

Instructor: Agnieszka Tuszynska
Spring 2011

English 461: Race and Place in the Twentieth-Century American Fiction

Course Description:

Race and Place in the Twentieth-Century American Fiction is a course that invites you to explore the correlations between race/ethnicity and spatiality (understood as place, boundaries, territory, etc.) in American literature. In our readings of works of fiction, we will examine how American authors in the twentieth century cast the relationship between places and such subjects of critical inquiry as inequality, mobility, nation, segregation, migration, indigeneity, community, the city, everyday practices, and resistance. With the help of readings from critical thinkers on space and place, we will address such questions pertaining to our works of fiction as: How do racial, ethnic, class, and gender identities of our characters—both collective and individual—affect the ways in which they perceive their relationship to various spaces and to America at large? How do authors of different backgrounds choose to talk about these negotiations? How are different types of spaces (e.g. urban space, space of labor, familial space) constructed in the texts? What does it mean that space can be produced and consumed, and how does that relate to the notion of power? What does space have to do with identity?

Required texts:

Sherman Alexie, *The Toughest Indian in the World* (2000)
Nelson Algren, *Never Come Morning* (1942)
Pietro diDonato, *Christ in Concrete* (1939)
Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952)
Claude McKay, *Home to Harlem* (1928)
Colson Whitehead, *The Intuitionist* (1999)
Anzia Yezierska, *Salome of the Tenements* (1923)

Assignments:

Four response papers (2-3 pages each)	10% each =	40 %
Final paper (8-10 pages)		20%
Attendance and Participation		30%
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Some suggestions for response papers:

Two out of four response papers will need to present a close reading of a passage you selected from the readings (I'll provide you with guidelines). But the other two leave you with a lot of room to let your creative juices flow. While you may choose to write all traditional literary analysis papers, here are some suggestions of alternative response paper formats:

Converse with specific points in the text that strike you, either positively or negatively.

Write about any personal connections that you have with the reading.

Write a letter to the author and/or return letter from the author to yourself.

Write an imaginary interview with the author or with a character in a novel.

Compose a prequel (incidents occurring beforehand) or a sequel to a novel and summarize it.

Rewrite a work or part of a work from a point of view ("I," "he/she," or "you") different from that presented in the original text. (NOTE: If you choose to assume the persona of a literary character, please note this at the end of the passage.)

Rewrite part of a novel into a different genre, for example, a poem into a story, a story into a poem, a play into a story, etc.

Do a character study of the main character in a novel.

Do a character study of the narrator in a novel.

Draft a fictional biography or autobiography of a character in a novel.

If you are artistically inclined, draw a graphic version of one of our assigned readings, complete with dialogue balloons.

Analyze any of the elements of fiction in a novel.

Participation and Attendance:

Students are required to attend all class meetings.

All students should come to each class meeting prepared. While I have no doubt that this is going to be a class full of eager participants and that you will often come up with wonderful points spontaneously, I still want each of you to write down two questions or comments about the reading before each class. They should be mature, analytical questions, not simply plot-related questions. At least one of them should **be based on a selected passage** from the assigned reading. Be prepared to read the passage to the class and tell us what reflections/questions you have about it.

Discussion leaders: Starting on February 4th, the first hour of **discussion** in each of our meetings will be **led by one of you**. This means that on the day when you are the discussion leader you should prepare a more extensive list of questions, passages, and reading-related problems that you will ask us to focus on. This is going to be an important part of your participation grade. I'm really looking forward to this part!

Grades:

A-surpasses usual expectations in skill and thoughtfulness. Well-developed and well-organized ideas, rich with detail and often revealing new insight. Virtually no grammatical or mechanical errors.

B-a better than average paper with few errors. Effectively organized and supported ideas. Argument developed in a clear and logical manner.

C- satisfies requirements, but may be lacking in organization or support. May contain some major and many minor errors or unclear ideas.

D-insufficient work to satisfy all requirements. Contains many errors.

F-does not demonstrate an understanding of the basic requirements for the assignment.

Important: YOU HAVE TO TURN IN ALL GRADED ASSIGNMENT IN ORDER TO PASS THE CLASS.

Plagiarism and Cheating:

The University of Illinois has high standards of academic integrity set out in Article 1, Part 4 of the University

Student Code. All written coursework is expected to be your own, with words and/or ideas from other sources fairly attributed. To use words and/or ideas from another source as if they were your own is plagiarism. Submitting your own work for more than one course without permission of both instructors can also constitute plagiarism. The University Student Code sets out possible consequences of plagiarism in coursework, ranging from failure on the assignment to suspension or dismissal from the University. The Code specifies that ignorance of these principles is not an excuse. All students in this class should familiarize themselves with the Code at www.admin.uiuc.edu/policy/code/ and with guidelines for fair use in the Modern Language Handbook [or another source]. If you have questions about fair use, please do not hesitate to consult me.

Comportment Policy

While you should feel free to express your ideas, slurs and epithets based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and preference, religious practice, etc. will not be tolerated. Any disruptive, obnoxious, or disrespectful behavior may result in dismissal from the classroom and other disciplinary action. I trust that we can all avoid such hypothetical situations and create safe classroom environment.

Disclaimer

Any part of this syllabus is subject to change, according to the needs and/or progression of the class. This syllabus is not exhaustive; I reserve the right to implement any reasonable methods not included in the syllabus if they serve the pedagogical purpose of the class.

Tentative schedule

Week 1--Jan 21

Introduction.
“Sense of place”--definition and relation to literature.

Week 2 --Jan 28

Home to Harlem (First Part)
Reading from *Harlemworld: Doing Race and Class in Contemporary Black America*
“The New Negro” by Alain Locke.

Week 3-- Feb 4

Home to Harlem (Second Part and Third Part)

Week 4--Feb 11

Salome of the Tenements (Introduction and chapters 1-15)
Excerpts from *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*

Week 5--Feb 18

Salome of the Tenements (chapters 16-24)

Week 6--Feb 25

Christ in Concrete (Geremio and Job)
Reading from *Hands: physical labor, class, and cultural work*

Week 7--Mar 4

Christ in Concrete (Tenement and Annunziata)

Week 8--Mar 11

Never Come Morning (Book I and Book II)

Excerpts from *The Practice of Everyday Life*

Excerpts from *Domination and the arts of resistance : hidden transcripts*

Week 9-- Mar 18

Never Come Morning (Book III and Book IV)

“Heterotopias” by Michel Foucault

Week 10—No class

Week 11--Apr 1

Invisible Man (Prologue, chapters 1-9)

Week 12--Apr 8

Invisible Man (chapters 10-16)

“Masquerade, magic, and carnival in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*” by Christopher Shinn

Excerpts from Mikhail Bakhtin (on the notion of carnivalesque)

Week 13-- Apr 15

Invisible Man (chapters 17-25 and Epilogue)

Week 14-- Apr 22

The Toughest Indian in the World (“Assimilation” through “The Sin Eaters”)

Excerpts from *American Indian reservations : controlling separate space, creating separate environments*

Excerpts from *The Dance of Person and Place*

Week 15 --Apr 29

The Toughest Indian (“Indian Country” through “One Good Man”)

Week 16-- May 6

The Intuitionist (Down Part I and Part II_

Reading from *Reconfigured Spheres : Feminist Explorations of Literary Space*

Week 17—May 13

The Intuitionist (Up Part I and Part II)