

 “A crowd gathers to wave Bobby Kennedy goodbye, Philadelphia, 1968” /Photo by Paul Fusco

ENGLISH 2329.017 // University of Texas at Arlington AMERICAN LITERATURE

WRITING FROM THE MARGINS:

THE LITERATURE OF MARGINALIZED POPULATIONS IN AMERICA

Spring 2015 Dr. Wayne Gay

5:30-6:50 pm Office: Preston Hall 201

Fine Arts 409 Office hours 2-4:30 pm MW

 and by appointment

 Contact: wgay@uta.edu

REQUIRED TEXTS AND MATERIALS

Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*. New York: Mariner, 2007.

 [ISBN 0-618-87171-3](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special%3ABookSources/0618871713)

Hansberry, Lorraine. *A Raisin in the Sun*. New York: Random House, 1994.

 ISBN: 978-0-679-75533-3

Jiménez, Francisco. *The Circuit*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996

 ISBN: 978-0-8263-1797-1

Sapphire. *Push*. New York: Knopf, 1996. ISBN 978-0-679-76675-8

Toomer, Jean. *Cane*. Afterwords by Rudolph Byrd and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Liveright, 2011. ISBN 978-0-87140-210-3

Students should arrange to have access to all of the above texts.

A number of other texts to be examined during the course will be posted on Blackboard for downloading.

Students should own a 1” loose-leaf binder dedicated to the work in this course.

Students will be required to bring a bluebook or greenbook OR a fully-charged laptop to class for the mid-term exam and for the written portion of the final exam.

COURSE FOCUS AND OUTCOMES

Instead of a chronological survey similar to what you may have experienced in other literature courses, the focus of this course will be an examination of representative texts from writers who belong to marginalized groups in the United States. These groups include populations in America that have been or continue to be deprived of full civil rights and economic and social opportunity because of ethnic, racial, gender, sexual, regional, or religious identity. In the course of the semester, we will discuss the meaning, definition, and parameters of marginalization in America, to the end that each student should arrive at his or her own definition of marginalization as well as a heightened awareness of the presence of marginalization in his or her own life. We will also explore the effect of marginalization on the literary output of specific writers, the expression of marginalization in American literature, and the effect of marginalization in literature on the reader.

 Participants in this course should expect to gain new expertise in reading and understanding literary texts as well as the cultural artifacts he or she encounters every day. There will be a definite emphasis on “close” reading; i.e., looking below the surface of a text or artifact and discovering less obvious but often equally important meanings, including revelations the author or creator may or may not have intended.

 This course satisfies the University of Texas at Arlington core curriculum requirements in Language, Philosophy, and Culture. The required objectives of these courses are the development of students’ critical thinking, communication skills, personal responsibility, and social responsibility. Many elements of this course foster development of these objectives, which are explicitly addressed in the “Signature Assignment” (see below). The Departmental guidelines for sophomore literature can be found by typing “sophomore literature” in the “Search UT Arlington” box on the University website: http://www.uta.edu/uta.

GRADING

The grade of A is reserved for students who attend regularly, participate in discussion, and submit all assignments on time, completely and satisfactorily. However, the course is so structured that all students who attend and participate diligently, and who submit all assignments in a satisfactory and timely manner, may reasonably aim for the goal of a final grade of A. In other words, you don’t have to be a genius writer or literary critic to make an A in this course: you just have to attend, do the assignments, and do them on time.

Attendance: satisfactory attendance for this class is defined as four absences or fewer. Illness is not an excused absence; the only excused absence is official university business. Four basically “free” absences allow ample leeway for those occasions on which a student may feel that it is necessary not to attend for whatever reason. The instructor has the discretion of giving partial or full attendance credit for tardy arrival or early departure; students who for various reasons may have arrived late are advised to discretely enter the classroom and gain the benefits of partial attendance, and the likelihood of at least partial credit for attendance.

 The instructor strongly feels that healthy adults should be able to participate in an 80-minute session without having to leave the room. Calls from boyfriends, girlfriends, employers, parents, spouses, children, siblings, or bill collectors are not a good reason for leaving a lecture or discussion.

 The final course grade will fall by one letter for every fourth absence.

 Students may choose to take notes electronically in this course, or to use electronic versions of the required texts when available. It is the student’s responsibility to avoid making or receiving text messages or phone calls during class; the instructor retains the privilege of insisting that students do not engage in non-class-related communications, but the instructor does not feel personally responsible for monitoring the activities of adults in the classroom.

Short papers: A large portion of the material for the course consists of seven short papers (250 words each) written outside of class in response to the reading assignment for the upcoming week. In other words, the papers will consist of your ideas concerning the readings.

