LITERATURE OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WARS

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330-317-9982 (cell)

Office Hours: T/Th 1:00 – 2:00 p.m.; Fridays by apt.

Course Description

The plural, *wars*, of this course’s title signals two competing traditions in Civil War memory and periodization:

— the Civil War as a distinct and defining event, from 1861 to 1865, that splits American history (and most English departments’ surveys of American literature) into two distinct halves; and

— the Civil War as an ongoing feature of American life, which, as Ta-Nehisi Coates writes, “commenced not in 1861, but in 1661, when the Virginia Colony began passing America’s first black codes,” and extends into the twentieth and twenty-first century’s waves upon waves of “white terrorism.”

On the one hand, a war that ended chattel slavery; on the other, a war that is more nonevent than event, restructuring rather than ameliorating the violence of antiblackness.

Historical periods, as Caroline Levine reminds us, act as “bounded wholes” and “forms for organizing heterogeneous materials”; they “afford constraints and opportunities, bringing bodies, meanings, and objects into political order.” What, then, do these two competing periodizations of the Civil War bring into view and what do they obscure: about race and the legacies of enslavement; about antiblackness and white nationalism; about death and remembrance; about war and violence? And what differing historiographical methods do they demand of us as literary historians and literary critics working to understand the significance and contexts of our texts?

Over our semester, we’ll examine literary texts that address these questions, some more explicitly than others. We’ll move chronologically, beginning with texts published during the years leading up to the Battle of Fort Sumter and ending with very recent debates over Afro-Pessimism and rejections of the narrative of racial progress. Primary texts will include poetry,
popular songs, short stories, novels, films, photographs, and nonfiction prose. Secondary texts will include writings in the philosophy of history, critical race theory, and the study of war.

**Course Responsibilities**

To get the most out of this course, you have several responsibilities:

*Reading.* Read and reread. Then read again. As you read, take notes in the margins, circle words, draw lines, reference earlier page numbers for later comparison, underline. Pay special attention both to those moments in a text that get you excited and those moments that make you frustrated or irritated; although quite different, both kinds of reactions signal a moment in the text that will reward further attention, particularly when you’re drafting a memo or a longer essay. When possible, bring hard copies of course materials to class.

*Participating.* A variety of voices will enrich our experiences with these texts and with each other, and the success of this seminar is thus a collective responsibility. Come to every class prepared with questions, notes, and observations to help us along.

*Provoking.* Two times over the semester, you’ll send a set of interrelated discussion questions to the class. These needn’t be long (<150 words is ideal), but they absolutely must feature questions that generate thought and debate. Do not share your own thoughts about the readings; doing so is not the point. The point, instead, is to send the class debatable, generative questions that will have many different answers and produce arguments. You should hinge your questions to a specific body of evidence (a passage, a pattern, a repeated word, a critical claim) that will provide a concrete focus. Send your provocations to the full class email no later than 8:00 p.m. the Monday before class.

*Teaching.* You’ll design a lesson plan (between one and two single-spaced pages) for undergraduates or advanced secondary students that incorporates digital, archival material related to the U.S. Civil War. You will then present your lesson and rationale briefly (no more than five minutes) to the class. I’ll announce more details about this assignment as our date gets closer.


**Grade Distribution**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Grade A</th>
<th>Grade B</th>
<th>Grade B+</th>
<th>Grade C</th>
<th>Grade D</th>
<th>Grade E</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Participation, including provocations</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>920 – 979</td>
<td>890 – 889</td>
<td>800 – 819</td>
<td>700 – 799</td>
<td>600 – 699</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Possible</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>820 – 879</td>
<td>790 – 809</td>
<td>750 – 769</td>
<td>650 – 669</td>
<td>550 – 599</td>
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**Course Texts**

Faith Barrett, ed., *Words for the Hour: A New Anthology of American Civil War Poetry*

Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage*

Ambrose Bierce, *Civil War Stories*

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, *Iola Leroy*

William Faulkner, *The Unvanquished*
Suzan-Lori Parks, *Father Comes Home from the War, Parts 1, 2, and 3*

**Course Calendar**
B: Blackboard  
*WFH: Words for the Hour*

**January 16**  
Course Introduction  
Julia Ward Howe, “Battle Hymn of the Republic” (1862)  
Henry Timrod, “A Cry to Arms” (1861)  
Robert Lowell, “For the Union Dead” (1964)  
Kevin Young, “For the Confederate Dead” (2007)

**January 23**  
Christina Sharpe, “The Wake” (2016)  
Abraham Lincoln, “A House Divided” (6/16/1858); “Address at Cooper Institute” (3/27/1860); “First Inaugural Address” (3/4/1861); “Final Emancipation Proclamation” (1/1/1863); “Gettysburg Address” (11/19/1863); “Second Inaugural Address” (3/4/1865)  
Jefferson Davis, “Speech in Jackson, Miss.” (12/26/1862)  
Frederick Douglass, “The Meaning of July 4 for the Negro” (7/5/1852); “The Inaugural Address” (4/1861), “The Future of the Negro of the Slave States” (2/5/1862); “The War and How to End It” (3/25/1862); “The Slaveholders’ Rebellion” (7/4/1862); “A Day for Poetry and Song” (12/28/1862)

