

AI 204 Expressing Individual Identity: Politics and the Creative Self

Instructor: James J. Brask

Office Hours: Before and after class or by appointment

E-mail: jbrask@depaul.edu or jbrask@sbcglobal.net

Statement of Purpose:

This is a writing course which examines personal identity and how it is imbedded in narrative. The course examines novels and non-fiction from a variety of sources to illustrate the formation of personal and political identity. Students also write about personal identity by using stories from one's own experience, stories derived from oral history, or stories transmitted from people with whom one has communicated. Students will use one or more of the various forms - short stories, journal, diaries, - to reconstruct stories of personal identity that constitute part of a larger narrative about how citizens understand and communicate the complexities of emotion and ideas connected to politics and political experiences in one's life.

Concentrations:

A2A Can create and original work of art, explore its relationship to artistic form,
And reflect on the creative process

A3G Can assess the assumptions and implications of significant ideas about
Human experience

H1E Can explain the concept, function, and expression of culture and illustrate
the explanation with one or more cultures

H3I Can explain how self is interpreted in a variety of cultures

FX To understand how personal political identity is constructed in a political
culture and how it is related to the larger political and social community in
which one lives.

Required Books:

Halberstam, David. **The Fifties**. New York: Random House, 1993.

Whitley Strieber, **Communion**. New York: Harper Collins, 1988.

Greene, Graham. **The Quiet American**. New York: Penguin, 1955.

Grading:

There will be no exams only writing assignments as outlined in the class calendar. The weight of each assignment is noted and if such weights are altered you will be notified of such a change. All papers should be typed, double spaced, stapled, and not enclosed in any binder.

Class Calender

Jan 5th : Introduction to Identity, Politics, and History.

Jan. 12th Read Halberstam, pp. 3-100, and start reading **Communion**.

Writing Assignment [based on a theme from James Alan Gardner's **Commitment Hour** (1998)]: An Introspective Letter to a Friend. Worth 10% of grade.

Write a letter (3-4 pages) to your best friend, male or female, by assuming the identity of the opposite gender; i.e. a man will write the letter as if he were a woman and a woman will write the letter as if she were a man. Your letter should explain what happened to cause the recent divorce from your partner, The letter should delve into your feelings about what happened and where you find yourself at this point in your life. Your letter should include a reference to your friend about how long you were married and your current age (whatever reasonable age you choose to be).

Jan. 19th Read Halberstam, pp. 101-187. You should have finished 200+ pages in **Communion**.

Jan. 26th Read Halberstam, 188-271.

Writing Assignment (Worth 20% of grade): Write an essay (4-5 pages) on **Communion** which addresses the struggle of Whitley Strieber to understand what happened to him and how it influenced his perception of reality and his own identity. In your conclusion you should assume that Strieber is telling the truth about what he experienced even if you do not believe it really happened and you should relate how such an experience would influence your own identity if you believed it happened to Strieber or if it happened to you.

Feb. 2nd Read Halberstam, pp. 272-358. Start reading **The Quiet American**

Feb. 9th Read Halberstam, pp. 359-428.

Writing Assignment (Worth 10% of grade): Interview someone born between 1930 and 1941 and write an analysis (4-5 pages) of their perceptions of, and experiences during, the 1950s. Your initial analysis may be more cultural and personal than political and historical depending on your interview subject's answers, but your conclusion should make relevant connections to themes suggested by class discussions and the reading from Halberstan, **The Fifties**.

Feb. 16th Read Halberstam, pp. 429-507. Continue **The Quiet American**

Writing Assignment (Worth 10% of grade): Interview someone who was born between 1945 and 1951 about their perceptions and experiences of the 1960s, the Vietnam era. Using information from this interview write (3-4 pages), using any form - poem, short story, or another critical analysis - a piece which addresses some of the cultural, political, or historical issues current in that time period.

Feb. 23rd Read Halberstam, pp. 508-586.

Writing Assignment(Worth 20% of grade): Write an essay which assesses the identities, and any significant changes, in Fowler, Pyle, and Phong.

Mar. 1st Read Halberstam, pp. 587-666.

Mar. 8th Read Halberstam, pp. 667-733.

Internal world/external world: Final Writing Assignment (5-10 pages worth 30% of grade): You may choose either option subject to the instructor's approval.

Option #1 Using any form - poems, short story, journal, an extended letter, an epitaph, a final will, - identify and explain the events or experiences that have influenced your life and your identity as a person..

Option #2: Assume the identity of another person of a different race, ethnicity, nationality, or religion and, using any form as specified above, explain the events or experiences of their life that influence their self-identity.

Some Examples of Narrative and Identity

Amitav Ghosh, **The Glass Palace**, 2002

Novel of intersecting personalities and events between Burma and India 1885-1945

Anita Rau, **The Hero's Walk**, 2000

In this novel the death of estranged daughter and her husband brings American granddaughter back to India.

Pramoedya Ananta Toer, **The Fugitive** 1950

Novel set in Indonesia during Japanese occupation. Writer imprisoned by Dutch during Indonesian revolution after WWII.

Pramoeda Ananta Toer, **This Earth of Mankind** 1982

The first novel of Buru Quartet originally recited orally by Toer when he was prisoner of the Dutch during post WWII Indonesian revolution.

DuongThu Hong, **Paradise of the Blind** 1988

A Vietnamese novel of three women after the end of American war and the price of attempted reconciliation.

Graham Greene, **The Quiet American** 1955

A British journalist befriends a young American agent in French Indochina and warns him to leave Vietnam.

James Alan Gardner, **Commitment Hour** 1998

Science fiction concerning society in which young people change sexual identity every year until the age of twenty-one. Then they face a commitment as to sexual orientation.

Robert M. Pirsig, **Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values** 1974

A motorcycle journey by a son and father provides the setting for an exploration into the meaning of science, religion, values, and how one lives one's life.

Jack Williamson, **The Humanoids**. 1948

Sentient robots negotiate with humans to free them from work and protect them from harm. While some humans fear such agreements are designed to end freedom others defend the agreements as the only logical way to prevent self-destruction and realize the possibilities of freedom.