

## ENGLISH 4322: Major American Authors since 1860 Narrating Nation

University of Memphis, Fall 2004  
Monday/Wednesday/Friday 10:20-11:15

Patterson 215

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### DESCRIPTION

This course examines U.S. literary configurations of the relationship between individual and group identities, considering especially:

- how groups are configured. To what extent is the nation represented as a coherent group, and to what extent does it seem to serve as a container for groups within it? Do these groups extend throughout the nation, or beyond its boundaries? What are the relationships among them?
- how characters are positioned within groups. How much choice do characters have in affiliating or identifying with a group, and to what extent is this process pleasurable or painful? To what extent is a character's relationships with other people shaped by *their* idea of that character's group affiliations?
- how ideas about groups affect psychological and emotional experience. How much do characters in these novels care about national or other group affiliations, and what prompts these feelings?
- how these novels reflect or challenge prominent national ideas about group membership and citizenship.

### TEXTS

These texts are available at the University Bookstore, but you are allowed to use other editions.

- James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1942)
- Richard Wright, *Native Son* (1940)
- Carson McCullers, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (1940)
- Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (1977)
- Gish Jen, *Typical American* (1991)
- Julia Alvarez, *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994)

### CONDUCT

- While in class, you are expected to attend to and participate in discussion; you are **NOT** allowed to engage in private conversation or other behaviors that would disrupt class activities. Turn off your phones before class!
- You are expected to be civil to others in the class. Discussion is an important element of this course, and our reading presents some unsettling images as well as controversial topics. You are encouraged to express your concerns and opinions, but please be aware that this right is shared by other members of the class. 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 the classroom community.

- Student conduct should accord with university expectations, as outlined in the Student Handbook, p. 5 (available online at [www.memphis.edu/stuhand2/stuhand982.pdf](http://www.memphis.edu/stuhand2/stuhand982.pdf)).
- Bring the relevant text to *every* meeting of class!

### **GRADING**

- Plagiarism, if detected, will result in a failing grade for the course. You can find further information regarding plagiarism and penalties at my webpage.
- More than five unexcused absences will result in failure of the course. More than three unexcused absences will lower your final grade. Attendance will be recorded during the first 5 minutes of class. Repeated tardiness or early departure will be recorded as absence.
- 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 course grade will be determined by a weighted average:
  - Quizzes: 15%
  - Participation: 15%
  - First essay: 20%
  - Presentation: 20%
  - Research paper: 30%
- You may be allowed to make up graded work for a **limited number** of classes, if you can present a **documented** and acceptable excuse, such as personal illness, unexpected and serious illness of a close family member, participation in a university-sponsored activity, etc.
- You must complete all assigned work to pass this class.

### **DAILY WORK**

- In addition to reading assignments, there will be a **quiz** almost every day in this class. Their chief purpose 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.
- Student **participation** is vital to this course—both for fulfilling our pedagogical goals, and establishing students' grades. It will be recorded daily. I do not generally call on students who are not volunteering, at a given moment, to participate, but I am aware that this practice may be a useful method for further encouraging some students to contribute to discussions. Please alert me to any concerns you may have about this aspect of the course/your grade at the **beginning** of the semester.

### **PRESENTATIONS:**

- You will develop your own topics for the group presentation, in consultation with me. We will divide into six groups (one per author). You may schedule your presentation for any date on which we are scheduled to discuss the author's work.
- Presentations must involve research. Multimedia presentations are encouraged.
- Presentations should last approximately 30 minutes.
- Presentations, like research papers, should situate the novel in relation to a larger debate in literary criticism or in another field; they need not produce readings of the novel. Be creative

and informative, and develop a topic that you find interesting. Presentations often include biographical information concerning the author, overviews of a critical debate concerning the work, or interdisciplinary investigation of a topic raised in the text. You could, for instance, briefly compare Agee and Evans' work with various other period representations of tenant farming; you could examine, for example, other photodocumentaries, social scientific studies, or filmic representations. (The cinematic version of *Tobacco Road* was released in 1941; you could also consider the representation of migrant agricultural laborers in *Grapes of Wrath* in 1940.) Options for topics abound, and may be suggested by class discussion or the central themes of the course (as described above).

- You will each write a 2-3 page narrative documenting and explaining your participation in the group presentation. This may, to a great extent, consist of notes from your research and from your development of the presentation (which may be included as "appendices"), but it should also provide an overview of your topic's relevance to the class and how decisions concerning how to research and format the presentation were made.
- Written narratives are due at the class meeting after your presentation (though you may, of course, submit them on the day you present!).
- Think about which novel you want to work on, and begin planning quickly: we will divide into groups during the first week of class.

