

ENGLISH 7474: CULTURAL TEXTS

THE PLANTATION: IMAGE, SYSTEM, SPACE

University of Memphis, Spring 2009
Monday 5:30-8:30
Patterson 331

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Office Hours: M, 2:30-4:30 and by appt.

DESCRIPTION:

Examining fiction, film, photo-documentary, autobiography, and travelogue, we will consider how the plantation has functioned in both aesthetic representations and in society—as an image (depicted in ways that convey or challenge dominant ideologies), as a system (a set of economic and social relationships that shape the material circumstances of persons adjacent to, as well as on, plantations), and as a space in and alongside which people live and work. Focusing on the literature and culture of the southern U.S., we will also explore connections between this region and the broader “plantation Americas” and consider the ways in which representations of the plantation past are used to conceptualize the contemporary United States.

OBJECTIVES/OUTCOMES:

- Examining the cultural and even political effects of diverse strategies for representing the plantation;
- Producing a critical dialogue that integrates widely studied literary texts, less-studied or archival materials, and interdisciplinary approaches;
- Describing results of research and analysis in oral presentation; and
- Writing sustained and persuasive arguments based on research and analysis.

REQUIRED TEXTS (available at University Bookstore and Tiger Bookstore):

- Erskine Caldwell, *Tobacco Road* (1932)
- William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom* (1936)
- Richard Wright, *12,000,000 Black Voices* (1941)
- James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941)
- Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (1946)
- Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (1968)
- Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987)
- V. S. Naipaul, *A Turn in the South* (1988)
- Caryl Phillips, *Crossing the River* (1995)
- Alice Randall, *The Wind Done Gone* (2001)
- Lars Von Trier, *Manderlay* (film, 2005)

POLICIES:

- Attendance and active participation are mandatory. If you miss more than two classes, you will fail the course. More than one unexcused absence will lower your grade. Because this is a graduate seminar, you are expected to come to class ready to discuss the texts.
- You must complete all assigned work to pass this class.
- Bring the relevant texts (except for films and images) to every meeting of class!
- 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.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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>.
- 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:
 - Class participation: 25%
 - Discussion postings: 25%
 - Research paper: 25%
 - Abstract & annotated bibliography: 10%
 - Presentation: 15%

DISCUSSION POSTINGS:

- Weekly postings to the ECourse discussion board are **REQUIRED**. They are due **BEFORE** the beginning of class each week.
- These 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!)
- Of course, one other purpose of the postings is to ensure that everyone is keeping up with the reading, so for full credit, 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). Cite using MLA or Chicago documentation styles.

- Compose your posting in a software of your choice, but copy it directly in the window for commentary: do *not* post your comment as an attachment. (You may add an attachment, and will on one occasion be prompted to: if you download a relevant article or image from the web and wish to share it with the class, for example, an attachment to your posting would be the ideal way to do so. But *your* comment should be entered directly into the posting-window; posting via attachments becomes unwieldy for your classmates and even for the ECourseware system.)
- Yet another purpose of these postings is to stimulate analysis before class, so that each of you will be prepared to contribute to seminar discussion. Because your classmates are expected to read your postings—and because you will be able to expand on your commentary in class—be selective and thoughtful in these postings: do not exceed 300 words (approximately one page of double-spaced text). Do write at least 150 words for each posting.
- I will post directions—basically, a thematic prompt—for each posting in the online forum for the assignment.

PRESENTATIONS:

- Your presentation will provide a brief overview of your research paper. It should clearly and concisely describe:
 - The problem/question you have chosen to investigate
 - Existing scholarship on this question
 - Your critical methodology
 - Your preliminary conclusions
- You are strongly urged to develop multi-media presentations: in other words, you should supplement your talk with images, video or audio clips, presentation software, etc. At the very least, students should provide well-formatted and helpful handouts with their presentations.
- Note that, because the objective for these presentations is to present your findings to your classmates, they constitute an excellent opportunity for you to consider the significance or purpose of your project and also how to organize and articulate your analysis in an audience-friendly manner. The objective of these presentations is not only to share your research but also to augment the paper-writing process.
- Students are expected to provide questions and feedback for their classmates' presentations: attendance and participation are just as important during the last sessions of class as they are earlier in the semester.
- Presentations must include at least 12 minutes worth of material; they will be stopped at 15 minutes. You will not be able to include all of your examples: select sufficient detail to illustrate your point.
- Students are welcome to volunteer to present on April 20th; beyond that, the schedule will be arranged by drawing names.
- Presentations will be graded according to:
 - Vigor of research and analysis
 - Clarity and organization of content
 - Style (use of media, consideration of audience, response to questions, etc.)

RESEARCH PAPER AND PRELIMINARY DOCUMENTS:

- All documents related to the final paper should be typed and submitted to the appropriate dropbox on ECourseware.