 These papers must be submitted on Blackboard by 12 noon on the Saturday of the week they are due. The papers are graded on a pass-fail basis; grammar, punctuation, and formatting are *not* taken into consideration in the evaluation of these papers. Length, basic demonstration of ideas and familiarity with the texts in question, and timely submission are the only significant criteria in determining whether the paper receives a grade of pass or fail.

 Students who do not submit all papers on time will not be eligible for a grade of A. The final grade will fall by one letter for the first missed paper and by one more letter for every two missed papers thereafter.

Signature assignment: This will consist of a 3-page (minimum) paper examining any current issue raised in any of the works studied, such as civil rights, healthcare, immigration, climate change, U.S. foreign policy, or any other of the multitude of issues facing Americans today, thereby demonstrating social responsibility on the part of the writer. This paper will include MLA citations and (in addition to the 3-page requirement) a works cited list including at least three acceptable sources, and will be written in formal English with standard punctuation and grammar and MLA format. The papers will be graded and critiqued on the basis of these elements. For students who fail to submit, on time, a paper which receives a grade of C or higher, the final grade will fall by one full letter grade.

 This paper will be submitted in both paper and electronic forms.

 For further description, see the section “More about the signature assignment” at the end of this syllabus.

Plagiarism tutorial and policies: All students are required to participate in the UTA plagiarism tutorial at http://library.uta.edu/plagiarism/. Print out the “results” page after you have taken the tutorial and bring it to class on or before February 2.

 Although there are many aspects of participation in this course, failure to complete and submit evidence of completion of the plagiarism tutorial will result in a grade of F for the course. Understanding the concept of plagiarism is fundamental to this course, in other coursework, and in your future career.

 To summarize, plagiarism consists of willfully representing someone else’s work as your own. This includes presenting ideas without adequate documentation as well as allowing friends, acquaintances, or associates to do your work for you. University penalties for violation of plagiarism policy will be applied to short papers, exams, and the signature assignment.

Midterm exam: A 750-word essay written in class, graded on a pass-fail basis. Failure to submit a satisfactory midterm will result in the final grade falling by one letter. This exam will be open book, and may be submitted electronically or on paper.

Final exam: the final exam will consist of two main portions: a 750-word essay written in class on April 27, and a discussion period on May 11 at 5:30-8 pm. ATTENDANCE AT BOTH OF THESE SESSIONS, INCLUDING THE DISCUSSION SESSION DURING EXAM WEEK, IS MANDATORY. FAILURE TO ATTEND WILL RESULT IN LOWERING OF THE FINAL GRADE BY ONE LETTER. In other words, don’t book a flight, a vacation, a job interview, or before May 13 at 10:45 pm.

 The grade for the final exam will be either pass or fail. REITERATE: failure to attend the discussion portion of the final exam period will result in a grade of fail for the final exam, which will result in the final letter grade for the course falling by one letter.

A FINAL NOTE ABOUT GRADES: The alert student will have noted that, with diligent attendance, participation, and timely fulfillment of assignments, any university student should be able to reasonably aim for a final grade of A for this course. The instructor fervently believes that his principal goal and responsibility is to assist you in being aware of the great treasure which is our national literature, and in being able to respond intelligently and critically to all literature and cultural artifacts you may come into contact with in the future.

OTHER PERTINANT ISSUES:

Students with disabilities or special needs should identify themselves at the beginning of the semester and provide me with authorized documentation from the appropriate University office (e.g., the Office for Students with Disabilities, 817-272-3364). Students needing academic counseling should consult their Undergraduate Advisor; for other types of counseling, contact the Office of University College Hotline (817-272-6107). To prepare for emergencies, be aware of classroom exits. For on campus problems requiring police assistance, dial 817-272-3003

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1:

 Jan. 21: Introduction to the course

Week 2: Before class, download and read “Introductory Readings”

 Jan. 26 & 28: Continued Introduction to the course

Week 3: Before class, download and read “Paul’s Case,” “What You Pawn I Will Redeem,” “Barbie-Q,” “The Bedquilt,” “The Appropriation of Cultures,” and “How to Date a Brown Girl . . .”

