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GLSP -- SOCS 624
Spring, 2009

Lives in School

What can we learn about education in the contemporary U.S. by looking closely at the stories people tell about their schooling? Do you believe that most people have had generally similar experiences in school in the U.S.? If not, why not? How would you describe the changes that education may have made in the life of your family between your parents' generation and your own, or that of your children? Are the identities that define you to yourself the same as the identities that have defined your careers in school? What meanings does school have to people in other cultures?

School is among the most powerful institutions in American culture, often reproducing inequalities of race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality, and more. At the same time, narrative accounts reveal that school can bring about great transformations in the lives of individuals, and can play a critical part in social change that affects significant groups of Americans. This seminar explores these contradictory realities through the lenses of autobiography and memoir, ethnography and social science research, journalism and documentary film and video. The readings will be framed by education studies as a field, and will focus on urban school reform as a specific set of circumstances that we investigate from different perspectives.

The course asks students to think critically about their educational experiences as students, teachers, parents, and citizens. Students will develop and interpret their own educational autobiographies and will research and present educational narratives drawn from the lives of individuals quite different from themselves. In addition to required attendance, weekly reading and participation in class discussion, there will be frequent short writing in class and three required papers.

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PLEASE NOTE:

All books for the course have been ordered at Broad St. Books. Books with a double asterisk ** are required. A single asterisk * indicates that students will choose one book from the group of texts assigned for that date.

We will make certain decisions about the course together during the first class meeting, after which the final syllabus and additional required short readings will be available.

ALL STUDENTS please read Dalton Conley, Honky, before the first class, 1/28/09

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January 28

Dalton Conley, Honky **
James Herndon, "Flax" from How to Survive in Your Native Land
(hand-out in class)

