studies 303
Office Hours: Tu 1:30-3:00pm
(Sign up at tinyurl.com/profrabin)

DESCRIPTION
What is America? What does it mean to be "American"? How does one "become" American? These questions rest at the heart of some of the most popular and provocative debates in the history of the United States, debates ultimately about what binds a nation together and what defines the boundaries of citizenship. In this course we will engage these questions from the vantage point of three particular communities. African Americans, Catholics, and Jews have each been characterized as outsiders at various points in American history. And yet, at other moments, each have been heralded as the epitome of the American Dream. This course will situate this seeming paradox in historical and cultural context. We will explore our three opening questions through a close engagement of a variety of primary sources, ranging from memoirs to court cases. Students will become familiar with significant scholarly work in the fields of African American Studies, American Studies, History, Jewish Studies, Political Science, Religious Studies, and Sociology. We will think through the consequences of these questions for our contemporary moment. In collaboration with faculty, students will present and facilitate discussion on how a contemporary source relates to the themes of the course.

COURSE STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES (SLOs)

- Students are familiar with how ideas and practices are represented, interpreted or valued in the United States of America broadly and in African American, Catholic, and Jewish communities in particular.
- Students analyze primary source materials using the tools of American cultural studies.
- Students analyze problems from more than one disciplinary perspective.
- Students engage intellectual problems through engagement with contemporary controversies and in an intensive creative project.

These are evaluated in the final “Unessay” project.

HONORS COLLEGE SLOs

1. Demonstrate ability to create and communicate analytic arguments supported by evidence
2. Evaluate complex issues using an interdisciplinary perspective
3. Analyze and synthesize information within and/or across disciplines

GENERAL EDUCATION IN THE HUMANITIES SLOs
1. Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture.
2. Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the humanities area under study and interpret the material in writing assignments.
These are evaluated in the “Unessay” introduction.

REQUIRED TEXTS
1. Bruce Burgett & Glenn Hendler, eds., *Keywords for American Cultural Studies, Second Edition*
2. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*
3. All additional required readings can be found in OAKS

RECOMMENDED TEXT
Paul Harvey, *Bounds of our Habitation: Race and Religion in American History*
   (Available in the CofC Bookstore and on reserve in the library)

ASSIGNMENTS
*A Note on Assignments:* All assignments must be written in Times New Roman, 12-point font, double-spaced and using APA citation style. They should be submitted as Microsoft Word files to the designated OAKS Dropbox by class-time on the due date.
*A Note on Questions/Communication:* All emails should be sent to both professors at rabinsl@cofc.edu and cresslermj@cofc.edu.

**Participation - (20%)**
This seminar requires you do the readings and actively participate in discussions and activities.

**Keyword Analysis (15%)**
Find a news article about a contemporary event that interests you. In 3-4 double-spaced pages, you should offer an analysis of the event informed by an entry of your choice from *Keywords for American Cultural Studies.* Due March 7

**Historians for the Day (15%)**
At the start of class on one of the following Tuesdays, in groups of two or three, you will present in class on the recommended Harvey reading: January 22, January 29, February 5, March 26, April 2. In 20 minutes, you should introduce the historical context and connect it to the topics for discussion that week. - Sign-Up in Class on January 15.
Unessay (50%)

What is an unessay?: “Almost anything, as long as it seriously and meaningfully engages with the themes that we discuss together in class. This an opportunity for you to draw on the questions at the heart of our course, and to reflect on them in ways that empower and interest you on a personal and intellectual level. In addition to producing the creative project itself, you will be asked to write a creator’s statement explaining what you tried to accomplish, the sources behind you project and how you interpreted them and their creative process.” - Adapted from Sarit Kattan Gribetz

Your unessay will seek to answer the following questions via a creative project: Is it possible to become American? What are the costs, the benefits, and the limits of becoming American? More details will be provided later in the semester.

- Preliminary Unessay Introduction (10%)
  In 3 pages, define the genre your unessay will take and offer some preliminary thoughts about the question: Is it possible to become American? What are the costs and/or benefits of becoming American? - due April 14

- Presentation (10%) - In Class April 16 and 18

- Unessay + Introduction (30%) - due 12:00pm April 30

GRADING SCALE
A = 93-100  B+ = 87-89  C+ = 77-79  D+ = 67-69  F = 0-60
A- = 90-92  B = 83-86  C = 73-76  D = 63-66
B- = 80-82  C- = 70-72  D- = 60-62

POLICIES AND RESOURCES
Absences
You will be excused for up to FOUR (4) absences during the semester. If you miss more than four classes, you should not expect to pass this course. We do not require you to submit paperwork when you do miss a class, but please be aware that we will enforce this policy strictly.

Honor Code
You are expected to abide by the Honor Code of the College of Charleston. The Honor Code of the College of Charleston forbids cheating, attempted cheating and plagiarism. A student found guilty of any of these offenses will receive a grade of “XF” in the course, and may be subject to additional penalties such as suspension or expulsion from the College, at the discretion of the Honor Board. See the College of Charleston Student Handbook, for definitions of these offenses (www.cofc.edu/generaldocuments/handbook.pdf).
Disability Accommodations
If you have a documented disability and have been approved to receive accommodations through the Center for Disability Services / SNAP, please come and discuss this with us during our office hours.

