ENG 2009G-003: Labor, Class, and Power: Literary Conceptions of "The" American Dream

Tim Engles
Eastern Illinois University

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Instructor: Tim Engles  
Phone: 581-6316 (it’s often easier to reach me by e-mail: cftde@eiu.edu)  
Office hours (Coleman 3831): Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:00-4:15, and by appointment  
Course listserv: 2009f2004@eiu.edu

Required Texts:

- *bell hooks*, *Where We Stand: Class Matters*  
- Paul Lauter, Ann Fitzgerald, *Literature, Class, and Culture: An Anthology*  
- Horatio Alger, Jr., *Ragged Dick*  
- Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*  
- Gloria Naylor, *Linden Hills*  
- Nicholson Baker, *The Mezzanine*  
- Helena Maria Viramontes, *Under the Feet of Jesus*

Course Description:

Our subject matter will primarily be the world of work, and how American literary and cinematic artists have portrayed this world. We will question whether America really is a meritocracy, as promised by “the American Dream,” and whether there really is just one American Dream. We will discover insights provided by American authors into the struggles, dreams, and achievements of working life, as experienced by members of different socioeconomic classes. We will also spend time building a historical grounding for a more informed understanding of the class-based social structures and ideologies that inform literary works. You will need to approach this course and its material with an open mind and a willingness to seriously consider viewpoints expressed from different perspectives.

Course Objectives:

- To encourage reflection and understanding of how labor, class, and power exist in American life, and how literary artists portray such phenomena;  
- To promote independent, critical thinking in reading, discussion, and writing;  
- To encourage consideration of how labor and class issues intersect with other factors, including race, class, gender, sexuality, and religious preference;
• To practice articulating thought-out responses to the issues raised by the course;

• To promote the use of reasoning, passion, and evidence to support ideas and interpretations;

• To foster professional, well-organized writing.

Policies and Procedures:

Grades: Your final course grade will be determined in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Exam 1</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short essay (3-5 pages)</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Major essay (5-7 pages)</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation/quizzes/attendance</td>
<td>15%</td>
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</tbody>
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Regarding Writing: The two exams will be written exams, with questions for short and long essay answers. The two formal essays will be graded on how thoughtful, complete, and insightful they are; writing that has enough errors and problems in it to distract from the content will be downgraded accordingly. Both writing assignments are to be turned in at the beginning of the class period on the day they are due. Papers are due at the beginning of class on the due date whether the student is in class or not. Late papers will be penalized fifteen points (15%) each day they are late, beginning at the end of the class period of the day on which they are due.

When the two essays are turned in, they MUST be accompanied by all notes and drafts written towards toward them, with the final copy of the essay on top of this material. I will use these materials to gauge and offer comments on your writing process. I WILL NOT GRADE an essay that is not accompanied by material that clearly demonstrates several earlier stages leading up to the final draft, so be sure to save all such materials (if you do most or all of your writing on a computer, print out occasional drafts to include with your final copy). Essays unaccompanied by materials that clearly demonstrate several stages of development toward the final copy will receive an automatic ZERO.

Regarding reading: Since one skill you will be developing in this class is the art of textual analysis, you must give the readings more than a quick skimming over. Instead of wolfing them down right before class, set aside enough time to read carefully. I suggest that you take notes as you read, then decide for yourself, before coming to class, what each author is trying to describe and bring to light. Also, to ensure that your final grade reflects your reading effort, I will occasionally give “pop” quizzes at the beginning of class on required readings.

Missed quizzes and late papers: Because the answers to unannounced quizzes come up in class after they are taken, quizzes cannot be made up (even if you come to class late). These quizzes are one way to reward those who attend class regularly and on time.
Again, Papers are due at the beginning of class on the due date whether the student is in class or not. Late papers will be penalized fifteen points each day they are late. You may turn in position papers and the major essay before their due dates if you know you must miss class that day. The will be no make-up exams—students who miss the first or second exam may substitute a 6-8 page major essay (see requirements above) in response to questions written by me. Students who miss the final exam will receive an automatic “zero.”

