

ENG 400 Seminars

Spring 2017

Race and Space: Race and Space: Afrofuturism and Speculative Representations of Blackness **Dr. Michael Burns**

This course will engage texts of various genres (including novel, short story, film, and music) to explore how the Black experience is represented within and related to the literary and cultural aesthetic of Afrofuturism, which considers human relationships to outer space and speculative futures. One motivating question for the course will be: What do these speculative literary and cultural representations of race offer to our understandings of the Black experience? Further, as we stand on the verge of colonizing Mars—the very idea should give pause—what is the contribution of the humanist? How might more careful considerations of literary and cultural texts that address issues related to race beyond terra firma inform our thinking about the human condition and human rights in this world?

Practicing Rhetorical History in the Bayard Rustin Archive **Dr. Tim Dougherty**

Too few of us know that the key organizer of the 1963 March on Washington was born right here in West Chester. As a queer black man, Bayard Rustin lived and worked at the intersections of various social justice movements in the 20th century. This class asks what we can learn from Rustin's rhetorical practices that might be instructive for 21st-century social justice movement work.

The seminar will ground students in the vibrant scholarly conversation of rhetorical historiography, focused especially on the ethical and methodological questions underpinning serious archival work in the history of rhetoric. We'll begin by immersing ourselves in the major debates of rhetorical historiography, and then focus on the ongoing ethical questions of archival scholarship in rhetorical studies. We'll then read some particularly innovative contemporary versions of archival scholarship emerging in the field of rhetorical history. We'll then apply these methodological insights to individual projects growing from Bayard Rustin's personal papers (a copy of which is archived here at WCU) as we read secondary scholarship on his life and work.

Literature and The Problem of History **Dr. Erin Hurt**

This course will take Faulkner's famous phrase—"The past isn't dead. It isn't even past"—as a starting point for our critical inquiries as we explore the ways in which three authors represent history, memory, and storytelling in their fiction, set in the South and the Southwest. William Faulkner, Toni Morrison, and Cormac McCarthy and other authors use their novels to interrogate what history means. These authors' novels differ from each other by telling the stories that the others don't. At the same time, all of these authors deeply engage with the idea that history is contingent and not what we thought we knew; history is about (un)making, (re)writing, and erasing. Among the issues we will address are: history and fiction, collective memory, the idea of American identity, nation, empire, gender and society, race and ethnicity, postmodernity, narrative, slavery, freedom, closure, and community. Throughout, we will be paying close attention to each

writer's stylistic choices—how the writer's narrative strategies affect the way we interpret the novel. Our goal, as we make our way through these novels, will be to articulate the ways in which these novels speak to each other about history and memory. During the semester, students will practice a number of different skills such as close reading, content and audience reception analysis, finding relevant scholarly work, and synthesizing critical arguments.

Multicultural British Literature & Popular Music **Dr. Graham MacPhee**

Multicultural Britain has seen the influx of a dizzying array of new musical forms such as calypso, ska, reggae, and bangra, and the emergence of hybrid forms such as punk rock, rap, acid jazz, Asian dub, drum and bass, and grime. And over time, new poetic and literary modes, often centered on performance or drawing on spoken word traditions—including Dub poetry and punk poetry—have emerged in response. Both these literary and popular forms have taken on a social and political significance by challenging traditional notions of national identity, gender, and race through the pluralization of idiom, dialect, and voice.

This seminar will ask what this amazing musical diversity tells us about postwar, multicultural British society and how literary forms—both the novel and poetry—relate to and draw on popular culture and social movements. We will employ postcolonial approaches to literature and culture, as well as theoretical understandings of race, gender, and multiculturalism.

The course is taught by Professor Graham MacPhee, who works extensively in this field of research. Students can learn more about the instructor's research interests and publications by going to his page on the English department's website.

The Profession of Writing **Dr. Ashley Patriarca**

These days, anyone can get published. Some media outlets would be more than happy to let you write for them for free. But here's the thing: Writing is hard, and the written word is valuable. Good information is not the same as bad information. A good essay is worth more than one written merely for click-bait. Companies need good technical and business writers, and are willing to pay for them. There are online magazines that pay. Thus, writing is a *profession*, in addition to an avocation. This seminar explores what it means to be a *professional writer*. We'll prepare several pieces of your own writing for formal submission to a publication through intensive workshopping, and we'll also speak to several professional writers at different stages of their careers. This course is open to writers of any genre.

Literature of the Civil Rights Era **Dr. Andrew Sargent**

The Civil Rights/Black Power era of the 1950s-70s was a watershed period in US history. While key figures and events from this era have long been fixtures in the American popular imagination, our aim in this class is to examine the many forms of literature that sought to shape the black freedom struggle as it unfolded and/or to assess the movement's aims, achievements, and shortcomings in the decades after. In exploring texts by, among others, Martin Luther King, Harper Lee, William Melvin Kelley, Anne Moody, Amiri Baraka, and Alice Walker, as well as movies such as *The Help* and *Night Catches Us*, we will engage with works produced by iconic race leaders and grassroots

activists, blacks and whites, women and men, and creative writers, photojournalists, and filmmakers. Paying particular attention to how the movement's legacy is remembered and contested today (and to what the movement's legacy reveals about the racial politics of contemporary America), our critical approach will blend cultural studies, critical race theory, and critical whiteness studies, along with careful close reading and discussion of our primary texts. Students interested in learning more about Dr. Sargent's research interests are encouraged to view his faculty profile on the English Department website: <https://www.wcupa.edu/arts-humanities/english/aSargent.aspx>

Eighteenth Century London Lives

Dr. Eleanor Shevlin

During the long eighteenth-century London grew significantly as an urban center. Many young adults in their teens and twenties from Britain's towns and rural areas flocked to London. Not only did London become an increasingly youthful city, but it also grew ever more diverse. French Huguenots, blacks from Africa and the Americas, Irish, southern planters, Jews from Europe and others were drawn to Britain's capital and formed their own communities within London's expanding geographic boundaries. By 1815 the metropolis was the most populous city in the world.

