Course Description

Over the course of this semester, we will read a range of works that deal with the themes of protest, resistance, and struggle at the heart of the African American literary tradition. We will read selections from Ralph Ellison (Invisible Man, selected essays), Richard Wright (Native Son, essays from Black Power and White Man, Listen!), James Baldwin (Go Tell It On the Mountain, essays from The Fire Next Time, Nobody Knows My Name, and Notes on a Native Son), and some of their contemporaries: Lorraine Hansberry, Ann Petry, John A. Williams and Malcolm X. In order to establish a historical framework for these creative forms of intellectual and political protest, we will also read excerpts from Ida B. Wells, Frederick Douglass, and W.E.B. Du Bois among others.

Required Texts

Baldwin, James. Go Tell It on the Mountain (1953)
Ellison, Ralph. Invisible Man (1952)
Hansberry, Lorraine. Raisin in the Sun (1959)
Petry, Ann. The Street (1944)
Wright, Richard. Native Son (1940)

Please Bookmark:

Oxford English Dictionary: www.oed.edu
MLA Formatting and Style Guides: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/

Grade Components

Participation and attendance 10%
Quizzes 10%
10 Written Responses – 1 page 20%
Short paper and revision – 6 pages 20%
Final Paper Project–12 pages
  Proposal 5%,
  Source Analysis 10%
  Outline 5%
  Final Draft 20%

N.B.: Please keep a copy of all graded assignments.
Course Goals and Objectives
This course fulfills Humanities F4 and F2 requirements; thus, it is considered part of the broader Foundations liberal arts curriculum, which is designed to lend focus and cohesion to your undergraduate learning experience. The goal of this series of classes, as with any liberal arts curriculum, is to create a well-rounded student, equipped with an array of interpretive, analytical, and critical thinking skills. It is hoped that these skills will enable “lifelong learning,” or the ability to adapt and be flexible in order to engage, assimilate, and use new information in unique situations. This humanities course focuses on two aspects of that larger curriculum:

F2 “Develop excellence in written communication,” which the college catalog defines as “the ability to express concise and methodical arguments in clear and precise prose.” In our course, we will address this objective by through written assignments and class discussion, building on our personal insights to develop thoughtful considerations of the literature in context.

F4 “Read and interpret literary texts.” As per the catalog description, the “critical and sensitive reading of significant works refines analytical skills and develops an awareness of the power of language.” In our course, we will use the skills of critical thinking and analysis as employed in literary study to clarify our understandings of texts and tackle problems of interpretation. Likewise, we will practice developing our individual “voice” to responding to texts in written assignments and class discussion.

Since this course is also considered writing intensive, we will also focus on the following important writing skill sets:
--further developing the ability to plan, draft, and revise essay length writing projects.
--further developing the ability to formulate, construct, and develop an insightful and engaging interpretive argument.
--further developing the ability to consistently produce clear, concise, focused, thoughtful prose.
--develop the ability to incorporate relevant and credible sources into written and spoken arguments.

In addition to these writing specific objectives, we also have the following learning goals:
--Understand the literature of this period in relationship to relevant historical antecedents.
--Become more knowledgeable about the lives of our primary subjects--Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, and James Baldwin.
--Understand and be able to identify the style of each author.
--Understand and be able to analyze how authors negotiate the tension between the aesthetic and political functions of literature.
--Understand these authors in relationship to Modernism, Realism, and Naturalism, major literary movements of the time.
--Further develop the skills of close reading, textual analysis, and the wise use of scholarly sources to formulate, develop, and communicate written arguments about literature.
--Understand and recognize forms of protest literature--the jeremiad, the pamphlet, manifestoes—and understand how protest is accomplished in various genres, including novels, essays, sermons, drama and slave narratives.
--Be able to identify and analyze contemporary forms and methods of protest and resistance.
--Develop an appreciation for the creative forms of protest and resistance pioneered by African American writers and artists during the mid-twentieth century.
Why do all of this? The hoped for outcome is that you end up better able to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, concepts, literary elements and each others’ ideas while also developing an understanding of and appreciation for the literature of this period. At the end of the semester, we will all pause to consider whether and how these objectives have been met and consider strategies to better attain these goals.

**Guidelines for Our Discourse Community**

**Attendance** is very important in a discussion-centered classroom. A successful student will strive to attend every class and be ON TIME. Since situations do arise that may cause you to be absent, you will be allowed up to three absences, or “personal days,” for the semester. After those three instances, only absences for documented illness and the documented death or serious illness of immediate family members will be considered excused. Foreseeable absences for documented school related travel require at least one week’s notice; otherwise, they will be counted as unexcused. If your absence is excused, you will be allowed one week to make up any in-class assignments you may have missed. Students who have missed class time should get notes from a classmate, review the notes, and consult with me to clear up any questions. **It is your responsibility to get class notes and set up and keep appointments to make up missed work.**

**Missing an appointment or deadline for make-up work will result in failure of the assignment.** More than five unexcused absences will result in failure of the course.

