

Fall 2009
Dr. Phyllis Cole
Class time: TR 2:30-3:45
Main 218

Phone: 610-892-1456
E-mail: pbc2@psu.edu
Office: Upper Vairo, Faculty Cubicle #23
Office hours: TR 12:00-1:30, W 1:00-3:00

AMST 100U (Honors) **Introduction to American Studies: American Lives**

Autobiography, the telling of one's own life story, may be the most enduring form of American literature, extending through time from the colonists' earliest reports to the multi-cultural explorations of our current president. The collective record of American Lives amounts almost to a national epic, including writers across race and gender and the recorded voices of those who did not or could not write for themselves. "We the People" gain a voice here. In particular, over 50,000 have recently shared stories of their family and friends through the StoryCorps project, now archived at the Library of Congress. We'll explore both some written classics of autobiography and some of the recorded stories, and at the end we will create our own blog of American Lives on the model of StoryCorps.

This will also be a course about *American culture*, because the stories of individual lives witness and shape the patterns of history, religion, and politics around them. A couple of times we will look at material culture (buildings, graveyards, monuments) in relation to our theme, first at the national mall in Washington, then in our own campus neighborhood in the Delaware Valley. We will also keep an eye on our FA09 Honors theme of education as our autobiographers reflect it and as it becomes a part of American/global culture.

In all of these ways we'll be sampling the interdisciplinary methods of the field called American Studies. AMST 100U counts toward the General Education requirement in Humanities, but it also provides the base for a major or minor that you could complete here at Brandywine Campus. I'm the program adviser; let me know if you'd like to hear more!

Books and materials to buy:

Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (1995, Three Rivers Press 2004)

First Person Past: American Autobiographies, 2 volumes, ed. Marion J. Morton and Russell Duncan (2nd edition, Brandywine Press 2003). Abbreviated as FPP below.

Other resources:

The United States Constitution: What It Says, What It Means (from Honors Program)

StoryCorps website: www.storycorps.org

StoryCorps book and CD: Dave Isay, *Listening Is an Act of Love: A Celebration of American Life from the StoryCorps Project* (2007), on reserve at Vairo Library

Encyclopedia of American Studies, 4 volumes (in library, Ref. E 169.1.E625.2001)

www.google.com or another search engine to identify references in the reading

Course requirements, expectations, grades:

- **Regular attendance and active participation are vitally important.** Please attend all classes unless disaster strikes. Come on time and stay to the end. More than three absences will lower your grade, as will frequent lateness. This is primarily a discussion class, so constructive participation should be your goal as well. Attendance and participation together count for 1/6 of your final grade, but if you miss more than ten unexcused classes you cannot pass the course regardless of other grades. *Absence for illness is excused, and in some cases (in the upcoming season of contagious flu) advisable. It will be your responsibility to keep me informed about health-related absences.*
- **Complete daily reading assignments and write online journal entries.** Prepare for class discussion by keeping up with the reading and by writing a preliminary journal response (a paragraph or two) before each class on our class's ANGEL website. Usually there will be a question posed in advance as a prompt for the journal, but additional free-form thoughts are also welcome. As needed, there may also be quizzes or written question sheets, and near the end of the course journal entries will include review and overview of critical issues. The journal and other daily work as a whole will count 1/6 of your final grade.
- **There will be two 4-6 pp. papers in the course.** For the first (due Sept. 27) write about Obama's autobiography through close reading and/or contextual study; I'll provide suggestions for topics or you can invent your own. For the second (due Nov. 17) compare two or more autobiographies related by theme or context; again there will be choices of topic. Each of these papers counts 1/6 of your final grade. Feel free to rewrite either of these for an improved grade after consulting with me or the Writing Center. See flier at end of this syllabus about Writing Center availability.
- **The final project for the course will be your recorded interview with or oral history by somebody in your family, community, or campus.** First we will be introduced to the technical means of creating a sound recording and entering your project on the course blog. A 2-3 pp. proposal about your project, available resources for it, and significance is due Oct. 27. The final project, including a written transcript and interpretation as well as the posted electronic version, is due Dec. 10. Photos, documents, and material culture artifacts might be included either place. We will also report on these projects to each other in the last two classes. Each part of the project counts about 1/6 of your final grade, but the weight will lean toward the final grade. More exact guidelines for length and content will be provided later.
- **Technology:** Make your Penn State internet access official NOW, as the course will depend on use of ANGEL, internet, and eventually our blog. Any of these that are new to you will become familiar in the course of the semester; I myself am very much a learner here. Please use Penn State email addresses rather than private addresses in all course communications.
- **Cell-phones:** please turn them off before class so we aren't interrupted by calls. And please do not consider class time appropriate for texting.