Religious Accommodations
The College acknowledges that religious practices differ from tradition to tradition and that the demands of religious observance in some traditions may cause conflicts with student schedules. In affirming this diversity, like many other colleges and universities, the College supports the concept of “reasonable accommodation for religious observance” in regard to class attendance, and the scheduling of examinations and other academic work requirements, unless the accommodation would create an undue hardship on the College. Faculty are required, as part of their responsibility to students and the College, to ascribe to this policy and to ensure its fair and full implementation. Our full Statement on Religious Accommodations Policy can be found here: http://president.cofc.edu/community-relations/rlc/accommodation.php

SCHEDULE (Subject to Change with Notice)

Part I: What is America and what is an American? (Theories)

Week 1 - What is a Nation? What is Religion?
Tu    Jan 8
Keyword: Nation

Th    Jan 10
Keywords: Religion

Week 2 - The Birth of a Nation
Tu    Jan 15
Keywords: America
Primary: Declaration of Independence; Bill of Rights
Secondary: Harvey, Bounds of Our Habitation, 11-42

Th    Jan 17
Keywords: Exceptionalism
http://keywords.nyupress.org/american-cultural-studies/essay/exceptionalism/
Videos: “Hamilton: A founding father takes to the stage”; “Hip-hop and history blend for Broadway hit Hamilton”; “Alexander Hamilton” and “The Battle of Yorktown”
from Hamilton: An American Musical

Further Recommended Reading: Responses to “Race-Conscious Casting and the Erasure of the Black Past in Lin-Manuel Miranda’s Hamilton,” History@Work

**Part II: Law and the State**

**Week 3 - Bible Wars**
Recommended: Harvey, * Bounds of Our Habitation, 43-79*

Tu Jan 22
Keywords: State

Th Jan 24
Keywords: Secularism
Primary: “John Hughes Condemns the New York Public School Society” and “Instruction of the Propaganda Fide Concerning Catholic Children in American Public Schools” *American Catholic History: A Documentary Reader*, 45-8, 54-7

**Week 4 – Black Bodies, Black Religion**
Recommended: Harvey, * Bounds of Our Habitation, 97-127*

Tu Jan 29
Keywords: Law
Primary: *Supreme Court Opinion, Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896)

Th Jan 31
Keywords: Freedom
Primary: *Moorish Science Temple FBI Files*

**Week 5 – Immigration Restriction**
Recommended: Harvey, * Bounds of Our Habitation, 129-158*
Tu Feb 5
Keywords: Immigration
Primary: “The Temporary Restriction of Immigration (1920),” *Jew in the Modern World*, 568-70

Th Feb 7
Keywords: Racialization

Due: Primary Source Analysis

**Part II: Race and Citizenship**

**Week 6 – Catholics**

Tu Feb 12
Keyword: Citizenship

Th Feb 14
Keyword: Latino, Latina, Latin@
Secondary: Timothy Matovina, “Remapping American Catholicism”

**Week 7 – Jews**

Tu Feb 19
Keyword: Diaspora
Primary: Jonathan Sarna, “The Cult of Synthesis in American Jewish History”

Th Feb 21
Keyword: White

**Week 8 – African Americans**

Tu Feb 26
Keyword: Black
Primary: James Baldwin, “My Dungeon Shook” in *The Fire Next Time*
Th   Feb 28
Primary: James Baldwin, “Down at the Cross” in *The Fire Next Time*

**Media and Culture**

**Week 9 – Film: The Godfather (1972)**
Tu   Mar 5 - No class

**Film Screening - TIME TBA**

Th   Mar 7
Keyword: Media

**Week 10 – The Family Sitcom: The Goldbergs and Blackish**
Tu   March 12
Keyword: Family

Th   Mar 14

**SPRING BREAK**

**Contemporary Debates**
**Week 11 – Postracialism**
Recommended Reading: Harvey, *Bounds of Our Habitation*, 159-182

Tu   Mar 26
Keyword: Identity
Primary: Barack Obama, “A More Perfect Union” (2008); Ta-Nehisi Coates, “We Were Eight Years in Power”

Th   Mar 28
Keyword: Politics

Week 12 – Catholics and Religious Liberty
Recommended Reading: Harvey, *Bounds of Our Habitation*, 183-204

Tu Apr 2
Keyword: Government
Primary: Catholic Docs

Th Apr 4
Keyword: Border
Primary/Secondary: Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration and the Movement of Peoples
Podcast: Jesuitical, ep. 82: “You have to visit the border to understand the migrant caravan”

Week 13 – Jews and Anti-Semitism

Tu Apr 9
Keyword: Liberalism
Primary: Jewish Docs

SPECIAL EVENT: Marcie Cohen Ferris and Michael Twitty, April 9

Th Apr 11
Podcast: “The Alt-Right Rises,” Episode 4, A12

SPECIAL EVENT: Jalane Schmidt (UVa), April 15-16

Week 14 Unessay Presentations
Tu Apr 16
Reading: Classmate Unessay Introductions

Th Apr 18
Reading: Classmate Unessay Introductions

Unessay Due April 30