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ENGL 225-02, Southern Literature, Fall 2013

Item Type	Syllabus
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Publisher	Memphis, Tenn. : Rhodes College
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Download date	2026-06-16 19:14:00
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/10267/20012

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Fall 2013

English 225: Southern Literature

When Shreve McCannon, a northerner, asks Quentin Compson, the displaced Mississippian in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, to "tell [him] about the South," he is articulating the enduring desire (and dilemma) of all Southern writers. How does one define the South, after all? Is it a region? A culture? A historical construct? And perhaps, more to the point, who or what is a Southerner? The literature that we'll read this semester will offer no easy answers, but it will reveal an enduring set of concerns. Questions of identity are at the heart of Southern writing – regional and national identities of course, but also individual identities. A heightened awareness of the complexities of race, gender, class and even sexuality is one of the hallmarks of this literary tradition. Thus, we'll investigate the construction and complexities of Southern identity in literature, beginning with post-Civil debates about the New South, then reading several works from the Southern Renaissance, the unprecedented flowering of literary production in the 30s, 40s and 50s. We'll end by reading *Can't Quit You, Baby*, a more contemporary book that grapples with the recent legacy of race, gender and class identity in the South.

Required Reading

(Please note: I prefer that you use these editions. If you choose to use another edition, be aware that differences in pagination could make following class discussion difficult.)

Douglas, Ellen. *Can't Quit You, Baby*. Penguin.
Faulkner, William. *Light in August*. Vintage/Knopf.
O'Connor, Flannery. *The Complete Short Stories*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
Welty, Eudora. *The Complete Short Stories*. HBJ/Harvest Press.

The syllabus requires that you read several shorter texts that will be available electronically in our public folder. Generally, the file name will be the author's last name and an abbreviated version of the title. **You should consider these required texts for the class, which means that it is mandatory that you not only read them but print them out and bring them to class.** I can't stress this strongly enough. Failure to do so will quite negatively affect your participation grade.

Assignments

Exam #1	15%
Exam #2	20%
Short Essay (4-5 pgs.)	15%
Long Essay (8-10 pgs.)	25%
Formal Question / Discussion	15%
Participation	10%

Leading Class Discussion

Each student will pose one formal interpretive question to the class during the semester. You will be speaking from notes, but you should provide your classmates with a brief handout to help them follow along. Your question should be focused, given a context, and its interpretive significance made clear to your classmates. The question should spark debate and a variety of opinions, and it should explore a fresh aspect of the text that you think will enrich our understanding of the work. Having posed your question, you will then guide class discussion for several minutes.

Attendance Policy

You are expected to be in class every day. Being “present” doesn’t just mean physically being in the room; you are to be alert and prepared. Anyone not alert (i.e. sleeping, reading the paper, working a crossword, etc.) will be counted absent, as will anyone clearly not prepared to participate. If you must miss class, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed and what, if anything, you need to make up. **More than 3 absences (for any reason other than a school sanctioned event) will adversely affect your grade; i.e. you will lose 1/3 letter grade for each additional absence. If you miss more than 5 classes, you will fail the course.** Chronic tardiness will count towards absences.

Assignment Submission Policy

It is especially imperative that you show up to class on exam days and your assigned presentation day. You will not be able to make up a missed exam or a missed presentation without a documented excuse. Essays are due on the time and day specified in the syllabus. I will ask for a hard copy and an electronic copy. Both must be turned in before I can grade your paper. **Papers are considered late 5 minutes after the due date/time. Late essays will be penalized 1/3 letter grade per day, including weekends.** Essays more than a week late will receive a failing grade. If you believe you have a legitimate reason for missing a deadline, talk to me beforehand to make alternate arrangements. Also, please note that exams should be written in a blue book and essays must be typed, double-spaced with an inch-margin, stapled, and adhere to MLA standards in both layout and documentation. See me if you have questions about MLA or need further information.

