

## **Pavilion Seminars – Spring 2018**

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### **Section 001 - New Orleans, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea (Jennifer Tsein)**

Should New Orleans exist? The very question was discussed shortly after the city was paralyzed by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Since its foundation in 1718, it has suffered fires, plagues, and floods, as well as man-made problems such as racial injustice, corruption, and extreme violence. And yet the city represents a unique culture that lives on in the collective memory and in the rituals of its inhabitants; it also lives on in the fantasy of outsiders. Its sense of foreignness within the United States constantly makes us question assumptions about race, history, identity, and culture. The problems of New Orleans also expose the troubled relationship between a colony and its distant rulers, between a formerly French city and an American nation.

In the texts and other materials we will study, several themes emerge. As the title of this course indicates, ominous water imagery will appear repeatedly, as will the figure of the devil, a fanciful personification of the forces responsible for the city's troubles.

Additionally, two emotions predominate: a certain nostalgia for lost things and a sense of the tragi-comic, or laughter as a response to horrible circumstances.

Materials for the course will include sources from history, French and American literature, African-American studies, anthropology, and popular culture: specifically, explorers' journals from the colonial period, fiction and films that established many of the clichés about the city (vampires, voodoo, the figure of the "tragic mulatta"), as well as scholarly studies of the city's unique food and musical culture.

### **Section 002 - Markets and Morality (Sahar Akhtar)**

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to economic principles and ethical theories by exploring a range of topics connected to the morality of markets and trade. Questions explored will include: whether some things (e.g., kidneys, sex) should not be for sale; whether engaging in market activity can cause one to become more selfish; and, whether placing a price on certain things (e.g., votes) changes the meaning of that thing. This course will employ innovative techniques to examine these questions. For instance, students will participate in economic "games" (e.g., the ultimatum and dictator games) and in experimental market transactions (e.g., barter and auctions). By engaging in these "hands-on" activities inside the classroom, students will gain a deeper understanding of basic economic theory and practice and its most significant challenges.

### **Section 003 - The Ethics of Food (Willis Jenkins)**

This interdisciplinary seminar develops the ethics of food as a way into questions about social justice, ecological sustainability, and the shape of a good life. It starts from arguments for particular dietary choices, turns to anthropology and history for

perspectives on the cultural meaning of arguments over foodways, and then further contextualizes those arguments by treating a series of controversies arising from some aspect of food systems—including distributive fairness in access, interpretations of obesity and malnourishment, relations with other animals, labor and gender justice in foodwork, sustainability and biotechnology.

### **Section 005 - Unearthing and Understanding: Researching the History of UVA & Charlottesville (Kirt von Daacke)**

This course is a writing and research-intensive seminar that examines the history of slavery and its legacies at UVA and in the central Virginia region. Seminar participants will spend first 1/3 of the class in reading relevant scholarship and developing individual research projects of their own choosing (guided by faculty). Then, students will focus on research, writing, and editing until formal papers and presentations are completed at the end of the semester.

### **Section 006 - Celebrity and the Human Condition (Andrea Press)**

Is it "human nature" to idolize industrial moguls, political and military leaders, and literary, film, music, television stars? Is celebrity endemic to the human condition, or specific to consumer capitalism? Is the "cult" of the celebrity a product of the newly prolonged state of adolescence, or has it been created and fueled by a particular phase of commercial media culture? This seminar will examine the phenomenon of celebrity, looking at the earliest known instances of celebrity cults; their transformation in early capitalist literary, political, and economic culture; the transformation of "idols of production" to "idols of consumption" concomitant with the rise of capitalism, and the cultural and economic apparatus of the Hollywood film industry; the cult of the film "star" in Hollywood's "Golden Age"; postwar U.S. celebrity and the development of the "American Dream"; interconnections between celebrity cults, fandom, and the political civil rights, sexual liberation, student activist and women's movements; the global nature and enduring importance of celebrity in the age of new media. The course will include case-studies of celebrities beginning with Alexander the Great, and continuing through the twentieth and twenty-first century to include more contemporary examples. Students will analyze their own history during adolescence either adoring particular celebrities or rejecting the cult of celebrity, writing self-histories of their experiences. In addition, students will choose an ongoing or past celebrity cult focused on one figure, living or dead, and chart and analyze activity both online and off used to commemorate and honor a particular celebrity. Textual analyses in this project will be supplemented whenever possible with interview and observational data when possible. A creative component, such as a film or video of celebrity or fan commemorative practices, can be included in this assignment. The course has no pre-requisites and is broadly open to students in the University.

### **Section 007 - Humanitarianism (Debjani Ganguly)**

Our contemporary age is frequently called the age of global humanitarian crisis. Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Sudan, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Rwanda, to name only a few countries, evoke visions of massacre, displacement and devastation. Over sixty million refugees—the largest ever in human history—seek asylum around the world. Millions more continue to be internally displaced and live in fear of their lives. The moral purchase of humanitarianism has never been more severely tested than in the present, the Holocaust, Stalin's gulags and Mao's camps notwithstanding. Humanitarianism, commonly understood, is an empathetic orientation to distant suffering. The modern origins of this idea lie in eighteenth-century debates on Abolitionism and the rise of capitalism's moral infrastructure that included the capacity to envision the remote consequences of one's actions. Devalued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries for being a soft, ineffective and often exploitative mode of response to human suffering, debates about the value of humanitarianism have witnessed a robust resurgence since the end of the Cold War. Three factors have contributed to this. First, the worldwide escalation in genocidal violence, endemic ethnic conflicts, and wars on terror as the result of the post-Cold War realignment of the world order. Second, the stupendous growth of the global humanitarian industry in the form of NGOs as a result of the magnitude of civilian carnage these conflicts have caused. Third, the reach of information and communication technologies that incessantly mediate these sites of violence for witnessing publics around the world. This course will offer interdisciplinary perspectives on the urgency of thinking "Humanitarianism" in our time by drawing on historical, literary, cinematic, anthropological, legal, and new media sources. In particular, we will explore the many genres through which humanitarian thought and practice unfold: films, novels, refugee narratives, life writing, truth commissions' testimonials, NGO websites, aid workers' memoirs, video games and war blogs.

### **Section 008 - The Self: Who Dat? (Lisa Spaar)**

What exactly, or ambiguously, might constitute a "self" is an ancient human question, but it is one which has perhaps never been more prevalently and variously on the public radar than in our moment. From the plethora of ubiquitous cyber-galleries of self-portrayal (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Tinder, Tumblr, all already stunningly outmoded) to fluid, galvanizing, and vexed identity issues of gender, race, and nationhood, the concept of self has perhaps rarely been on the one hand more vacuously and indiscriminately broadcast and on the other more fiercely interrogated and potentially transformative since literacy ushered in the language and space for privacy and the period of Renaissance self-fashioning put forward an idea, at least in Western cultures, that the individual is to be prized and valued. What is the self, if the coherent self exists at all? A vague interior state translatable to an emoji? A vexed

psychological construct? A theory? A fiction? A measurable profile of identifiable traits, likes, and dislikes? An amalgam of biological, chemical, and neurological forces? A profound entity that develops throughout a given embodied lifetime, something akin to the soul? How is the self protected and ignored in legal and medical systems? What do scientists think of the self? Are we binary or analogic entities? Can "big data" profile us? Can the self be cloned? How is technology changing the self? What is happening to our brains as a result, and how does this affect identity? What is the difference between visual and poetic, two- and three-dimensional, painted and photographic self-portrayals? How can the study of this myriad of dendritic questions help us to better understand *ourselves*?