- **Academic Integrity:** All students are expected to act with civility and personal integrity; respect other students' dignity, rights, and property; and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their own efforts. This is the first principle of any university, including Penn State. Think of our course as a learning community to which you and others can contribute.

Such academic integrity includes a commitment not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation, or deception. Such acts of dishonesty include cheating or copying, plagiarizing, submitting another person's work as one's own, using internet sources without citation, fabricating field data or citations, "ghosting" (taking or having another student take an exam), stealing examinations, tampering with the academic work of another student, facilitating another student's acts of dishonesty, etc.

Students charged with a breach of academic integrity will receive due process and, if the charge is found valid, academic sanctions may range from F for the assignment to F for the course, depending on the severity of the offense.

The University's statement on academic integrity, from which the above statement is drawn, is available at <http://www.psu.edu/dept/oue/aappm/G-9.html>.

- **Note to students with disabilities:** In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, it is Penn State's policy to provide reasonable academic adjustments for students with documented disabilities. If you have a disability-related need for modifications in this course, contact Sharon Manco, 610-892-1461, 127 Vairo Library, sam26@psu.edu. This notification should occur by the end of the first week of the semester. Students may visit www.equity.psu.edu/ods/ for complete information.
- **Be in touch.** Discuss either the course or your own relation to it with me at any time, in person or by phone or e-mail. It's not complaining to speak up about problems that might get in your way, whether an illness or any sort of problem with this work. We can also continue thoughts begun in class time or try out an idea for a paper when it first strikes.

Tentative schedule of classes: each reading assignment *due* by the date named

Introduction

Aug. 25 (T) In class: the course and subject ahead, introducing ourselves.

1. President, Autobiography, Nation

27 (R) Obama, *Dreams from My Father*, Preface, Introduction, and ch. 1 (vii-xvii, 3-27). Read "Autobiography as Literature," in FPP 2, pp. xv-xvi. What sort of autobiographer and "persona" is Obama?

Sept. 1 (T) Obama, chs. 2-4 (28-91). Read about StoryCorps at www.storycorps.com (at least the front pages) and consider Obama as a storyteller and conveyor of stories from others.

- 3 (R) Obama, chs. 5-6 (92-129). Read “Autobiography as History,” in FPP 2, pp. xi-xiii and try to place Part One of Obama’s text in history.
- 8 (T) Obama, chs. 7, 11, 14 (133-43, 207-22, 272-95), plus March 18, 2008 speech at the National Constitution Center, Philadelphia (handout).
- 10 (R) Obama, chs. 15 (first 6 pages), 18, 19, Epilogue (299-304, 367-442). Keep track of the Obama family tree as you go.
- 15 (T) Overview discussion of *Dreams from My Father* as autobiography, family history, and statement of American political values. Read Declaration of Independence (handout), selection from *The Audacity of Hope* (445-57.)
- 17 (R) **Constitution Day**, with the theme “We the People.” Read *The United States Constitution: What It Says, What It Means*. Be present for Common Hour: consider contributing to the forum and/or photo contest. (See attached.)
Class time: follow-up discussion of Constitution and Obama’s Constitutional values.