- In documents related to the research paper, as in discussion postings, use MLA or Chicago citation styles; be consistent. Numerous online sites provide guidance on citation; see, for example, <http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/>.
- No extensions are allowed on any of these documents. (If you desperately need an extra 24 hours or so at any point, contact me and, if you have fulfilled all other obligations, I may be able to be a bit lenient.)
- **Research paper:**
 - **Due date:** A complete draft of this paper is due on April 29th. I will return the draft with feedback, and your final paper will be due May 6.
 - **Length:** 12-15 pages for students in 7474; 17-20 pages for students in 8474
 - **Topic:** You will develop your own topics for this final paper, but you must consult with me during that process. You may focus on any literary or filmic representation of the plantation, from any period in U.S. history. Though the parameters for this assignment are broad, each paper should feature close, careful analysis of one or two texts while situating those texts in relation to broader aesthetic and/or historical contexts.
 - **Research:** Final papers should cite **at least** 5 (for 7474) or 8 (for 8474) books or journal articles in addition to your primary sources. You are also welcome to cite websites, artistic works (literary/musical/visual), or other forms of expression, but these will not count toward your minimum number of scholarly sources.
 - **Style:** Though innovative analysis is encouraged, research papers should conform to academic conventions for organization, expression, etc. Students are strongly encouraged to consult the overview of my stylistic expectations at <https://umdrive.memphis.edu/lduck/www/studentinfo/papers.html>.
- **Prospectus:**
 - **Due:** March 16
 - **Length:** Approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ page
 - **Content:** The prospectus need not posit a thesis, but should articulate the line of investigation that you plan to pursue. You need to articulate your research question clearly, and explain how you will approach that question. The extent to which I can helpfully advise you in developing your paper will depend on the quality and quantity of information you provide me here.
 - **Format:** The prospectus may use a conventional paragraph format or make use of bulleted lists, etc.
- **Annotated Bibliography:**
 - **Due:** April 6
 - **Length:** all primary sources to be consulted for paper, plus at least 4 scholarly sources for students in 7474 and 7 for students in 8474. Complete bibliographic information must be provided for each source. For each scholarly work, provide one concise paragraph of commentary.
 - **Format: Typed, itemized, with consistent citation style** (MLA, APA, or Chicago)
 - **Commentary:** Describe the relevance of each scholarly 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:

Texts/assignments listed to the right of the date are to be discussed/submitted on that date.
Underlined items are required only for students in 8474.

1/19 MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY—NO CLASS

1/26 Nostalgia, Transition, Argument

Joel Chandler Harris, from *Free Joe and other Georgian Sketches* (1887)
Kate Chopin, “La Belle Zoraïde” from *Bayou Folk* (1894)
Charles Chesnutt, “Hot-Foot Hannibal” from *The Conjure Woman* (1899)
W. E. B. Du Bois, from *Black Reconstruction* (1935)

2/2 Cavalier, Empire, Nation

Mark Twain, from *Letters from the Sandwich Islands* (1866)
D. W. Griffith, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) (screening for preceding week-end TBA)
Oscar Micheaux, *Within Our Gates* (1920) (screened during class)
Amy Kaplan, from *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (2002)

2/9 Plantation/Peasantry

Ersine Caldwell, *Tobacco Road* (1932)
Charles S. Johnson, “The New Frontage on American Life” (1925)
David Carlton and Peter Coclanis, from *The South, the Nation, and the World: Perspectives on Southern Economic Development* (2003)

2/16 House, Field, Region

Twelve Southerners, from *I’ll Take My Stand* (1930)
Robert Penn Warren, *All the King’s Men* (1946)

2/23 Picturing Plantation Poverty

Richard Wright, *12,000,000 Black Voices* (1941)
James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941) (feel free to skim some descriptions)

3/2 Regions: Local and Global

William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936)
Hosam Aboul-Ela, from *Other South: Faulkner, Coloniality, and the Mariátegui Tradition* (2007)

3/9 SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS

3/16 Narrating Movement and Containment

Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (1968)
Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past” (2005)
Prospectus due

3/23 Plantation Re/Memory

Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987)
Critical essay of student’s choice regarding memory and this novel

3/30 Atlantic Turns

Caryl Phillips, *Crossing the River* (1995)

Ian Baucom, from *Specters of the Atlantic* (2005)

4/6 Southern Tours

V. S. Naipaul, *A Turn in the South* (1988)

Jessica Adams, from *Wounds of Returning: Race, Memory, and Property on the Postslavery Plantation* (2007)

Annotated bibliography due

4/13 Labor/Relations

Alice Randall, *The Wind Done Gone* (2001)

Lars Von Trier, *Manderlay* (film, 2005)

4/20 STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

Kelli, Lara, Jervette, Everett, Gerald, Meredith, Chris, David

4/27 STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

Jennifer, Emahunn, Jessica, Renee, Eboni, Kay, Joshua

4/29 DRAFTS OF RESEARCH PAPERS DUE**5/6 FINAL DRAFTS OF RESEARCH PAPERS DUE**