

**ENGLISH 4345: STUDIES IN AMERICAN FICTION/
RACE, LAW AND NARRATIVE**

University of Memphis, Fall 2006
Tuesday/Thursday 1:00-2:25
FIT 226
Dr. Leigh Anne Duck
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Office hours: T 2:40-4:40 and by appointment

OBJECTIVE:

Focusing chiefly on twentieth-century U.S. novels, we will examine how these works have sought to understand and interrogate the meaning of “race” by situating their representations in relation to law and history. Considering first the shifting definitions and structural effects of race in legal discourse and literature, we will conclude the semester with attention to a question raised by all of these novels: in what ways do legal structures shape or limit possibilities for individual and social development?

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

Available at the University Bookstore:

- Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894)
- Charles Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901)
- Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1970)
- Louise Erdrich, *Tracks* (1988)
- Gish Jen, *Typical American* (1991)

Selections marked with an asterisk (*) are available in the course's electronic archive on UMDrive.

GRADING AND POLICIES:

- Your final grade will consist of a weighted average:
 - Quizzes: 15%
 - Participation: 15 to 20% (For students who contribute consistently to class discussion, this part of the grade will be weighted to counter part of a lower grade.)
 - Presentation: 10%
 - First essay: 20%
 - Annotated bibliography: 10%
 - Final paper: 30%
 - Extra credit: replaces 5% of weight allotted lowest grade
- Attendance and active participation are mandatory. More than two unexcused absences will lower your grade. If you miss more than 6 classes, you will fail the course. Please note that the drop deadline is Oct. 20; if you have already missed several classes by that date, you are strongly advised to drop this course.
- While in class, you are expected to pay attention to class discussion; you are not allowed to engage in private conversation or other behaviors that would disrupt class activities.

- You are expected to be civil to others. Discussion is important to 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 all 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.
- Plagiarism will not be tolerated. You can find further information regarding plagiarism and penalties at <https://umdrive.memphis.edu/lduck/www/studentinfo/plagiarism.html>.
- “Quizzes” will be conducted orally, often, and at random: in each session, I will draw student names from a container and ask the selected individuals questions about the reading, recording the accuracy of their responses. The purpose of this testing 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.
- You can find more information about how I grade papers at <https://umdrive.memphis.edu/lduck/www/studentinfo/papers.html>.
- You must complete all assigned work to pass this class.

FIRST PAPER AND PROSPECTUS:

- **Due dates:** See “Schedule,” below.
- **Paper length:** 4-5 pages
- **Sources:** You are not required to cite multiple sources; you may support this argument through close reading of a single text. You should quote that text liberally—not lengthy swaths of text, but carefully chosen words and phrases that demonstrate your analytic points.
- **Format:**
 - Essay 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.”
 - Pages must be numbered.
 - Thesis must be underlined.
 - Author’s email address must be included in header.
 - Papers that refer to multiple sources must use MLA, Chicago, or APA citation style. Citation method must be consistent throughout the paper.
 - Approved prospectus must be re-submitted with paper.
- **Topic:** One premise of this course is that, despite their significant differences in form and function, literary texts explore many of the questions central to legal discourse. These include the parameters and meanings of community and citizenship, questions of what individuals and societies require for just and fulfilling lives, how “violation” and “retribution” may be defined, and what their consequences can be. Choose one novel from this syllabus and explore its treatment of *justice* or *legality* in relation to its historical context.
- **Prospectus:** The purpose of this prospectus is to be sure that, in personalizing this broad and abstract essay topic, you have found a workable argument. My goal here is to allow you to choose a topic that truly interests you; also, learning how to approach a broad and difficult question through close analysis of a narrowly-defined example

develops an important intellectual skill. Still, approaching such a paper topic can be difficult! By providing me information about your plans for the paper, you enable me to help you approach potential challenges in this process. (The purpose of the prospectus is also, of course, to ensure that you begin thinking about the paper well before it is due.)

This document should include

1. Name of the text/topic on which you will write.
 2. Brief discussion explaining your choice of topic.
 3. Provisional conclusion/thesis statement.
 4. Brief description of the reasons guiding you toward this provisional conclusion.
- (Numbered short-answer format is acceptable.)

FINAL PAPER AND RELATED DOCUMENTS:

- **Due dates:** See “Schedule,” below.
- **Paper length:** 8-10 pages
- **Sources:** minimum of 6
- **Format:** All documents must be formatted using directions provided for the first paper.
- **Topic:** You will develop your own topic for this paper, although it must be related to the themes of this course. (Feel free to consult with me well before the topic statement is due.) Papers should focus on a literary work; essays consisting strictly of historical or legal research, for example, will not be accepted. If you wish to focus on creative work in a different genre (film or song lyrics, for example), discuss this possibility with me in advance.
- **Topic statement:** This document may be largely informal, but should tell me:
 - the text(s) you plan to discuss, and the approach you plan to take
 - why this topic interests you, and/or how you became interested in it
 - where you plan to look for sources. Be as specific as possible, and name any likely sources you have already found.
 - the central question you will pursue, and/or over-arching claim you will make. To the extent possible, summarize your research plans using the following structure: “I am trying to learn about . . . because I want to find out . . . in order to help my reader understand how . . .” (You can learn more about this approach to developing papers in Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research*, 2nd ed. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003].)
- **Annotated bibliography:**
 - Bibliography must contain at least 5 scholarly sources. It may also contain literary works, song lyrics, films, etc., that have not been covered in this class.
 - All entries must include thorough and formal bibliographic information.
 - The relevant section of each item must be *very briefly* summarized.
 - The relevance of each item to your paper must be specified. 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?
- **Introduction and modified outline:**

