

Desperate Domesticity: The American 1950s

ENG 4953 (T 6-8 in CBD 0224)

3/8/16

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This course explores fraught constructions of domesticity in American literary and popular culture of the 1950s, focusing on the nuclear family, gender roles (especially Housewife and Organization Man), the rise of suburbia, and alternative domesticities. Our writers will include John Cheever, Gwendolyn Brooks, Patricia Highsmith, Flannery O'Connor, Tennessee Williams, Sloan Wilson, Robert Lowell, and Sylvia Plath. Our postwar magazine readings come *Ebony*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *The New Yorker*, and *One*. We'll explore the family sitcoms *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver*, as well as the teen delinquent films *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Blackboard Jungle*. We end with retrospective images of the American 1950s in contemporary culture. In addition to writing a short paper and a seminar paper, you'll give a presentation that addresses key components of an assigned text. You'll also submit a Florida Fifties archive worksheet and design a Faux Fifties ad.

TEXTS

Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (also available as UF e-book)

John Cheever *The Stories of John Cheever*

Patricia Highsmith, *The Price of Salt*

Gwendolyn Brooks, *Selected Poems*

Flannery O'Connor, *The Complete Stories of Flannery O'Connor*

Tennessee Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

Sloan Wilson, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*

Robert Lowell, *Life Studies/For the Union Dead*

Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar* (HarperPerennial)

Fifties family sitcoms

Popular magazines on Microfilm (Library Reserve), or try finding them on EBay

Critical essays on UF Libraries course reserves (Ares)

POLICIES

1. You must complete all *assignments* to receive credit for this course.
2. *Attendance*: Like all seminars, this one needs *you!* Use your allotted absence *wisely* (for emergencies, serious illness) as you would for any job. You will fail the course if you miss **2** seminar sessions (the equivalent of 2 weeks of class).
3. You do *not* need to tell me why you are absent *unless* you have a medical condition that will use up *more than your allotted absence*. At that point, you should contact me, provide documentation, and we can discuss the options.
4. If you are *absent*, you are still responsible for knowing the material and for turning in any assignments due that day.
5. *Cell Phones* must be stowed and silent-- *unless* you are using an electronic edition of a textbook on your phone and show me when class begins.
6. *Latecomers* receive partial absences, and must see me after class so I know you attended in part.

7. *Paper Format*: Please *put your e-mail address* on the front page of your paper, number pages, and make sure the printout is easy to read. Use this format: 12 point font, 1-inch margins, double spacing, numbered pages. Grammatical errors will cost you, so proofread.
8. *Submitting Papers*: Your papers are due *in class* (hard copy) and on Canvas on the assigned days. (If you are absent, your paper should be *in my Department mailbox* when I return from class). Late papers and panel statements earn grade reductions; papers submitted a week late earn an "E."
9. *Save That Paper!* Always make backup copies of your work so it arrives on time. Also, *save the graded work I return to you* in case you ever request a letter of recommendation, which requires at least *three weeks'* notice. I cannot write a reference letter without the comments I made on your work.
10. *Participation*: The quality and frequency of your contributions determine your participation grade. Learning to participate effectively and to move the conversation forward will help you understand the poetry and develop important professional skills. If you're shy about offering opinions, try asking questions. Remember that if you are confused about a text, others are, too!
11. Students requesting classroom *accommodation* must first register with the Dean of Students Office, which will provide documentation for you to give me when requesting accommodation.
12. For information on UF Grading policies, see:
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>
13. Students who face difficulties completing the course or who are in need of counseling or urgent help may call the on-campus Counseling and Wellness Center (352) 392-1575.

ASSIGNMENTS (see details below):

- Seminar presentation on part of a reading/viewing assignment
- Short Paper (Ad Analysis)
- Florida Fifties archive worksheet
- Seminar Paper Proposal
- Seminar Paper

