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English 10-714
Spring 2015

English 10-714: Topics in American Literature
Freedom and Imprisonment in the American Literary Tradition: A Multidisciplinary Approach

This special topics course is cross-listed with FST 04-304 and RES 37-304. We will address themes of freedom and imprisonment in American literature, broadly construed to include fiction, poetry, film, oral history, autobiography, anthropology, journalism, history, and sociology. In discussion, we will consider how the texts under review register and comment upon the intersections between imprisonment practices and histories of structural inequality in the U.S. We will pay particular attention to categories of gender, race, and class as we explore such topics as detention and U.S. foreign policy, feminist abolitionism, and the historic role of Texas in U.S. imprisonment regime. The course has a significant digital archives component; as part of their coursework, students will have opportunities to engage with digital archives initiatives such as the Texas After Violence Project, Fatal Encounters, the StoryCorps *Slavery By Another Name* Oral History Project, the Rule of Law Oral History Project, and the American Prison Writing Archive. Over the course of four task sessions during the first half of the semester, we will complete important project work for the Texas After Violence Project. Among other final project options, students may choose to continue working with the TAVP for their final projects.

By the end of the semester, students will achieve a strong understanding of how the American literature under review reflects the many ways in which prison systems interact with gender, racial, and economic inequality, both historically and today. In addition to practicing literary analysis and research skills, students will learn and implement digital tools such as the Annotation Studio, Omeka, Historypin, Tiki-Toki, and video-editing software. In lieu of the traditional final paper, each student will be responsible for a writing-intensive digital final project in accordance with detailed guidelines provided by the instructor. Examples of potential digital projects include developing web content for the Texas After Violence Project website, or creating a themed online curated exhibit of digitized primary sources such as oral history interviews, newspaper clippings, photographs, and government documents. Given the non-traditional nature of this English class, students will be provided with extensive support in order to make strong analytical connections between the literary themes and digital archives under consideration.

COURSE TEXTS

Course Texts available at the SU Bookstore:

- *Invisible Man* (1952) by Ralph Ellison (New York: Vintage International)
- *Fourth City: Essays from the Prison in America* (2014) edited by Doran Larson (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press)
- *The Meaning of Freedom: And Other Difficult Dialogues* (2012) by Angela Davis (San Francisco: City Lights Books)

Course Texts available on Moodle:

- Selected poems of Emily Dickinson (1890)

- “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (1963) by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- “Caged Bird” (1983) by Maya Angelou
- “Aurora” (1996) by Junot Diaz
- Selections from *Poems from Guantanamo: The Detainees Speak* (2007) edited by Marc Falkoff, Flagg Miller and Ariel Dorfman
- Selections from *Reading is My Window: Books and the Art of Reading in Women’s Prisons* (2010) by Megan Sweeney
- Selections from *Texas Tough: The Rise of America’s Prison Empire* (2010) by Robert Perkinson
- “Making Space for Restorative Justice in Criminal Justice and Criminology Curricula and Courses” (2013) by Sarah Britto and Mary Ellen Reimund

Course Texts available online:

- Selected episodes of *Serial* (2014) co-produced by Sarah Koenig and Julie Snyder, www.serialpodcast.org
- Selected episodes of Season One of *Orange is the New Black* (2013) created by Jenji Kohan
- Selected oral histories from the Texas After Violence Project, the StoryCorps *Slavery By Another Name* Oral History Project, and the Rule of Law Oral History Project

FINAL PROJECT OPTIONS

Final projects will be prepared for submission to the *Journal of Undergraduate Multimedia Projects*. I will provide detailed guidelines for all final project options.

Digital Archiving Project for the Texas After Violence Project (www.texasafterviolence.org).

In consultation with staff members of the non-profit, you’ll complete important project work to advance the mission of the TAVP. Tasks may include transcribing, auditing, and editing oral history interviews; using Glifos software to archive interviews at the Human Rights Documentation Initiative (<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/hrdi>); and creating content, including text and edited videos, for TAVP narrator pages.

Videographic Essay. Create a video that makes an argument or tells a story using clips from oral history collections we’re exploring over the course of the semester. Reference at least three sources from the syllabus to contextualize and otherwise enrich your argument or story.

