

ENGLISH 4323: SOUTHERN LITERATURE

University of Memphis, Spring 2008

Monday/Wednesday 12:40-2:05

Patterson 331

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DESCRIPTION:

In this course, we will examine some ways in which texts and institutions have created and contested understandings of “southernness.” How does literature interact with other expressive media that stage or interrogate regional identity, such as folklore, film, photography, and museum display? How do these diverse representational forms critique, revise, or seek to normalize ideas of regional identity or experience? How do they encode possibilities for change? How do they stage individual responses to societal transition or stasis? How, and to what effect, do they situate the region in relation to the larger nation and world? We will focus in particular on how diverse ways of representing the plantation seek to shape understandings of the rural south, the region as a whole, and the larger U.S.

OBJECTIVES/OUTCOMES:

- Recognize the ways in which texts borrow, expand, and challenge representations from previously existing texts;
- Examine the role of regional literature in producing and contesting public ideas of regional culture;
- Analyze the strategies and effects of cultural production;
- Describe results of analysis in oral discussion and presentation; and
- Write persuasive arguments based on research and analysis.

TEXTS:

Available at the University Bookstore and Tiger Bookstore:

- Erskine Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*
- Ellen Douglas, *Truth: Four Stories I Am Finally Old Enough to Tell* (1998)
- William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*
- Randall Kenan, *Let the Dead Bury Their Dead*
- Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*
- Kevin Wilmott, *C.S.A.: The Confederate States of America* (DVD)

Other readings, images and films will be made available via eCourseware or screening.

POLICIES:

- Attendance and active participation are mandatory. If you miss five or more classes, you will fail the course. More than three unexcused absences will lower your grade.
- You must complete all assigned work to pass this class.

- Plagiarism of words or ideas, if detected, will result in a failing grade for the course. You can find further information regarding plagiarism and penalties at my web page: <https://umdrive.memphis.edu/lduck/www/studentinfo/plagiarism.html>.
- Any student who may need class or test accommodations based on the impact of a disability is encouraged to speak with me privately to discuss your specific needs. Students with disabilities should also contact Student Disability Services (SDS) at 110 Wilder Tower, 678-2880. SDS coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.
- The university's expectations for academic integrity and student conduct are described in detail on the website of the Office of Student Judicial and Ethical Affairs (<http://saweb.memphis.edu/judicialaffairs>). Please take a look, in particular, at the sections about "Academic Dishonesty," "Student Code of Conduct and Responsibilities," and "Disruptive Behaviors." Students are expected to be aware of these guidelines and to conduct themselves accordingly.
- You are expected to be civil to others in the class. Discussion is an important element of this course, and our assignments include some disturbing representations as well as controversial topics. You are encouraged to express your concerns and opinions, but please be aware that other members of the class share this right. We will be able to work through the more upsetting elements of this literature most effectively by communicating both candidly and in a manner that demonstrates respect for all classroom participants. Civility includes other forms of professional behavior: for example, turn off your cell phone.
- Bring the relevant texts (except for films and images) to every meeting of class.
- Your grade will be assessed according to a +/- scale. At the University of Memphis, an A- earns 3.84 out of 4 possible points; all other +/-s indicate a .33 distance from the nearest integer (i.e., a B+ = 3.33, and a B- = 2.67).
- Your final grade will consist of a weighted average:
 - Quizzes: 10%
 - Postings: 20%
 - Class participation: 10-15% (for students who contribute consistently to class discussion, this part of the grade will be weighted to counter a lower grade on another aspect of the course)
 - First essay and preliminary documents: 20%
 - Presentation: 15%
 - Final essay and preliminary documents: 25%

ECOURSEWARE POSTINGS:

- Postings on ECourseware serve multiple roles in this class, but the most important is to help students prepare for their research paper through consistent practice of writing and analysis, exchange with each other, and feedback from the professor. Accordingly, postings should be written in a professional style: in other words, students should communicate in grammatically constructed sentences and paragraphs. The organization and diction of these assignments will not be graded as closely as will those aspects of essays: the writing you do in assignments is meant to be exploratory and therefore expected to be somewhat less polished. But your writing here is not meant simply for yourself or to communicate with friends, and it should conform to the standards of a professional and academic environment. (For example, emoticons, phonetic spellings, and other attributes standard to text messaging are not appropriate for this course!)