 Submit Response No. 1 on Blackboard by 12 noon on Saturday, January 31

 Feb. 2 & 4: Discuss the above readings in class

Week 4: Before class, download and read “Poetry”

 Submit Response No. 2 on Blackboard by 12 noon on Saturday, February 7

 Feb. 9 & 11: Discuss the poetry readings in class

Week 5: Before class, read Jimenez’s *The Circuit*

 Submit Response No. 3 on Blackboard by 12 noon on Saturday, February 14

 Feb. 16 & 18: Discuss Jimenez’s *The Circuit* in class

Week 6:

 No response due this week

 Feb. 23 & 25: Introduction to Signature Assignment

Week 7: Before class, read Sapphire’s *Push*

 Submit Response No. 4 on Blackboard by 12 noon on Saturday, February 28

 March 2 & 4: Discuss Sapphire’s *Push* in class

\* \* \* \* SPRING BREAK \* \* \* \*

Week 8:

 No response due this week

 March 16 & 18: Conferences for Signature Assignment

Week 9:

 No response due this week

 March 23: Watch Van Peebles’s *Classified X* in class

 March 25: Midterm exam

Week 10: Before class: download and read “Spiritual and Popular Song Lyrics”

 Submit Response No. 5 on Blackboard by 12 noon on Saturday, March 21

 March 30 & April 1: Discuss spiritual and popular song lyrics in class

Week 11: Before class: Read Bechdel’s *Fun Home*

 Submit Response No. 6 on Blackboard by 12 noon on Saturday, April 4

 April 6 & 8: Discuss Bechdel’s *Fun Home* in class

WEEK 12

 No response due this week

 Submit Signature Assignment on Blackboard by 12 noon on Monday, April 13

 Submit hard copy of Signature Assignment at class time on April 13

 April 13 & 15: Watch *Raisin in the Sun* in class

WEEK 13:

 No response due this week

 April 20 & 22: Watch *The Celluloid Closet* in class

WEEK 14:

 Submit Response No. 7 on Blackboard by 12 noon on Saturday, April 25

 April 27: Written portion of final exam in class

 April 29: Begin discussion of submitted cultural artifacts

WEEK 15:

 No response due this week

 May 4 & 6: Continued discussion of submitted cultural artifacts

FINALS WEEK:

 Monday, May 11, 5:30-8 pm: Discussion portion of final exam

 ATTENDANCE IS MANDATORY!

APPENDIX: More about the Signature Assignment

The signature assignment addresses all four of the course University prescribed objectives. **Personal responsibility**: This essay includes the integration of outside sources; it therefore requires students to demonstrate personal responsibility as they use the words and ideas of other writers in an accurate and ethical manner. Citing sources properly isn’t just a matter of mechanics. It’s a question of personal responsibility (with real consequences for students) that overlaps with students’ responsibility to the academic community of which they are a part. The construction of a clearly articulated thesis statement supported by a careful analysis of textual evidence demonstrates **critical thinking** and **communication skills**. The development of a well-organized essay that demonstrates the correct use of grammar and other writing mechanics and demonstrates an awareness of the how to appeal convincingly to an audience further addresses the communication objective. The critical analysis of the way the selected text engages a significant issue of social responsibility related to current issues in American life addresses the **social responsibility** outcome.

Specific Requirements :

Write a well-organized, effectively developed 3-page argument identifying and expanding on a contemporary issue identified in one of the texts studied in the course. Write coherent sentences and paragraphs exercising grammar, spelling, and punctuation appropriate for a sophomore English course. Practice standard MLA formatting including consistent double-spacing (no extra space between paragraphs!), 1-inch margins, and Times New Roman 12-point type.

Students must properly integrate material from three secondary sources into their analysis in a way that gives credit to the authors whose ideas and language they are incorporating. This is not a research paper or a summary of the work of literature, but a paper in which students draw on the selected text and secondary sources to communicate an interpretive argument about their chosen text through the lens of social responsibility. The Library offers a quick, on-line plagiarism tutorial: <http://library.uta.edu/plagiarism/> **Take the tutorial; print out the “Results” page, and submit that page to the instructor in class on or before February 2.**

Appropriate Secondary Sources**:**

* National newspapers (e.g., *New York Times, Washington Post, USA Today, Dallas Morning News, Fort Worth Star-Telegram*)
* Print magazines (e.g., *The Atlantic, Harper’s, New Yorker, Time, Newsweek*)
* Online magazines (e.g., *Slate, Salon*)
* Scholarly articles (e.g., academic articles published in peer-reviewed journals; you can find citations for these articles by using the MLA International Bibliography database, JSTOR, or Project Muse—all of which UTA’s library gives you access to online)
* Scholarly books or book chapters (it’s a good bet a book is scholarly if it’s published by an academic press, such as Duke University Press; if you’re not sure, ask your instructor)
* Historical documents (e.g., old newspaper articles, letters, speeches, journal entries) from academic databases (see the History subject guide on the library website for ideas)

Students interested in using a source that isn’t listed here should check with the instructor.

In order to receive a grade of C or higher on the signature assignment, students *must*

1. write an essay that is at least 3 pages long
2. integrate three appropriate sources
3. have a thesis
4. have a title
5. incorporate at least one quotation from the literary text
6. have a Works Cited page using MLA form

 7. format the paper in correct MLA style, including correct line-spacing and

 type face