**E-mail activity:** Enrollment in this class requires an e-mail account, and you must check it frequently for messages pertaining to the course. You already have an EIU account; students are also welcome to use other types of accounts. We will use our course listserv (or “e-mail discussion list”) for occasional assignments (to be announced in class) and for extension of in-class discussion. E-mail is also the quickest, easiest way to reach me if I am not in my office; I welcome any and all questions and comments. Using e-mail is crucial for this course—if you do not send me an e-mail message (cfde@eiu.edu) by Friday, August 27 at 3:00 p.m., I will assume that you have chosen against fully participating in the course, and I will therefore drop you. In your message, (1) tell me which class you’re in (English 2009); (2) describe yourself in whatever way you choose, including your career aspirations; and (2) write a statement to the effect that you have read and agree with these course policies and requirements.

**Classroom Environment:** In class, I expect all of you to participate in discussions (class participation will be figured into your final grade). The best way to demonstrate that you are an active, engaged, and interested reader is by contributing regularly to class discussions, and by paying close, respectful attention to what everyone else has to say. If you have questions, no matter how simple or complicated, go ahead and ask me, either in class or via e-mail—chances are that other people have the same question. Sensitive issues tend to arise within a course of this sort, so we must respect the opinions of others—it will help if we try to respond to ideas, rather than to the particular person stating them. I do not plan to lecture in this class; I want us to contribute together to a positive, challenging, interesting learning environment. (Also, please do not chew gum, eat food, or read outside materials during class, activities which are too distracting to others—drinking beverages is okay. Finally, no caps, please, but if you must wear one, turn it backwards so we can see your eyes.)

**Academic Honesty:** I expect you to act honestly and do your own work in this class, and so does Eastern Illinois University. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the English Department’s policy on plagiarism: “Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—‘The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one’s original work’ (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.” If you are uncertain whether something you have written is an example of plagiarism, just ask me to look it over before you turn it in.
ENGLISH 2009: DAILY SCHEDULE

This schedule may change; any changes will be announced in advance. Reading and writing assignments are to be completed by the dates on which they appear on the syllabus. BE SURE to bring the appropriate book or books to class if a reading assignment is listed for that day; students who show up without a copy of the day’s reading assignment may be marked absent.

(LCC = Literature, Class, and Culture  CP = Instructor’s Course Packet)

T AUG 24  Introduction to the course

- In-class film screening: A History of Social Classes
- Sometime soon (before Friday, August 25, 3:00 p.m.), send an e-mail message to Dr. Engles at cftde@eiu.edu describing yourself in whatever ways you like and confirming that you have read and agree to our “course policies and procedures”
- Writing assignment: Which social class do you consider yourself a member of? What features of your life make you say so? (Be honest—I won’t force anyone to share their responses)

R AUG 26  Continue A History of Social Classes and discussion of “labor, class, and power”

F AUG 27   3:00 p.m.: Deadline for sending Dr. Engles an e-mail (cftde@eiu.edu):
   1) tell me which course you’re in (English 3704)
   2) describe yourself in whatever ways you like
   3) confirm that you have read and agree to our “course policies and procedures” (if you disagree with or have questions about any of them, write about that too)

T AUG 31  Readings for today: the handout from Thursday, Howard Zinn’s “Persons of Mean and Vile Condition” (from A People’s History of the United States, 1980), and LCC: “Introduction,” 1-13, “Reading for Meaning” and “Getting Ready for Class Discussion,” 709-12

R SEP 2  The remainder of this Daily Schedule will be filled in and handed out soon . . .

F SEP 3  4 p.m.: Deadline to Drop a Course with No Grade/No Charge

M SEP 6  No classes (Labor Day)

T SEP 7

R SEP 9