- Students should refer clearly and directly to the assigned texts. When you quote these texts—as you should—please indicate the source parenthetically. If you quote external sources, please indicate where you found them (author, title, and publishing venue or website, as appropriate).
- For discussion postings, write your posting in a software of your choice, but copy it directly in the window for commentary: in these cases, do *not* post your comment as an attachment. For your paper prospecti, you may use attachments; for the annotated bibliography, you really must use attachments.
- Postings should range between approximately 200-300 words, which would be between 2/3-1 page of double-spaced text on paper.

QUIZZES:

The chief purpose of our regular quizzes is to ascertain that you have done the reading while reasonably alert. If you keep up with the reading, this aspect of the course will help your grade (and will also enable you to participate in class discussion, further improving your grade). If you do not keep up with the reading, you will not do well in this class. Quizzes will cover all facets of the reading.

PAPERS: GENERAL

- All documents related to papers should be typed and submitted to the appropriate dropbox or discussion forum on ECourseware.
- To document your research, use MLA or Chicago citation styles; be consistent. Numerous online sites provide rules and models; see, for example, <http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/>.
- If you would like to receive feedback on a draft of your paper, please contact me in advance; students submitting drafts early for feedback may request an extension on their final drafts.

FIRST ESSAY AND PROSPECTUS:

Due: March 30th to dropbox

Length: 6-7 pages

Topic: Focusing on a carefully selected installation or presentation of objects, explicate one aspect of how a local museum or other institution for preservation stages local history or culture.

Additional information:

- You may choose from the Alex Haley House and Museum (Henning, TN), Chucalissa Museum and Village, the National Civil Rights Museum, the Delta Blues Museum (Clarksdale, MS), Graceland, the Pink Palace Museum, the Memphis Rock and Soul Museum, Rowan Oak (Oxford, MS), the Center for Southern Folklore, the Stax Museum of American Soul Music, or the W. C. Handy House Museum. If you would like to propose an alternate exhibit or institution, talk to me in advance of the prospectus date.
- Your objective explain how the exhibit shapes viewers' understanding of local culture; that is, you want not only to describe the exhibit, but also to analyze how it functions. What ideas about local culture does it convey, and how does it do so? To answer these questions, of course, you will have to describe the exhibit, but be sure that you use details to illustrate and support your argument. Papers that merely describe an exhibit, without engaging in analysis, will not be successful.
- Obviously, during your visits to these institutions, you will need to take thorough and accurate notes! Feel free to quote text displayed in the museum and cite it in your papers. If the institutions allow you to take photographs, you are encouraged to use those in your

presentations or even as an appendix to your papers; if not, you may want to use cited images from the institution's publicity materials.

- You are advised to work in groups to visit the institutions, organize your presentations, and even discuss interpretations. Each student's argument should be distinct and authored solely by that student. However, discussion of your ideas should help you to clarify your opinions as you prepare the presentation/paper. You are also free to cite each other's work, as you would properly cite a published authority.
- You may focus on an object or assortment of objects or images, the way in which a group of objects or images are arranged, the text or narrative that accompanies these objects or images, or some combination of these elements. You will, of course, need to situate the exhibit in relation to the larger museum or institution and its purpose, but don't try to describe and assess the whole museum; then you would be forced to sacrifice the detailed observation on which a successful paper will depend.

Prospectus:

Due: March 2nd to discussion forum

Length: Approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ page

Format: The prospectus may use a conventional paragraph format or make use of bulleted lists, etc.

Content: Briefly describe:

- the institution you have selected and the objects/exhibit on which you will focus,
- the reasons for your interest in this institution (You might consider, for example, how discussion of the exhibits there might enrich our course, or what distinct perspective it offers on how people think about local culture?), and
- your plan for analyzing the exhibit that you have selected. (What do you find notable about how the exhibit's objects or images are presented? What is the implied purpose of the exhibit—i.e., a site of cultural memory, an exemplar of cultural achievement, etc.? How does the display encourage viewers to recognize the importance of its topic?)