2. Autobiography: traditions and performances. (In some of these classes we’ll all read the same text; in others we’ll divide the responsibility and report to each other.)

- 22 (T) **Paper due on *Dreams from My Father*.** Details to be announced. A Puritan woman’s spiritual narrative: Anne Bradstreet in FPP 1: 1-4. In class: more on the origins of autobiography in early American history (I’ll provide.)
- 24 (R) Voyages of body and spirit: Elizabeth Ashbridge or Olaudah Equiano in FPP 1: 5-19 or 20-37. Read the text you’ve chosen with critical care, and at least skim the other.
- Sept. 29 (T) Self-made man: Benjamin Franklin in FPP 1: 38-62.
- Oct. 1 (R) Self-making and slavery: Frederick Douglass or Harriet Jacobs in FPP1: 127-51 or 152-81.
- 6 (T) Native American autobiography: Black Hawk in FPP 1: 85-105.
- 8 (R) Indian fighter, Indian resistance: Davy Crockett or Black Elk in FPP 1: 63-84 or 2: 10-27. In class: workshop with Matt Frank, Digital Commons Campus Consultant, on audio-recording for oral history project.
- 13 (T) Autobiography and the US Presidency: Abraham Lincoln (handout 3 pp.), US Grant in FPP 1: 205-39.
- 15 (R) **Honors Program Fieldtrip to the National Mall, Washington DC.** Focus

on the symbolic space of the Mall as it officially and unofficially represents “We the People,” and on the Lincoln exhibit as it relates politics and narrative to material culture at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History. Bus departs at 7 AM and returns at 7 PM; as needed, arrange with other instructors to miss class today.

- 20 (T) Life origins of a lifelong protest: Elizabeth Cady Stanton in FPP 1: 182-204, plus text of the Declaration of Sentiments at the 1848 Woman’s Rights Convention (handout, 4 pp.)
- 22 (R) Women, education, rights, ethnicity: Mary Antin, Anna Howard Shaw, or Monica Sone in FPP 2: 67-82, 119-32, or 152-67.
- 27 (T) **Proposal due for Final Project** (format for contents will be provided in advance.) In class: “I See Dead People”: a pre-Halloween tour of campus and adjoining Cumberland Cemetery, with follow-up assignment to construe some of the epitaphs and wills of people buried there. What are epitaphs and wills like as (bottom-line) life narratives by people who mostly did not write their stories for publication? What can we hear through the silence?
- 29 (R) Analysis of epitaphs and wills as assigned.
- Nov. 3 (T) African Americans and Reconstruction: Tunis Gulic Campbell or Booker T. Washington in FPP 2: 1-9 or 43-66.
- 5 (R) Capitalists and workers: Andrew Carnegie or Harriet Hanson Robinson or Mary (Mother) Jones in FPP 1: 106-26, 2: 28-42, or 2: 83-103.
- 10 (T) A reformer and a populist: Frederick C. Howe or Woodrow Wilson Guthrie in FPP 2: 104-18 or 133-51. In class: workshop #2 with Matt Frank.
- 12 (R) Autobiography of the Civil Rights era: Anne Moody in FPP 2: 168-91

3. Final Project, Final Thoughts

- 17 (T) **4-6 pp. paper due, a comparative or thematic study of the autobiographies** (use of both primary and secondary sources expected.) Details to be announced.. In class: StoryCorps workshop.
- 19 (R) “Born on the Fourth of July”: Ron Kovic in FPP 2: 192-210 and critical issues.
- 23-29 all week: **Thanksgiving Break—be thankful—and find time for work on your final project**
- Dec. 1 (T) StoryCorps, critical issues (reading to be announced.)

- 3 (R) StoryCorps, critical issues (reading to be announced.) In class: workshop on your individual projects with Matt Frank.
- 8 (T) Oral reports on projects.
- 10 (R) Oral reports on projects. **Projects due in paper and electronic form. No final exam is anticipated in the course.**