

**COMICS AND THE U.S. SOUTH**  
SOST 405U/ENGL 429C/AFAM 398E



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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course is a scholarly study of the way comics represent the U.S. South and explore southern histories, places, and identities. Drawing upon comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels from the 1930s to the present, our investigation will explore the relationship between region and nation, the representation of race, class, and gender in southern comics, and the ways history and memory are processed through personal and collective trauma.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Upon completion of this course you will have developed as a careful, thoughtful reader of sequential narratives with a strong grasp of the social and historical contexts that deepen their storytelling strategies. Through in-class writing prompts, small group activities, and creative projects, you will apply the fundamentals of cultural studies critique and verbal/visual analysis to our primary texts. You will also have the opportunity through two short essays and a final research paper to develop persuasive written arguments about the construction and meaning of the comics medium.

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**REQUIRED READINGS**

- *Captain America: The Captain*, Mark Gruenwald and Tom Morgan
- *Nat Turner*, Kyle Baker
- *Bayou Vols. 1-2*, Jeremy Love
- *Hellboy, Vol. 10: The Crooked Man*, Mike Mignola and Richard Corben
- *Stuck Rubber Baby*, Howard Cruse
- *AD: New Orleans After the Deluge*, Josh Neufeld
- [\*Comics and the U.S. South\*](#), eds. Qiana Whitted and Brannon Costello

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

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| • Quizzes and In-Class Assignments     | 20% |
| • Close Reading and Context Essays (2) | 40% |
| • Creative Group Project (Due April)   | 15% |
| • Research Paper (Due April 28 by 5pm) | 25% |

## GRADING SCALE

**A:** 90-100; **B+:** 87-89; **B:** 80-86; **C+:** 77-79; **C:** 70-76; **D+:** 67-69; **D:** 60-66; **F:** 0-59 pts.

## CLOSE READING AND CONTEXT ANALYSIS ESSAYS

You are required to complete two essays on two different primary readings. (See more detailed descriptions below.) Your writing must be clear, concise, and professional. Comics and other resources should be cited according to MLA style. The papers should also be free of misspellings and other errors. Failing to meet these requirements will result in point deductions.

- I. The **close reading essay** should select a single page from one of our primary readings and analyze how both the visual and verbal elements convey meaning. Stronger essays will make an effort to identify ways in which the concepts, ideas, or characterizations that we have discussed in this course can be applied to the comic. (500-600 words)
- II. The **context analysis essay** should take a closer look at an element of the social or historical background that informs one of our primary readings. Examples might include an examination of the role of slave women in *Nat Turner*, or a exploration of another comic that depicts Hurricane Katrina differently than *AD: New Orleans After the Deluge*. The topic should build upon – and not repeat – the information exchanged in lecture and class discussions. (minimum 900 words)

## CREATIVE PROJECT

Each student will have the opportunity to work with a group to create their own 3-5 page comic book or webcomic. A handout with more information will be distributed in class with rotating due dates during the month of April.

## RESEARCH PAPER

Your final assignment in this course will be a research paper that uses one or more of the comics we have studied for further analysis. You may also incorporate comics that we have not discussed in class that relate to the theme of the course. The paper must be a minimum of 2000 words (6 pages) and use at least two outside critical sources. A handout with more information will be distributed in class. The due date is April 28 by 5pm.

## READING SCHEDULE

I. This unit will provide an overview of the fundamental terms and concepts in comics studies through a discussion of the mainstream, superhero comic series, *Captain America*. We will discuss the way comics as a medium utilize icons, codes, and closure; how time is expressed in the narrative, and the way words and pictures clash and collaborate on the page. We will conclude with a critical analysis of the Captain America comic that will move us into the thematic focus on representations of the South.

T	Jan 10	What is a comic?
Th	Jan 12	<b>Introduction, <i>Comics and the U.S. South</i></b> Gruenwald and Morgan, <i>Captain America: The Captain</i>
T	Jan 17	<i>Captain America</i> , continued
Th	Jan 19	<i>Captain America</i> , continued
T	Jan 24	<b>Costello, “Southern Super-Patriots and United States Nationalism: Race, Region, and Nation in <i>Captain America</i>”</b>
Th	Jan 26	Visit from Roy Thomas, Writer and Editor at Marvel Comics

II. This unit will apply what we have studied in the previous weeks to a comic that takes an in-depth look into the historical figure, Nat Turner, and his 1831 slave insurrection. We will begin with a brief analysis of the primary documents and source material before discussing how Baker adapts these resources to his pictorial narrative.