PRESENTATIONS:

- Your presentation should provide a brief overview of your argument to the class. Because one objective for this presentation is to share your findings with your classmates, you should use this opportunity to think about how to organize your argument in an audience-friendly manner and to explain the significance of your observations. In other words, what should your classmates learn about institutional representations of local culture from your paper?
- Presentations must be supported by detail (from your excursions or from your research), but be very selective: pending changes in class size, presentations should not last more than 7 minutes.
- One objective of these presentations is to imagine what we might use to create a digital overview of and/or commentary concerning cultural institutions in and around Memphis. Accordingly, you are required to develop multi-media presentations: include images, objects, or, at the very least, handouts (both from the institution you have visited and to accompany your presentation). These images and objects will also, of course, help to illustrate and support your analysis. You are strongly encouraged to use Powerpoint or other presentation software.
- Students will sign up for presentation times one week before Spring Break.

SECOND ESSAY AND RELATED DOCUMENTS:

Due: May 4th to dropbox

Length: 8-10 pages

Topic: Perhaps the most famous statement in southern literature comes from William Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun* (1951): "The past is never dead. It's not even past." Explicate how one of the texts we have examined this semester represents the relationship between past and present, and discuss the significance— aesthetic, cultural, ethical or political—of representing history in this way.

Additional information:

- You may take a number of approaches to this topic, but you must have a distinct thesis, supported through textual analysis and some research.
- If you request and receive my approval well in advance of the prospectus date, you may focus on another text from or concerning the U.S. South.
- Though these papers focus on a single text, the topic asks you to reflect on a central theme of this course, which is, "What does it mean to represent history—or the relationship between the past and the present—in a certain way?" Accordingly, in order to establish what you mean by the *significance* of a text's representational strategies (and that may vary greatly from paper to paper), you are encouraged to reference other texts or even discussions from our course.
- In order to develop your argument, and also to situate it in relation to ongoing discussions regarding history and memory in southern culture, you must cite *at least* three scholarly sources: journal articles, books, etc.
 - You may also cite encyclopedia entries, websites, other literature, songs, films, etc., but these will not count toward the required three scholarly sources. Similarly, though you are more than welcome to use sources listed on our syllabus, they will not count toward this requirement.
 - Research topics may vary depending on your topic and interests. You could find dozens (if not hundreds) of scholarly sources on the role of memory and history in *Absalom, Absalom!*; far less will have been written on more recent works. If you choose to write on Kenan or Douglas, then, you might use research to think about how these specific works—*Let the Dead Bury Their Dead* and *Truth*—compare with the approach to history and memory in their other works. If you want to write on Moody, you could compare her autobiography with historical accounts of how other civil rights activists positioned themselves in relation to history and memory. You could, in contrast, research the mode or genre—i.e., magic realism, oral history, or autobiography—through which these texts engage with memory or history. Many options are available, but plan ahead so that you can conduct a focused, productive search for sources.

Prospectus:

Due: April 13th to discussion forum

Length: Approximately ¾ page

Format: The prospectus may use a conventional paragraph format or make use of bulleted lists, etc.

Content: Briefly describe:

- the text on which you will focus,
- the reason you find its representation of history interesting, and
- your plan for conducting research for this paper.

Annotated bibliography:

Due: April 24th to discussion forum as attachment

Length: At least three entries plus paragraphs

Format: List your sources using standard bibliographic form (MLA or Chicago style), and provide a paragraph of commentary underneath each listing.

Content: In addition to providing bibliographic entries for three scholarly sources, this document should:

- briefly summarize the relevant section of each item.
- specify the relevance of each item to your paper For example:
 - Will you be disputing this author’s claim?
 - Will it be used to support a certain section of your argument? (Describe which one.?)
 - Will it be used to provide historical context? Explain the importance of that context.
 - If it turns out that this item may not be useful in your paper (and you should not submit a bibliography in which no items will be useful), how has reading it helped to shape your plans for the paper?

SCHEDULE:

W, 1/21 Introduction

Narrating the South: Conflicting Visions

M, 1/26 Joel Chandler Harris, from *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings* (1880)
 Kate Chopin, “La Belle Zoraïde” (1894)
 Charles Chesnutt, “Hot-Foot Hannibal” from *The Conjure Woman* (1899)

W, 1/28 Zora Neale Hurston, from *Mules and Men* (1935)
 Selection from the Federal Writers’ Project collection of narratives describing life in slavery (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>)
ECourseware posting: Briefly describe the narrative you select from the Library of Congress archive. Summarize the narrative and describe any notable stylistic traits (representation of dialect, thematic foci, etc.).

