

# Honors Seminar Descriptions

Spring 2020

## HONR 392

### **Section 1: Coming to America – M. Elkins**

*MWF 9:00 AM – 9:50 AM*

The story of America is the story of immigrants: their problems and contributions, their struggles to assimilate or to resist assimilation in their new country. In this course, we will begin with an overview of this issue, particularly focusing on the 19th and early 20th Century immigration from Europe to the northeastern section of the United States. Other immigrants have their stories as well. We will move on to look at West Coast immigrants. We will conclude with an in-depth look at the immigration reform debate that is swirling around us today.

### **Section 2: Why Do They Hate Us? Understanding the Myths, Realities and Limits of the “American Empire” – K. Jagers**

*TR 11:00 AM – 12:15 PM*

In this seminar we will explore the tension between how U.S. citizens perceive themselves and how, and why, the rest of the world perceives us in a different, and often less flattering, light. At its core, this seminar will focus on the uneasy relationship between the liberal political culture and institutions of the United States and the power-centric and nationalistic ideals that have traditionally governed our country's foreign policy. Particular emphasis will be placed on the motivations and tactics that have fueled the expansionist ambitions of our society over the past 400 years and the forces, both domestic and foreign, which have sought to limit both the size and scope of the "American Empire". We will also examine both the political and moral implications associated with being the world's first global "empire" as well as the social, economic and political forces contributing to anti-American sentiment and political action in Latin America, Asia and the Islamic world since the turn of the 20th century.

### **Section 3: The Beat Generation Writers – A. Merline**

*R 2:00 PM – 4:30 PM*

The Beat Generation is a term used to describe both a group of American writers who came to prominence in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and the cultural phenomena that they wrote about and inspired. This class will explore the influence of the legendary group of American writers who came to prominence during this era who challenged the values of American society after World War II, and paved the way for the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s. We examine the lives and literature of Neal Cassady (Collected Letters), Allen Ginsberg (Howl, Kaddish, America), Jack Kerouac (On The Road), and William Burroughs (Naked Lunch) and other minor poets and poetry that exemplify this generation of writers.

### **Section 4: Abraham Lincoln: What's Up With That Hat? – P. Vaughan Knaus**

*MW 3:00 PM – 4:15 PM*

Abraham Lincoln once described his life story as "the short and simple annals of the poor. That's my life, and that's all you or anybody can make of it". We now know differently. Yet, America's sixteenth president remains an enigma: both beloved and despised. Did he unduly exceed the boundaries of Executive Privilege, alienating nearly half of the country? Was he a devout humanitarian possessing a genuinely ethical nature, yet still able to justify taking the United States through unspeakable devastation? The truth, as is generally the case, lives somewhere in the middle. Let us explore the man, the myth, the legend. Our task is to discover for ourselves: who was Abraham Lincoln? What forces guided his decisions and edicts? Was he a man of faith? Of uncommon intellect? Of tremendous self-doubt and physical shortcomings? Our class has a rare opportunity to revisit history as it was being made. Generations of students, academics, and hobbyists have argued that Abraham Lincoln is somehow unique--uniquely erudite, uniquely important, and uniquely relevant to understanding America. Is this concept accurate? Discussions will vary tremendously, including topics such as Lincoln's love-life or why his hat was the size and style that we've come to recognize as distinctly "Honest Abe's".

### **Section 5 & 6: You'd be Murdered for This: Art, Political Regimes and Morality – S. Zwick-Tapley**

*Section 5: TR 3:30 PM – 4:45 PM*

*Section 6: MW 3:30 PM – 4:45 PM*

Imagine a painting so scandalous you'd be imprisoned. Imagine a play so threatening you'd be tortured. Imagine a book so controversial you'd be exiled for life. Imagine a film so revolutionary you'd be killed. Throughout history art has challenged dictators, religion and sexual norms and has been blamed for the destruction of morality and civilization. What are these works of art and what made them so threatening? And did these works of art succeed in bringing about the change so feared? This class will explore controversial art from around the world (Europe, Asia, South America and Africa) and look at the political, sociological, and psychological frameworks specific to each culture. Art forms covered will include theatre, dance, the visual arts, film and literature.

### **Section 6: See Section 5**

### **Section 7: Contemporary East Asian Cinema – H. Chung**

*TR 2:00 PM – 3:15 PM*

This seminar examines representative and remarkable examples of both contemporary art cinema and commercial filmmaking in Japan, Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and South Korea. Students will explore how the global/local geopolitics specific to the post-Berlin Wall era (the dismantling of Cold War institutions; the passing of authoritarian regimes; the boom and bust of the Asian economy; the canonization of Asian films in the film festival circuit) have influenced the reshaping of New Asian cinemas across borders. The first section of our course will investigate the ways in which historical traumas (wars, massacres, revolutions, and uprisings) have been revisited and redressed in the post-Cold War cinemas of Japan, China, Taiwan, and South Korea. What is the relationship between history and national cinema? How do such concepts as imperialism, nationalism, post-colonialism, guilt and trauma play a role in films that shoulder the "burden of history" and represent the "unrepresentable"? The second section provides insights into selected auteurs and stars familiar to international cinephiles (such as John Woo, Chow Yun-fat, Wong Kar-wai, Zhang Yimou, Gong Li, Tsai Ming-liang, Kim Ki-duk,

Oshima Nagisa, and Kitano "Beat" Takeshi). In the process, we will identify the themes, styles, genres and ideological/cultural content of East Asian film canons in the West. Are there specific aesthetic trends and thematic echoes among these auteur films from different nations? Is canon-making itself an Orientalist act of cultural imperialism? The final weeks we will devote to border-crossing films such as Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) and Park Chan-wook's *Oldboy* (2003), works that highlight such critical concerns as diaspora, hybridity, transnationalism, and globalization.

## **Section 8: Friendship in the Western World: Ancient Greece, Modern and Contemporary Perspectives**

– A. Archie

*TR 12:30 PM – 1:45 PM*

The purpose of the seminar is to critically analyze the ancient Greek conception of friendship (i.e., Plato and Aristotle) in relation to modern and contemporary conceptions of friendship. According to Aristotle, friendship has to do with the self. Thus, in reflecting on friendship we enter upon self-discovery. In contrast to the ancients' preoccupation with the self, modern and contemporary reflections on friendship tend to focus on rules and acts. The main question of the seminar is, "Which position on friendship is more compelling: the ancient Greek, modern or contemporary position?"