

english 595 (literary studies across cultures) | *after identity*

instructor Viet Thanh Nguyen
Fall Semester 2006
Class Hours: Wednesday 4:30-6:50
Location: WPH 104

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by appointment

overview Since the new social movements of the 1960s, "identity" has been a key locus for political organization, social mobilization, and cultural production. The "culture wars" around identity reached their peak in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with opponents of so-called "identity politics" arguing that such politics threatened to disunite America. Proponents, of course, saw the recognition of diverse identities through multiculturalism as being fundamental to American unity. Since this period, identity-based movements and politics have arguably moved from being emergent or dissident political phenomena to being part of the cultural dominant of the United States and of late capitalism. Not surprisingly, cultural and political theorists are questioning the multivalent and contradictory roles played by these movements and politics. In this course, we will read a wide range of such reconsiderations; we will also consider some texts, past and present, that argue for the necessity of identity. Some of the fields we will traverse include ethnic, American, queer, postcolonial, feminist and literary studies, keeping in mind as we do so that many of these disciplines and fields are also engaged in contesting the unacknowledged and unmarked identity formations of dominant cultures.

requirements Course requirements involve the following: 1) doing the required readings and actively participating in each weekly discussion; 2) one book review of about 1000 words, modeled on published book reviews in professional journals, which will be distributed to everyone in class, for a week during which you are not the discussion leader; 3) leading a one-hour discussion for one session; 4) a 15-20 page paper on a topic to be chosen in consultation with the instructor.

Categories 1 and 2 are 15% of the final grade; discussion facilitation counts for 20%, and the paper 50%. Every three to four weeks you will be asked to submit written work delineating the progress of your paper: 1) a one page statement describing a tentative topic your paper will address (due February 7); 2) a working bibliography of the books & articles central to your paper (due March 21); 3) a three-page draft of text taken from anywhere in the paper, ideally from an introductory or thesis statement (due April 15); 4) the final paper (due May 2).

texts

1. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*
2. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Ethics of Identity*
3. Wendy Brown, *States of Injury*
4. Arlene Dávila, *Latinos Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People*
5. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*
6. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism*
7. Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*
8. Laura Hyun-yi Kang, *Compositional Subjects: Enfiguring Asian/American Women*

9. Walter Benn Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History*
10. Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*
11. Rafael Pérez-Torres, *Mestizaje: Critical Uses of Race in Chicano Culture*
12. Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*

note: Gayatri Spivak's *Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward A Vanishing History of the Present* is no longer on the reading list.

further reading

1. Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*
2. Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*
3. Kandice Chuh, *imagine otherwise: on asian american critique*
4. Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism*
5. Rey Chow, *Ethics After Idealism*
6. Terry Eagleton, *After Theory*
7. Avery Gordon and Christopher Newfield, eds., *Mapping Multiculturalism*
8. David Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*
9. James Kyung-jin Lee, *Urban Triage: Race and the Fictions of Multiculturalism*
10. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*
11. Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*
12. Gayatri Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays on Cultural Politics*
13. Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman Native Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*
14. Kenneth Warren, *So Black and Blue: Ralph Ellison and the Occasion of Criticism*

week 1/ january 10 introduction

identity in literary and cultural studies

week 2/ january 17 Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism*

week 3/ january 24 Walter Benn Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History*

week 4/ january 31 cancelled due to Visions and Voices event, *South by Southeast: Indian and Vietnamese Artists in a Transnational Age*, part of the *Asians in the Americas | Americans in Asia* series, 6-8 pm, Parkside International Residential College, Room 1016; read Gilroy

week 5/ february 7 Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (possibility of class starting after 5 pm due to jury duty)

due: a one page statement describing a tentative topic for your paper, via email

queer politics, queer theory

week 6/ february 14 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*

please make an appointment with me in either week 7 or 8 to discuss your research paper

- week 7/ february 21 Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*
week 8/ february 28 Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*

critical latino and asian american studies

- week 9/ march 7 Laura Hyun-yi Kang, *Compositional Subjects: Enfiguring Asian/American Women*

spring break : march 12-16

- week 10/ march 21 class cancelled

due: a working bibliography of the books & articles central to your paper, via email

- week 11/ march 28 Rafael Pérez-Torres, *Mestizaje: Critical Uses of Race in Chicano Culture*

- week 12/ april 4 Arlene Dávila, *Latinos Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People*

the ethics of injury and identity

- week 13/ april 11 class will run from 5:30 to 7:50
Wendy Brown, *States of Injury*

- sunday, april 15 **due: a three-page draft of text taken from anywhere in the paper, ideally from an introductory or thesis statement, via email by 5 PM**

- week 14/ april 18 Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Ethics of Identity*

- week 15/ april 25 Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*

- week 16/ may 2 **due: final paper, via email**