S, 1/31 **Screening, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) TBA**

M, 2/2 W. E. B. Du Bois, from *Black Reconstruction* (1935)
 Discussion of scenes from *The Birth of a Nation*

W, 2/4 Screening, *Within Our Gates* (1920)

F, 2/6 **ECourseware posting:** Briefly describe one way in which Micheaux’ *Within Our Gates* “answers”—refutes or challenges—Griffith’s accounts of race or history in *The Birth of a Nation*.

The Cabins and the Big House

M, 2/9 Erskine Caldwell, *Tobacco Road* (1932)

- W, 2/11 Caldwell, continued
Images by Margaret Bourke-White, Walker Evans, and Dorothea Lange
- M, 2/16 Screening, *Cabin in the Cotton*
- W, 2/18 Richard Wright, “Long Black Song” (1938) and “The Man Who Saw the Flood” (1937)
Discussion of film, continued

Representing (a) Culture

- M, 2/23 Andreas Huyssen, “Escape from Amnesia: The Museum as Mass Medium” (1995)
Paige Williams, “Reviving His Works, on Paper and Plaster” (2005)

Narrating Movement and Resistance

- W, 2/25 Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (1968)
Selection from Jim Crow narratives at *Behind the Veil*
(<http://cds.aas.duke.edu/btv/menupagered.html>) or *The History of Jim Crow*
(<http://www.jimcrowhistory.org/resources/narratives.htm>)

- F, 2/27 **ECourseware posting:** Briefly describe the narrative you select from the oral history archives on segregation. Summarize the narrative and describe any notable stylistic traits. Aim for approximately 200 words.

- M, 3/2 Moody, continued
PROSPECTUS FOR FIRST ESSAY DUE BY NOON

- W, 3/4 Moody, continued
Eudora Welty, “Where Is the Voice Coming From?” (1963)

3/9-3/11 **SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS**

M, 3/16 **STUDENT PRESENTATIONS**

W, 3/18 **STUDENT PRESENTATIONS**

M, 3/23 **STUDENT PRESENTATIONS**

Past, Present, Perception

- W, 3/25 William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), chaps. 1-3
ECourseware posting: Reflecting on your own experiences and your classmates’ presentations, what conclusions can you make—or what questions seem most pressing—regarding how local institutions represent local history and culture? Explain or illustrate your answer through reference to specific moments in your classmates’ presentations.

- M, 3/30** Faulkner, chaps. 4-5
FIRST ESSAY DUE
- W, 4/1** Faulkner, chaps. 6-7
Edward Said, from “Invention, Memory, and Place” (2000)
- M, 4/6** Faulkner, chaps. 8-9
ECourseware posting BY NOON: Briefly describe one way in which Faulkner responds to the plantation tradition. You might consider any (or all) of the following questions
- To what extent does *Absalom, Absalom!* correspond to heroic or nostalgic versions of antebellum southern history?
 - In what ways does it challenge or subvert such narratives?
 - More simply, what did you find most surprising about the novel?
- W, 4/8** Randall Kenan, from *Let the Dead Bury Their Dead* (1992):
- “Clarence and the Dead”
 - “Things of this World”
- George Handley, “A New World Poetics of Oblivion” (2004)
- M, 4/13** Booker T. Washington, “Address to Atlanta Exposition” (1895)
W. E. B. Du Bois, “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others” (1903)
Kenan, “This Far”
PROSPECTUS FOR SECOND ESSAY DUE
- W, 4/15** Kenan, “Let the Dead Bury Their Dead”
Arlene Keizer, from *Black Subjects: Identity Formation in the Contemporary Narrative of Slavery* (2004)
- M, 4/20** Kenan, “Tell Me, Tell Me”
Ellen Douglas, from *Truth* (1998): “Hampton”
- W, 4/22** Douglas, “On Second Creek”
Paul Thompson, from *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (1988)
- F, 4/24** **ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE**
- M, 4/27** Discussion, *C.S.A.: The Confederate States of America* (2004)
- W, 4/29** Marilou Awiakta, from *Selu* (1994)
ECourseware posting BY NOON: Reflecting on your research and analysis for your final paper as well as your experiences with other texts encountered in this class, what aspects of southern literature and cultural representation more generally do you find most thought-provoking?
- M, 5/4** **FINAL PAPERS DUE**