Wk	Date	Reading/Viewing Assignments	DUE
1	1.5	Introduction, in-class screening of an episode from <i>Leave It to Beaver</i> ("Lumpy Rutherford," aired January, 1958)	
2	1.12	Cheever stories: "The Enormous Radio," "The Season of Divorce," "The Cure," "The Sorrows of Gin," "O Youth and Beauty!" "The Five-Forty-Eight," "The Housebreaker of Shady Hill," "The Wrysons," "The Country Husband" May : Chap 1, "Containment at Home: Cold War, Warm Hearth" (Ares	Talk 1 : "O Youth and Beauty!" Talk 2 : "The Five-Forty-Eight"
3	1.19	Highsmith : <i>The Price of Salt</i> + trailer to <i>Carol</i> <YouTubelink> + this recent <i>New Yorker</i> piece on Highsmith's novel: http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/11/30/forbidden-love + carryover Cheever story	Talk 3 : Carol & Therese's road trip in <i>The Price of Salt</i>
4	1.26	Brooks : <i>Selected Poems</i> through "The Ballad of Rudolph Reed," <i>omitting these sections</i> : "Gay Chaps at the Bar," the first 3 parts of the <i>Annie Allen</i>	Talk 4 : "kitchenette building" Talk 5 : "The <i>Chicago Defender</i> Sends a Man to Little Rock"
5	2.2	Fifties Family Sitcoms : episodes from <i>Ozzie and Harriet</i> -"The Pancake Mix" (1953) & "The Bird's Nest" (1954); <i>Father Knows Best</i> , - "Lesson in Citizenship" (1954) & "Jim the Farmer" (1955); <i>I</i>	Talk 6 : <i>Ozzie and Harriet</i> , "The Bird's Nest" (2.34, 1954)

		<p><i>Love Lucy</i> - “Lucy Goes to the Hospital” 1953); <i>The Honeymooners</i> - “Head of the House” (1956). *Check listserv email for viewing instructions; we’ll see another episode of <i>Leave it to Beaver</i> in class.) Talk 6 episode: https://youtu.be/eYQwMdpiZ3g</p>	
6	2.9	<p>O’Connor stories: “A Stroke of Good Fortune,” “A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” “The Life You Save May Be Your Own,” “A Temple of the Holy Ghost,” “Good Country People,” “Greenleaf,” “A View of the Woods,” “The Enduring Chill”</p>	<p>Talk 7: “A Stroke of Good Fortune” Talk 8: “The Life You Save May Be Your Own”</p>
7	2.16	<p>Williams: <i>Cat on a Hot Tin Roof</i> + <i>One</i> 3.4 (April 1955), magazine available through UF Libraries, LGBT Life e-archive</p>	<p>Short Paper</p>
8	2.23	<p>Popular Magazines on microfilm: <i>Ebony</i>: November 1950; <i>New Yorker</i>: Aug. 22, 1953; <i>Ladies’ Home Journal</i>: December 1958</p>	<p>Talk 9: <i>Ebony</i> feature on 5th Anniversary Issue (15-24), Letters to the Editor, Photo-Editorial (94-95)</p>
9	3.1	NO CLASS: Spring Break!	
10	3.8	<p>Wilson: <i>The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit</i></p>	<p>Talk 10: Tom’s WWII flashbacks</p>
11	3.15	<p>*Meet on the second floor outside Smathers Library (East) Grand Reading Room at 1:00!* Clarke: ““Parties Are the Answer”: The Ascent of the Tupperware Party” (Ares) + explore Tupperware on these websites: www.moma.org and http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/tupperware/</p>	<p>Archive Worksheet (in-library activity)</p>
12	3.22	<p>Teen Films: <i>Rebel Without a Cause</i> (1955, on Library Reserve, YouTube, Netflix DVD) + <i>Blackboard Jungle</i> (1955, on Library Reserve YouTube) + Ramona’s article</p>	<p>Seminar Paper Proposals Talk 11: abandoned mansion sequence with Plato, Judy & Jim</p>
13	3.29	<p>Lowell: <i>Life Studies</i></p>	<p>Talk 12: “Commander Lowell” Talk 13: “Home After Three Months Away”</p>
14	4.5	<p>Plath: <i>The Bell Jar</i> + these poems: “The Applicant,” “Cut,” “Lesbos”</p>	<p>Talk 14: “The Applicant” Talk 15: Buddy Willard in <i>The Bell Jar</i></p>
15	4.12	<p>Retro-Fifties in Pop Culture: <i>Pleasantville</i> (1998), premiere episodes of <i>Desperate Housewives</i> (1.1, 2004) and <i>Mad Men</i> (1.1, 2007) *(Check email for viewing details)</p>	<p>Seminar Paper</p>
16	4/19	<p>Matchar: “June Cleaver 2.0: Bloggers and the Rise of Domestic Chic” (Ares) Faux Fifties Ad Gallery!</p>	<p>Faux Fifties Ad</p>

ASSIGNMENT DETAILS:

Seminar Presentation

(12-15 minutes, with 1-page handout). Basically you're leading class discussion on a component of that day's assignment. Tell us what you find most important, surprising, and/or problematic about your material. What central issues should we be sure not to miss? Is there a key passage or image we should examine? Are there historical/cultural allusions we need to know? Reference sources are the ones most important for report; you may use 1 critical source if it helps you with your talk. After presenting, you'll test out some of the 3 discussion questions on your handout.