Omeka Digital Curation Project (<http://www.omeka.net/>). Curate an online exhibit that makes an argument or tells a story using clips from oral history collections we’re exploring over the course of the semester. Include digitized archival artifacts from the Digital Public Library of America, the Library of Congress Digital Collections, and/or the Chronicling America database. Reference at least three sources from the syllabus to contextualize and otherwise enrich your argument or story. Write a concluding statement identifying substantive insights that are made possible by considering your sources within an exhibit format.

Tiki-Toki Digital Timeline Project (www.tiki-toki.com/). Create a digital timeline that makes an argument or tells a story using clips from oral history collections we’re exploring over the course of the semester. Include digitized archival artifacts from the Digital Public Library of America, the Library of Congress Digital Collections, and/or the Chronicling America database. Reference at least three sources from the syllabus to contextualize and otherwise enrich your argument or story.

Write a concluding statement identifying substantive insights that are made possible by considering your sources within a timeline format.

Historypin Digital Mapping Project (www.historypin.org). Create a digital map that makes an argument or tells a story using clips from oral history collections we're exploring over the course of the semester. Include digitized archival artifacts from the Digital Public Library of America, the Library of Congress Digital Collections, and/or the Chronicling America database. Reference at least three sources from the syllabus to contextualize and otherwise enrich your argument or story. Write a concluding statement identifying substantive insights that are made possible by considering your sources within a map format.

Customized Digital Project. You may propose your own final project plan that incorporates one or more of the digital tools listed above.

COURSE POLICIES

- **Reading responses.** Every **Wednesday by midnight**, please submit one critical observation and one discussion question to the class Twitter account. Your observation and question should demonstrate that you have completed at least half of the reading for the week. Responses will be evaluated on a ✓/✓- scale and reflected in your final participation grade.
- **Class participation.** The success of this class will hinge on your dedicated participation in digital skills labs and seminar discussions. I expect you to arrive in class not only having completed the reading, but having highlighted significant passages, taken notes, and thought critically about the text so that you are prepared to engage in lively and congenial discussion.
- **Seminar and lab etiquette.** You will have many opportunities to support your peers in this class, through collaboration on and peer review of digital projects. We will maintain an environment of congeniality and respect in part by keeping phones and laptops stowed during class. Use of technology in our classroom will be very targeted, and we will use the computers in the Mac Lab where our class meets.
- **Attendance.** Missing more than one class meeting will significantly compromise your participation grade. **Missing three class meetings will result in your automatic failure of the course.**
- **E-mail Correspondence.** All of you will engage in e-mail correspondence with me at some point in the semester. Please observe appropriate etiquette; address me with salutation ("Dear Charlotte") and sign off politely ("Sincerely, Joe Schmoe"). Please check your e-mail regularly. **E-mail is an official mode of communication for this class; you are responsible for information that I e-mail to you.**
- **Honor Pledge.** I take Southwestern's Honor Pledge seriously and I expect you to adhere to it. If you have questions about what constitutes an Honor Pledge violation, please ask.
- **Accommodations for students with disabilities.** Southwestern University will make reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students should contact the Center for Academic Success and Records to determine their eligibility to receive accommodations. It is the student's responsibility to discuss any necessary accommodations with faculty.

GRADING

American Prison Writing Archive Transcription: 5%

Annotation Studio, Omeka, Tiki-Toki, Historypin, and Text-mining in-class assignments: 5%

TAVP digital archiving tasks: 15%
Oral history close-listening worksheets: 5%
Guided class blog posts: 10%
Final project proposal (short oral presentation): 2.5%
Final project progress report (short oral presentation): 2.5%
Final digital project and final showcase presentation: 40%
Final short integrative reflection essay (approximately 5 pages) and grade proposal: 5%
Attendance, punctuality, reading responses,
and thoughtful, frequent participation in discussion: 10%
Extra credit opportunity: +1 point added to final grade

The grading scale for this class will include pluses and minuses.

A+ = 4.0 = 98-100; A = 4.0 = 94-97; A- = 3.7 = 90-93

B+ = 3.3 = 88-89; B = 3.0 = 84-87; B- = 2.7 = 80-83

C+ = 2.3 = 78-79; C = 2.0 = 74-77; C- = 1.7 = 70-73

D+ = 1.3 = 68-69; D = 1.0 = 64-67; D- = 0.7 = 60-63

READING and ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

Subject to Change

January 16: Introduction

In class: introduction to course themes, syllabus, blog, and the *Journal of Undergraduate Multimedia Projects*; reading and discussion of “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; Annotation Studio in-class assignment

January 23: “Nobody-ness”

For today: read *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison

In class: discussion of reading; visit from the Texas After Violence Project team

January 30: Historical Perspectives on Justice and Inequality in the U.S.