- Submit an introduction for your paper. You may revise this introduction later, but this draft should contain:
 - A well-developed thesis statement, placed at the end of the introduction.
 - A preceding discussion structured to help readers understand the purpose/usefulness of your argument. (For example, what scholarly dispute does it attempt to settle? What new insight does it provide concerning the ethical, social, or psychological vision of the text? In what new way does it compare the novel's conception of "justice" to prominent understandings of the work's historical era? There are many good ways in which you might conceptualize your project's contribution to readers' understanding of cultural expression: your goal is to choose one and articulate it clearly and persuasively.)
- Following this introduction, briefly describe how your argument will proceed. You need not provide a complete outline (with roman numerals, letters, lower-case roman numerals, etc.), but you should list, in the order you will discuss them, the reasons you will use to support your argument, noting any substantial subsections that will be necessary to support your argument.

PRESENTATION:

- Your presentation should provide a brief overview of your argument in your final paper. 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 to think about how to organize it in an audience-friendly manner.
- You are *very strongly urged* to use presentation software, such as PowerPoint. I will be happy to provide some guidance in this regard. Students who are very uncomfortable with presentation software should provide well-formatted hand-outs at their presentations. Students who restrict their presentation to reading or talking will not receive high marks.
- Presentations should be supported by detail, but should not last more than 6 minutes.
- Students will sign up for presentation times one week before presentations begin.
- Students are expected to provide questions and feedback for their classmates' presentations: attendance and participation are just as important during these last three sessions of class as they are earlier in the semester.

EXTRA CREDIT:

Extra credit will be offered to students who attend designated public lectures on topics related to this course. Details—including dates, locations, and topics—will be announced as they become available.

For credit, students must submit a description and assessment of one of these events. This account should be formatted as a memo and addressed to me; it should describe the event very briefly, and then say why, and to what extent, you found it interesting. (You may determine, for example, that the event might not correspond to your broader interests, but that it did give you some insight into relationships among race, law, and culture; you may say just the opposite.) In any case, you should consider not only the content of the event, but also the style (lecture, performance, multi-media presentation, etc.). In what ways did the event succeed, or not, in

holding your interest? You should be able to provide this information in approximately ¾ page of single-spaced prose.

SCHEDULE:

Please note: Items listed to the right of a date should be read or viewed *before class* on that day.

T, 8/29 Introduction

Definitions of “Race”: Slavery and Segregation

Th, 8/31 *Dred Scott v. Sanford* (1857) *
Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution
 (1865-70)
Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) *
 Wai Chee Dimock, from *Residues of Justice* (1996) *

T, 9/5 Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, “Whisper”-chap. 11

Th, 9/7 Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, chaps. 12-16

T, 9/12 Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, chap. 17-end
 Cheryl I. Harris, “Whiteness as Property” (1993) *

Th, 9/14 Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition*, chaps. 1-7

T, 9/19 Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition*, chaps. 8-21
 Ida B. Wells-Barnett, “Lynching” (1909) *

Th, 9/21 Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition*, chaps. 22-28

T, 9/26 Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition*, chaps. 29-end
 Recommended: Michael Omi and Howard Winant, from *Racial Formation in the United States* (1986) *

Borders and Bodies

Th, 9/28 *Cherokee Nation v. State of Georgia* (1831) *
 Andrea Smith, from *Conquest* (2005) *
PROSPECTUS FOR PAPER #1 DUE!

T, 10/3 Erdrich, *Tracks*, chaps. 1-3

Th, 10/5 Erdrich, *Tracks*, chaps. 4-5

T, 10/10 Erdrich, *Tracks*, chaps. 6-7

Th, 10/12 Erdrich, *Tracks*, chaps. 8-9

PAPER #1 DUE—NO EXTENSIONS!

T, 10/17 FALL BREAK—NO CLASS

Th, 10/19 Jen, *Typical American*, pt. I
John S. W. Park, from *Elusive Citizenship* (2004) *

T, 10/24 Jen, *Typical American*, pt. II

Th, 10/26 Jen, *Typical American*, pt. III

T, 10/31 Jen, *Typical American*, pt. IV

Th, 11/2 Jen, *Typical American*, pt. V
Recommended: *U.S. v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923)

Polity and Psyche

T, 11/7 Film: *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962) (Pre-screening available: TBA)
Eric Sundquist, “Blues for Atticus Finch” (1995) *
TOPIC STATEMENT DUE!

Th, 11/9 Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, beginning – “Autumn”

T, 11/14 Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, “Winter”
Anne Anlin Cheng, from *The Melancholy of Race* (2001) *

Th, 11/16 Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, “Spring”

T, 11/21 Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, “Summer”
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE!

Th, 11/23 THANKSGIVING—NO CLASS

T, 11/28 Student presentations
INTRO AND MODIFIED OUTLINE DUE!

Th, 11/30 Student presentations

T, 12/5 Student presentations

T, 12/12 FINAL PAPER DUE BY NOON!