Academic Honesty

Every assignment that you submit must be your original work, written specifically for this class, and it must clearly and properly cite any sources you used in writing it. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please do not hesitate to ask. I am bound by the honor code to turn in any work I suspect of being plagiarized to the honor council, and I will not have a conversation with you before doing so. Therefore, it is best to approach me with any concerns before the assignment is submitted. If you plagiarize an essay or other assignment, in part or whole, you will fail the course in addition to any punishment meted out by the Honor Council. Please see the English Department policies attached to this syllabus for a further elaboration of the course plagiarism policy.

Cell Phones and Laptops

I should never see or hear your cell phone, nor should I be aware of it vibrating. Please turn your phones off before you enter the room. Be warned that I reserve the right to answer any phone that rings in my class and that if I see you texting or checking your phone, you'll be counted absent for that day. You may use laptops for taking notes, etc. However, if I discover that you are on the internet for any reason (other than my asking you to look something up) or you are doing something on your laptop that distracts you from class participation, then you will be counted absent that day, and I'll ask you not to bring your laptop back.

Reading Schedule

August

Thurs, 22: Introductions

RECONSTRUCTION AND RECONCILIATION: SOUTHERN LITERATURE AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

Tues. 27: Thomas Nelson Page, "Marse Chan"; Henry Grady, "The New South"

Thurs. 29: Washington, "The Atlanta Exposition Address" (in *Up from Slavery*); W. E. B. DuBois "On Booker T. Washington and Others"

September

Tues. 3: Joel Chandler Harris, "The Wonderful Tar Baby"; Charles Chesnutt, "Mars Jeem's Nightmare"; "The Wife of His Youth"

Thurs. 5: Ida B. Wells: "Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All its Phases"

Tues. 10: Mark Twain, from *Life on the Mississippi*; Kate Chopin: "At the 'Cadian Ball,'" "The Storm"

Thurs. 12: George Washington Cable: “Tite Poullette”; “Belles Demoiselles Plantation”

Tues. 17: TBA

Thurs. 19: **Exam 1**

THE RENAISSANCE: MODERNISM AND SOUTHERN LITERATURE

Tues. 24: Zora Neale Hurston: “How it Feels to Be Colored Me,” “Sweat,” “Gilded Six Bits”

Thurs.26: Richard Wright: “Fire and Cloud”

October

Tues. 1: William Faulkner, *Light in August*, Chpts. 1-6 (1-145)

Thurs. 3: William Faulkner, *Light in August*; Chpts. 7-11 (146-255)

Tues. 8: Faulkner, *Light in August*, Chpts. 12-16 (256-391)

Thurs. 10: Faulkner, *Light in August*, Chpts. 16-end (392-507)

Tues. 15: **Fall Break**

Wed. 16: Short essay due by noon outside my office door

Thurs. 17: Katherine Anne Porter, “Old Mortality”

Tues. 22: Eudora Welty: TBA

Thurs.24: Welty: TBA

Tues. 29: Flannery O’Connor: “A Late Encounter with the Enemy;” “Good Country People”

Thurs. 31: O’Connor: “Everything that Rises Must Converge,” “Revelation”

THE END OF REGIONALISM? : CONTEMPORARY SOUTHERN LITERATURE AND AMERICAN IDENTITY

November

Tues. 5: Ernest Gaines, “The Sky Is Gray”

Thurs. 7: Alice Walker, “Everyday Use,” “Nineteen Fifty-Five”

Tues. 12: Ellen Douglas: *Can't Quit You, Baby*, Chpts. 1-2

Thurs. 14: Douglas: *Can't Quit You, Baby*, Chpts. 3-4

Tues. 19: Douglas: *Can't Quit You, Baby*, Chpts. 5-end

Thurs. 21: **Exam 2**

Tues. 26: TBA

Thurs. 28: **Thanksgiving**

December

Tues. 3: Tony Earley, "Charlotte"

Final Essay due on Monday, Dec. 9 at 9:00 am