For today: read Angela Carter, “The Prison-Industrial Complex” and “Race, Crime, and Punishment” in *The Meaning of Freedom: And Other Difficult Dialogues*; “Introduction: The American Prison Writer as Witness”(1-10) and “Editor’s Afterword” (295-298) in *Fourth City: Essays from the Prison in America*; and Robert Perkinson, “Introduction” and “Plantation and Penitentiary” in *Texas Tough: The Rise of America’s Prison Empire*.

In class: discussion of reading; transcription workshop; transcription of American Prison Writing Archive essay; “Transcription as Close-Reading” exercise and blog post; exploration of the Texas After Violence Project oral history collection

February 6: Prison Reform and Alternative Justice Models

For today: listen to selected TAVP oral history interview; complete “Close-Listening Worksheet”; read Angela Carter, “Abolition Democracy” in *The Meaning of Freedom: And Other Difficult Dialogues*; Sarah Britto and Mary Ellen Reimund, “Making Space for Restorative Justice in Criminal Justice and Criminology Curricula and Courses”; and “Community Activists” (238-254) in *Fourth City: Essays from the Prison in America*

In class: discussion of reading and results of “Close-Listening Worksheet”; Omeka in-class assignment; TAVP task session 1

February 13: Perspectives on Gender and Prison

For today: read Megan Sweeney, “The Underground Book Railroad: Material Dimensions of Reading” in *Reading is My Window: Books and the Art of Reading in Women’s Prisons*; Junot Díaz, “Aurora”; and “The Life” (pages 13-53) in *Fourth City: Essays from the Prison in America*
In class: discussion of reading; Historypin in-class assignment; TAVP task session 2

Tuesday, February 17: Extra Credit Opportunity

For +1 point added to your final grade, attend a film screening of *Crime After Crime* from 4-5:30 p.m. in Olin 105.

February 20:

For today: attend Yoav Potash lecture, February 19 from 4-5 p.m. in Olin 105; read Angela Carter, “The Meaning of Freedom” and “Difficult Dialogues” in *The Meaning of Freedom: And Other Difficult Dialogues*. **Extra credit opportunity:** attend campus screening of *Crime After Crime* (date and location TBD)

In class: discussion of reading and Yoav Potash lecture; video-editing workshop with Whitney Milam, campus videographer

February 27: Poetry of Freedom and Imprisonment

For today: read selected poems of Emily Dickinson; “Caged Bird” by Maya Angelou; and selections from *Poems from Guantanamo: The Detainees Speak*; prepare final project proposal short oral presentation (5 minutes)

In class: final project proposal presentations and workshop; discussion of reading; information literacy session and in-class exercise; exploration of the Rule of Law Oral History Project

March 6: Prison Policy and U.S. National Identity

For today: listen to selected Rule of Law Oral History interview; complete “Close-Listening Worksheet”; read Angela Carter, “Democracy, Social Change, and Civil Engagement” in *The Meaning of Freedom: And Other Difficult Dialogues*

In class: discussion of reading and results of “Close-Listening Worksheet”; Tiki-Toki in-class assignment; TAVP task session 3

March 13: Prison on the Radio

For today: listen to Episode 1 of *Serial* podcast (<http://serialpodcast.org/>); read Adrienne LaFrance, “Is it Wrong to be Hooked on *Serial*?”

In class: discussion of *Serial* episode; text-mining in-class assignment; TAVP task session 4

March 20 *NO CLASS, SPRING BREAK!*

March 27: Micro Prison Narratives

For today: “Family Life In and From Prison City” (112-137) and “Inside Justice and Injustice” (145-175) in *Fourth City: Essays from the Prison in America*; prepare final project progress report short oral presentation (5 minutes)

In class: final project progress report presentations and workshop; discussion of reading; guided exploration of StoryCorps oral history collection

April 3 *NO CLASS*

April 10: Digital Projects Lab

April 17: Digital Projects Lab and Peer Review

April 24: Prison on T.V.

For today: **final digital projects due in class**; read interview with Piper Kerman

In class: screening and discussion of Episode 1 of *Orange is the New Black*

Date TBD (most likely during finals week): Final Digital Project Showcase