T	Jan 31	Gray, <a href="#">“The Confessions of Nat Turner”</a> (1831); Francis, <b>“Drawing the Unspeakable: Kyle Baker’s Slave Narrative”</b>
Th	Feb 2	Baker, <i>Nat Turner</i>
T	Feb 7	<i>Nat Turner</i> , continued
Th	Feb 9	<i>Nat Turner</i> , continued

III. This unit shifts our perceptions of history through the speculative and fantastic genres. We will discuss the visual and verbal representation of the supernatural, folklore, and spirituality in these interpretations of the past through *Swamp Thing* and *Bayou*, before shifting into the “fakelore” of the Appalachians with the *Hellboy* series.

T	Feb 14	<b>Whitted, “Of Slaves and Other Swamp Things: Black Southern History as Comic Book Horror”</b> ; Moore & Bissette, <i>Swamp Thing</i> , “Southern Change”
Th	Feb 16	Moore & Bissette, <i>Swamp Thing</i> , “Strange Fruit”
T	Feb 21	Love, <i>Bayou, Vol. 1</i>
Th	Feb 23	No Class
T	Feb 28	<i>Bayou, Vol. 2</i>
Th	Mar 1	<i>Bayou, Vol. 2</i>
T	Mar 13	Mignola, <i>Hellboy: The Crooked Man</i>
Th	Mar 15	<i>Hellboy</i> , continued
T	Mar 20	<i>Hellboy</i> , continued
Th	Mar 22	<b>Sommers, “Crooked Appalachia: The Laughter of the Melungeon Witches in Mike Mignola’s <i>Hellboy: The Crooked Man</i>”</b>

IV. This unit maintains its focus on history with *Stuck Rubber Baby*, but our investigation will consider how Cruse uses the aesthetics of undergrounds comics to combine the conventions of the “coming-out novel” with the “white southern racial conversion narrative.”

T	Mar 27	Cruse, <i>Stuck Rubber Baby</i>
Th	Mar 29	<i>Stuck Rubber Baby</i> , continued
T	Apr 3	<i>Stuck Rubber Baby</i> , continued
Th	Apr 5	<b>Richards, “Everybody’s Protest Novel: Stuck Rubber Baby and the Anxieties of Racial Difference”</b>

V. The unit concludes with a comic that revisits the events surrounding the landfall of Hurricane Katrina. Neufeld’s work gives us the opportunity to further consider how comics intersect with other media, as *AD: New Orleans After the Deluge* began as an interactive webcomic, and draws upon actual photographs take in New Orleans in 2005.

T	Apr 10	<b>Hofer, “A Re-Vision of the Record: The Demands of Reading Josh Neufeld’s <i>A.D. New Orleans After the Deluge</i>”</b>
Th	Apr 12	Neufeld, <i>A.D.: New Orleans After the Deluge</i>
T	Apr 17	<i>A.D.: New Orleans After the Deluge</i> , continued
Th	Apr 19	<i>A.D.: New Orleans After the Deluge</i> , continued
S	Apr 28	Research paper due by 5pm

**ABOUT ROY THOMAS (Jan 26):**



[Roy Thomas](#) is a comic book writer and editor for Marvel Comics, and was Stan Lee's first successor as editor-in-chief in 1972. He is possibly best known for introducing the pulp magazine hero *Conan the Barbarian* to American comics, with a series that added to the storyline of Robert E. Howard's character and helped launch a sword and sorcery trend in comics. Thomas is also known for his championing of Golden Age comic-book heroes – particularly the 1940s superhero team the *Justice Society of America* – and for lengthy writing and editorial stints on Marvel's *X-Men*, *Captain America*, *Amazing Spider-Man*, *Avengers*, and DC Comics' *All-Star Squadron*, among other titles.