**January 30**  
(class will meet from 5:10 – 6:10 so we can attend Literary Festival reception and reading by Tyehimba Jess)  
Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Brown Speech at Boston (1859); John Brown Speech at Salem (1859) (B)  
Henry Thoreau, “A Plea for Captain John Brown” (1859) (B)  
Frederick Douglass, “Speech on John Brown” (12/3/60) (B)  
“John Brown’s Body” (1861) (B)  
Melville, “The Portent” (1866) (*WFH*)  

**February 6**  
Faith Barrett and Cristanne Miller, “Words for the Hour”: A New Anthology of American Civil War Poetry, “Preface” and “Introduction” (*WFH*)  
William Cullen Bryant, “Not Yet” (1861) (*WFH*)  
Anonymous, “Cotton-Doodle” (1861) (*WFH*)  
William E. Pabor, “Emancipation” (1862) (*WFH*)  
Mary H. C. Booth, “While God He Leaves Me Reason, God He Will Leave Me Jim” (1862) (*WFH*)  
Anonymous, “Negro Song of Mission Ridge” (1862) (*WFH*)
Frederick A. Bartleson, “In Libby Prison—New Year’s Eve 1863-4” (1863) (WFH)
Isabella MacFarlane, “The Two Southern Mothers” (1863) (B)
Emily M. Washington, “Confederate Song of Freedom” (1864) (WFH)
Thomas Bailey Aldrich, “Frederickburg” (1864) (WFH)
Sarah E. Shuften, “Ethiopia’s Dead” (1865) (WFH)
Francis Miles Finch, “The Blue and the Gray” (1867) (WFH)

February 13
John Greenleaf Whittier, “The Hunters of Men” (1834) and “Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott” (1861) (WFH)
George Henry Boker, “The Black Regiment” (1863) (B)
Alice Cary, “Song for Our Soldiers” (1864) (B)
Benjamin Clark, “Be Joyful!” (1864) (B)
Walt Whitman, “Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night,” “The Wound-Dresser,” “Ethiopia Saluting the Colors,” “Reconciliation” (1865) (WFH)
Herman Melville, “Shiloh,” “The College Colonel,” “Rebel Color-bearers at Shiloh” (1866) (WFH)
Emily Dickinson, all selections (WFH)
Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, all selections (1854 – 1872) (WFH)
Sarah Morgan Bryan Platt, “Army of Occupation” (1866) and “A Child’s Party” (1883) (WFH)

February 20
Walt Whitman, from Memoranda During the War (1875-76) (B)
Louisa May Alcott, from Hospital Sketches (1863) (B)
Mary Boykin Chesnut, Mary Chesnut’s Diary (written 1861 – 1865; revised 1881 – 1884; published 1905) (selections) (B)
Edwin Redkey, ed., A Grand Army of Black Men (1861 – 1865) (selections) (B)
Colleen Glenney Boggs, “The Civil War’s ‘Empty Sleeve’ and the Cultural Production of Disabled Americans” (2015) (B)

February 27
James Dawes, “Language and Violence: The Civil War and Literary and Cultural Theory” and “Counting on the Battlefield: Literature and Philosophy after the Civil War” (2005) (B)
Fredric Jameson, “War and Representation” (2009) (B)
Stephen Crane, The Red Badge of Courage (B)

March 1: Seminar paper prospectus due by noon via email

Spring Break

March 13
Ambrose Bierce, “Chickamauga” (1889), “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” (1890), “One of the Missing” (1888)
Charles W. Chesnutt, “The Passing of Grandison” (1899) (B)
Jonathan Elmer, “American Idiot: Ambrose Bierce’s Warrior” (2015) (B)

March 20
Don Dingledine, “The Whole Drama of the War: The African American Soldier in Civil War Literature” (2000) (B)
Geoffrey Sanborn, “Mother’s Milk: Frances Harper and the Circulation of Blood” (2005) (B)

March 27 – Class Cancelled for Professor Conference

April 3
William Faulkner, *The Unvanquished* (1938)
Cody Marrs, “Transbellum American Literature” (2015)

April 10
Joseph R. Winters, “Introduction” to *Hope Draped in Black: Race, Melancholy, and the Agony of Progress* (2016) (B)
Jared Sexton, “Afro-Pessimism: The Unclear Word” (2016) (B)

April 17
Suzan-Lori Parks, *Father Comes Home from the Wars (Parts 1, 2, & 3)* (2015)

April 24: Course Conclusion, Lesson Plan Presentations, & Class Party

May 8: Seminar Papers due by noon via email.