## **WRITING ASSIGNMENTS**

- **General:**
  - Each writing assignment must be typed and double-spaced. You are advised to use one of the smaller 12-point fonts, and your margins should not exceed 1.25."
  - All sources must be cited; MLA style is recommended.
  - All assignments must include author's working email address or phone number in heading.
  - Underline your thesis.
  - For format information and important advice, consult my general paper guidelines at <http://www.people.memphis.edu/~lduck/studentpage.html>.
- **First essay:**
  - Papers should be **4-5** pages long, and are due **Monday, November 8**.
  - Examining **one** of our texts from the first half of the semester, explain how it articulates one problem or dynamic in collective life. You may look at issues in which multiple people are openly involved, or you may examine issues in individual experience or psychology that are linked to broader social structures or patterns. Crucially, you may doubt the prevalence of the problem or dynamic you discuss: your task is to elucidate the manner in which the text addresses or conceptualizes social experience.
  - Be sure to organize your paper in support of one over-arching thesis, and to use textual evidence to corroborate your claims. You may want to focus on a single scene or passage, considering its role in the plot, its tone and its imagery; you may want to compare scenes.
- **Research paper:**
  - Papers should be **6-7** pages long (in addition to bibliography), and must be submitted to my office by **Monday, December 13 at noon**.
  - You will develop your own topics for the final paper. You are highly encouraged to discuss these topics with me, and are **required** to submit a prospectus by **Monday, 11/22**.
  - Your prospectus should specify:

- The text(s) you plan to discuss
- Sources you plan to cite
- The central question you will pursue, and/or over-arching claim you will make
- Why this topic interests you, and/or how you became interested in it
- The methodology you will use in analyzing the text and/or supporting your position
- Sources you plan to consult
- Your prospectus should consist of 1-1.5 typed pages (part of which will consist of bibliographic entries). It need not posit a thesis, but should articulate the line of investigation that you plan to pursue. In submitting a well-considered and substantive prospectus, you provide me both an opportunity to offer helpful advice on your paper, and a reason to believe your paper is not plagiarized, so you are advised to attend to this document with some care.
- Papers must cite **at least 3** sources in addition to the literary work being analyzed.
- Papers may be related to the topic of your group presentation, but they may not be the result of group work! Research papers should situate a nuanced reading of the text in relation to a larger debate in literary criticism or in another field. Here, as in selecting a topic for your group presentation, you may consider formal aspects of the text and/or its cultural context.

### **SCHEDULE:**

- M, 8/30** Introduction
- W, 9/1** *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, pictures and “Preface” through Preamble (xlv-16)
- F, 9/3** *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 17-45
- M, 9/6** **LABOR DAY—NO CLASS**
- W, 9/8** *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 49-111
- F, 9/10** *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 115-126 AND 127-56 OR 157-89 OR 190-220
- M, 9/13** *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 223-253
- W, 9/15** *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 257-286 OR 289-315 OR 319-348 AND 349-357  
AND 447-59
- F, 9/17** *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 360-407
- M, 9/20** *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 407-44 AND 463-71
- W, 9/22** *Native Son*
- F, 9/24** *Native Son*

**M, 9/27** *Native Son*  
**W, 9/29** *Native Son*  
**F, 10/1** *Native Son*  
**M, 10/4** *Native Son*  
**W, 10/6** *Native Son*  
**F, 10/8** *Native Son*  
**M, 10/11** *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, I.1-I.4  
**W, 10/13** *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, I.5-II.1  
**F, 10/15** *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, II.2-II.5  
**M, 10/18** **FALL BREAK—NO CLASS**  
**W, 10/20** *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, II.6-II.8  
**F, 10/22** *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, II.9-II.12  
**M, 10/25** *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, II.13-end  
**W, 10/27** *Ceremony*  
**F, 10/29** *Ceremony*  
**M, 11/1** *Ceremony*  
**W, 11/3** *Ceremony*  
**F, 11/5** *Ceremony*  
**M, 11/8** *Ceremony*  
**First essay due**  
**W, 11/10** *Typical American*  
**F, 11/12** *Typical American*  
**M, 11/15** *Typical American*  
**W, 11/17** *Typical American*  
**Writing workshop**

**F, 11/19** *Typical American*

**M, 11/22** *Typical American*  
**Prospectus due**

**W, 11/24** *In the Time of the Butterflies*

**F, 11/26** **THANKSGIVING—NO CLASS**

**M, 11/29** *In the Time of the Butterflies*

**W, 12/1** *In the Time of the Butterflies*

**F, 12/3** *In the Time of the Butterflies*

**M, 12/6** *In the Time of the Butterflies*

**W, 12/8** *In the Time of the Butterflies*

**M, 12/13** **RESEARCH PAPER DUE AT NOON IN MY OFFICE!**