- **Handout format:** (1) *1 page only*; you may use part or all of the backside if necessary; (2) outline or sketch of the main points you're making; (3) you may include a passage and/or an image you find especially crucial to your understanding of the text; (4) include bibliographic information for all sources outside the text; (5) include 3 discussion questions; (6) bring enough copies for everyone in the class.

Short Paper (Ad Analysis)

(3 ½ - 4 pages) Find a Fifties advertisement from the **Ad*Access** site on my home page Links tab. (Click the Date tab, and then More, and you'll find ads from 1950-1957; you may also search by product and subject.) In formulating your thesis and argument, consider these questions:

- Who is the intended audience for your ad?
- What assumptions does the ad convey about this audience?
- Does the ad assume that the audience has an anxiety, a problem, or a desire? If so, how does the ad offer reassurance, a solution, or a fulfillment? In short, what *appeals* does your ad employ?
- Does the ad invoke social oppositions in pitching its product or service? (male/female, black/white, straight/gay, parent/child, urban/suburban, traditional/ modern, etc.)
- Does the ad invoke key Fifties frameworks we've discussed from May's chapter, the literature, or the TV shows assigned thus far? (suburbia, the city, child-centered family, domestic containment, the experts, conformity, breadwinner/housewife, consumer culture, race relations, upward mobility, etc.)

Once you've assessed your ad, organize your assessments into a coherent and convincing *argument* about the ad's purpose, audience, methods, and effects. *Attach a copy of your advertisement to your paper*, and cite its source and year from Ad*Access.

Florida Fifties archive worksheet

You'll receive and fill this out during our library session

Seminar Paper Proposal

(1 ½-2 pages)

Write up a synopsis of what you plan to pursue for your Seminar paper, "selling" your idea with the materials you'll use and key contexts from the American 1950s. While this assignment is not a *contract* (your seminar paper may not turn out exactly as planned), it is a signal of your *commitment* to getting a good start on that larger project. Some of the examples you propose may change, but you should be able to identify the larger contours of an analysis that integrates our course materials. Your proposal must include these elements:

- A lively title
- A well-developed introductory paragraph (or two paragraphs) offering an overview of your topic, and previewing your major examples and aims. What's at stake in your analysis?
- A paragraph or two about key examples you plan to use to support your argument. How do they fit together? How does your comparison show us something none of the texts could show alone?
- A list of primary and secondary sources you plan to use for your paper

*Submit a hard copy in class, and email a backup copy.

Seminar Paper

(16-18 pages)

We've spent plenty of time on domestic duties in postwar America, so I'm giving you a *recipe* for designing and creating your own custom seminar paper! I'm assigning the paper's form and requiring its ingredients. Form wise, your paper must be *argumentative*: comprehensive set-up and conclusion, clear thesis, lively claims, supporting evidence, and well-framed body paragraphs. Here is your shopping list for *ingredients*:

- At least 1 literary text from our syllabus
- At least 1 visual text (sitcom or film) from our syllabus
- At least 1 item from the popular magazines (*Ebony*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *New Yorker*, *One*) and/or the UF Archives.

- 2 quotations from one or more of these historical readings: May's chapter from *Homeward Bound*; Clarke's chapter from *Tupperware*
- 2-3 works of secondary criticism that you find on your own. These may be related to particular texts you discuss or to the larger contexts of the American 1950s.
- You must document *all sources* using MLA style. In your Works Cited, include bibliographic information and URLs. In the paper itself, make it clear when you're summarizing, paraphrasing, and/or quoting someone else's work.

Once you've found and assembled your ingredients, mix and stir as you like, keeping your larger argument in view throughout the paper.

Faux Fifties Ad

(JPEG image + brief explanation submitted by email)

Through your ad and literary analyses, course readings and viewings, and our class discussions, you've acquired a good understanding of the desires and anxieties that fueled Fifties American consumption. Armed with this knowledge—and the unique qualities of your visually literate, IT generation—you are now well prepared to create a "Faux Fifties" ad for a product of your choice (household, personal care, luxury item, appliance, vehicles, etc). You'll have to invent your own brand, of course, but you'll tap our collective knowledge to make it appeal to a target 50s consumer of your choice: a housewife, a working woman, a man-in-a-gray-flannel suit, a suburban couple, an urban couple, a teenage boy or girl, etc. *Your ad must have a caption, and the body of your email must have 3-5 sentences explaining the target consumer and motivation for your product.* You'll present your ad on our last day of class; feel free to give us the Hard Sell!