**Participation** is determined by more than attendance. Students are expected to contribute regularly and significantly through in-class discussion and responses that are driven by an attentive reading of the materials assigned for each day. We are striving to build a discourse community based on our shared understandings of the texts we encounter, and our community is incomplete without your thoughtful contributions. Everyone begins the semester with 100 participation and attendance points which may be reduced for a number of reasons including, but not limited to: unexcused absences beyond three (-5), chronic lateness (more than three) (-3), lack of participation(-3), and missed conferences(-10).

**Communication.** Your success is important to me. Please visit my office hours if you have questions or concerns about a reading or assignment, or you just have more questions about something we’ve read or discussed. Additionally, I will answer most emails within 24 hours of their receipt (except those sent during the weekend), but do not expect an immediate response to any email, especially those sent between 8pm and 8am. I am happy to respond in conference or in writing to drafts received more than 48 hours before the due date within 24 hours of their receipt. Drafts submitted within 48 hours of the due date will only receive feedback in conference if my schedule permits.

**Writing Assignments**

Writing is an integral part of the learning process that helps us to engage ideas critically, increase our retention of the material, and articulate our understanding of new material in relationship to what we have already learned. Thus, writing, like learning, is a process and the assignments this semester are sequenced to help you focus in on particular aspects of this process, culminating in a final essay that requires you to draw on all of the skills practiced over the course of the semester.

**Keep in mind:** Extensions must be arranged PRIOR to the assignment due date. Late assignments will be penalized 1/3 letter grade per day. All major written assignments must be completed and turned in under penalty of failure of the course. Each assignment will have its own assignment sheet; these short descriptions are included for reference only.
Written Responses
Each entry should begin with an original, analytical question that frames your topic. In at least 250 and no more than 400 words, the ensuing entry should address the issues raised by the question, making frequent use of the text as evidence for your response, interpretation, and analysis.

Short Essay
The short essay requires students to focus on skills vital to literary studies – close reading, analysis, and research. The short essay should be 5 pages in 12 point, Times or Times New Roman font, with one-inch margins all around. Essays must conform to the rules of MLA citation style.

Paper 1 will focus on explication. The assignment requires you to construct a close reading of a passage or aspect of the text in order to construct a statement about the “meaning” or “theme” of a work. Each close reading should be based on observations about the plot, structure, voice, tone, characterization, setting, theme, language, or narration, among other things, noting relevant patterns and significant diversions from those patterns or conventions of form and genre. The paper should then use this “evidence” to make a claim about the meaning of the overall text. The essay must reference at least four scholarly sources.

Long Essay
The final essay will bring to bear the skills of close reading, analysis, and research to offer a coherent interpretation of a text. The paper should be 12 pages and must include a bibliography that contains at least 8 outside sources not included in your readings this semester. The essay should be fundamentally analytic, positing a thesis that draws on a particular critical or theoretical approach to build a sound interpretation of the text.

Paper presentation/class discussion
In 2 pages, you will analyze the critical approach and theoretical argument of a relevant scholarly source. The essay should strive to be comprehensive and balanced, identifying both insightful and problematic aspects of the text on the way to a coherent assessment of the overall merit of the work. In addition, you will guide the class in a discussion revolving around two or three thought/discussion questions. The presentation should help your peers develop a deeper understanding of a text or topic for the week, while raising questions for further thought and exploration. Each presentation should include a 1 page handout with the thought/discussion questions and a short (4 entries of at least three sentences each) annotated bibliography. Presenters will be graded on preparation, quality of research, and proficiency in leading discussion.

Keep in Mind. . .
● All assigned reading should be completed before the scheduled class meeting. In order to be prepared for class discussion, please read each selection thoughtfully, jotting down any questions that may arise; read each selection actively, making notes where helpful; and reflect on the discussion questions.
● Additionally, this class will include a lot of discussion. At times, we may not see eye to eye on the political, historical, social, or textual issues under consideration. We do not have to agree, but we will hold ourselves to the sine qua non of academic discourse -- considered, reasoned appeal based on evidence. Thus, we will not use or condone homophobic, racist, sexist, or otherwise denigrating language in our discourse community.
● Please refrain from any technodawdling during class. These things detract from the classroom atmosphere, essentially robbing your classmates of the full learning experience and, thereby, violating the Honor Code. Leaving the classroom for repeated cell phone breaks under the guise of bathroom visits is also problematic and disrupts everyone’s classroom experience.
Situations can and do arise that may require adjustments to the schedule of readings, discussion, or assignments; therefore, this syllabus is subject to change at my discretion.

