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ENG 3705-001: American Multicultural Lit

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Some forty years ago or so, scholars of American literature began to realize that the range, scope, and subject matter of creative writing was a good bit broader and deeper than typically recognized. Not all authors were men (in fact most weren’t), not all were of European heritage (and never had been), and not all were from the east coast of the country—misconceptions generally reflected for a long time in most anthologies of American literature. Out of this recognition that there was far more to American writing than we knew came something that began to be called multiculturalism—a term with many meanings and nuances, open to debate and interpretation, and also a useful way to recognize the complex, dynamic mix of cultures, heritage, and perspectives that is the real true fact of American history. In this class, through a wide range of reading (with a few films and some music as well), I’d like us to ask some basic questions raised by the idea of multiculturalism—among others, what are the various cultures that make up this country and its literature, can we say with any certainty that there is some dominant culture in the United States, or perhaps there is instead some hybrid of cultures that we all participate in without really knowing we do, and most importantly, how have writers and artists of various backgrounds and identities explored the idea of multiculturalism itself, long before literary scholars “discovered” it? I hope the answers as we find them will surprise us.

Work for the class is as follows—lots of reading, regular attendance and participation, probably several short papers and definitely a take home final.