**Tentative Schedule of Readings**

**Week 1: Contextualizing African American Literature**

- **W Aug 26**  Introduction; review syllabus and policies
- **F Aug 28**  Setting Goals
  - Expectations for Course Discussion and Papers

**Week 2: Origins of the Protest Tradition**

- **M Aug 31**  David Walker, *Appeal in Four Articles*; Rita Dove, “David Walker (1785-1830)”
- **W Sep 2**  Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”

**Week 3: The Origins of the Protest Tradition**

- **M Sep 7**  Labor Day Holiday
- **W Sep 9**  Du Bois, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings”
- **F Sep 11**  Wells Barnett, from *A Red Record*; Dunbar, “The Haunted Oak,” “Douglass,” “The Fourth of July and Race Outrages”

**Week 4: Richard Wright**

- **M Sep 14**  Wright, “The Man Who Lived Underground”; Dostoyevsky, from *Notes from the Underground*
- **W Sep 16**  Wright, “How Bigger Was Born” 433
- **F Sep 18**  Conferences on Paper 1

**Week 5: Richard Wright**

- **M Sep 21**  *Native Son*: Book One
- **W Sep 23**  *Native Son*: Book Two: Chapter 5 through 9; Wright, “Ethics of Living Jim Crow”
- **F Sep 25**  *Native Son*: Book Two: Chapter 10 through 13
  - **Paper 1 Due**

**Week 6: Richard Wright**

- **M Sep 28**  *Native Son*: Book Two: Chapter 14 through 18; Baldwin, “Many Thousands Gone”
- **W Oct 2**  *Native Son*: Book Three Reading: Chapter 19 through 23
- **F Oct 2**  *Native Son*: Book Three Reading: Chapter 24 through end; Ellison, “Richard Wright’s Blues”

**Week 7: Gender and Realism/Naturalism**

- **M Oct 5**  Petry, *The Street*: Chapters 1-7; Read at least chapter 2 of the Moynihan Report. If you’re up to it, read chapters 2-5. The text of the report can be found online at:  
- **W Oct 7**  Petry, *The Street*: Chapters 8-13; Baldwin, “Fifth Avenue, Uptown: A Letter from Harlem”
- **F Oct 9**  Petry, *The Street*: Chapters 14-18

**Week 8: Ralph Ellison**

- **M Oct 12**  *Invisible Man*: Prologue through Chapter 1; Ellison, “On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz”
  - **Paper 1 Revisions Due**
- **W Oct 14**  *Invisible Man*: Chapter 2 through Chapter 4
- **F Oct 16**  *Invisible Man*: Chapter 5 through Chapter 9

**Week 9: Ralph Ellison**

- **M Oct 19**  Fall Break
- **W Oct 21**  *Invisible Man*: Chapter 10 through Chapter 12; Ellison, “Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke”
- **F Oct 23**  *Invisible Man*: Chapter 13 through Chapter 15
  - **Final Paper Proposal Due**
Week 10: Ralph Ellison
M Oct 26  Conferences on Final Paper Proposal
W Oct 28  Invisible Man: Chapter 16 through Chapter 20; Ellison, “The World and the Jug”
F Oct 30  Invisible Man: Chapter 21 through Chapter 24

Week 11: James Baldwin
M Nov 2   Invisible Man: Chapter 25 through end
W Nov 4   Wright, “The Nervous Colony” from Black Power; Williams, from Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light

Week 12: James Baldwin
M Nov 9   Research Colloquium Day
W Nov 11  Baldwin, Go Tell It On the Mountain (Part One); Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel”
F Nov 13  Baldwin, Go Tell It On the Mountain (Part One)

Week 13: James Baldwin
M Nov 16  Baldwin, Go Tell It On the Mountain (Part Two)
W Nov 18  Baldwin, Go Tell It On the Mountain (Part Two)
F Nov 20  Baldwin, Go Tell It On the Mountain (Part Three); Baldwin, “Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood”
Final Paper Annotated Bibliography Due

Week 14: James Baldwin
M Nov 23  Baldwin, Go Tell It On the Mountain (Part Three)
W & F Nov 25-27  Thanksgiving Break

Week 15: Looking Ahead to the Sixties
M Nov 30  Hansberry: Raisin in the Sun; Baldwin, “Sweet Lorraine”
W Dec 2   Hansberry: Raisin in the Sun
F Dec 4   Hansberry: Raisin in the Sun; Baldwin, “Words of a Native Son”

Week 16: Conclusion
M Dec 7   Conferences on Final Paper; Final Paper Introduction and outline due in conference
W Dec 9   In-class workshopping
           Last Day of Classes

Final Paper Due  Friday, December 11, 2009 @ 7pm

Merry Christmas! Bountiful Kwanzaa! Happy New Year!