Alongside London's rapid growth in the eighteenth century were an outpouring of printed material and the burgeoning of new generic forms. Newspapers, novels, and magazines created a marketplace rich in reading material. In many ways these forms were tied to London's growth as well as to one another. London newspapers were replete with ads hawking the latest fashions, consumer goods, medicinal products, publications, and employment openings as well as reports of high society, royalty, commercial news, theatre and concert happenings, and crimes committed, periodicals supplied illustrated prints of London scenes, advice for conducting oneself in the city, and contrasted urban and rural realities. Not only did these publications bring London to Britain's countryside and towns, but the details found in their pages were also reworked in fictional narratives, imbuing novels with an aura of realistic representation. Many novelists resided in London, and some such as Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, and Eliza Haywood were also journalists. Newspapers and periodicals publicized novels through advertisements and reviews, and while novels certainly were not all set in London, many featured chapters on the metropolis that served to publicize the city, both its appeal and its hazards, as they simultaneously proffered advice to readers on how to navigate its spaces and decipher its social terrains.

This course explores the ways in which various eighteenth-century texts create, reproduce, and disseminate ideas about London and its urban populace. It is particularly interested in exploring the connections between London developments and the development of newer generic forms such as the novel and the newspaper. These genres have contributed to both contemporaneous and twenty-first century imaginings of the textures and rhythms, spaces and places of eighteenth-century London and its diverse inhabitants. Informed by the theoretical work of Michel de Certeau, Miles Ogborn, Lennard Davis, and Cynthia Wall, this course will pose a series of questions: How do various course texts conceptualize space to raise questions about identity? What kinds of maps of London do these texts create? What is the import of place in the construction of social relations in these works? Is urban space a gendered space in these texts? How do these texts convey social anxieties about London's rapid expansion and shifting demographics? What is the ideological significance of these imaginative reconstructions of urban London? And how is our digital age transforming our sense of British literature in the long eighteenth century and London? Students

will have the opportunity to explore archival material, and their final project will involve creating collaboratively a digital site showcasing their original research.

Crime in America: Fiction and Non-Fiction **Dr. Jeffrey Sommers**

Most bookstores feature a “True Crime” section because, apparently, readers are fascinated by reading about violent crime. This course examines that fascination, and focuses on the word “true” in naming the genre. We read books such as Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* and James Ellroy’s *Black Dahlia* about actual crimes and books that fictionalize those crimes. We view both documentary and fictional film versions (not only excerpts from *In Cold Blood*, but from *Capote*, a film about how he wrote the book) of several books. Our primary objective is to learn how to read “true crime” books: how do we know what to trust as “true”? How do writers, both nonfiction and fiction writers, turn the facts of the crime into a story? How do their strategies as writers influence and affect our reading? What do “nonfiction” and “fiction” mean when applied to the genre of “true crime”? What do the words “true,” “real,” “factually accurate” mean when applied to crime stories? These are complicated but fascinating questions that cannot, most likely, be answered easily or definitively, but the process of trying will be quite worthwhile...and each student in the class will have the opportunity to select a true crime book for the final research paper. Grisly reading but mesmerizing as well...

African and African American Still Photography **Dr. Spring Ulmer**

In this course we will study of the politics of representation (and the relationship between the image and ideology) in modern and contemporary African and African American still photography. Aesthetics, gender, class, the impact of slavery, lynching, colonialism, neocolonialism, and globalization on the arts, as well as issues of memory, identity, subjectivity, historical “truth,” race, and the African diaspora will be explored in relation to pan-African connections between African photographers, cross-cultural connections between African and African American photographers, and various national and international black arts’ movements. We will consider the production, distribution, consumption and archiving of these visual texts, as well as the materiality and mass replication of the photographic artifact, and examine various genres of visual texts, from the social documentary to portraiture to art photography. As we analyze the photography of Gordon Parks, Carrie Mae Weems, Lyle Ashton Harris, Seydou Keita, Zeweletu Mthethwa, Lalla Essaydi, and Zanele Muholi, among others, we will consider to what extent photographs comment upon or subvert racial identities and social hierarchies, what role the camera plays in protest movements, and whether one, as Audre Lorde asks, can ever dismantle the master’s house with the master’s tools. Reading Franz Fanon, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Okwui Enwezor, bell hooks, and Deborah Willis will provide a theoretical basis for our discussions.

Language and Literature of Environmentalism **Dr. Cheryl Wanko**

This seminar looks at how “nature,” sustainability, and environmental problems have been constructed in North American writing. Examining a range of types of texts from the Bible to

modern memoirs will allow us to consider questions related to ecocriticism, conduct research related to the intersections between language, literature, science, and culture, and create texts that address local and broader environmental questions. We will complete and reflect on a week-long “No Impact” experiment and ponder our own places in the global challenges that confront us.

Research statement:

Environmental sustainability has been a life-long interest of mine: working in natural foods stores, composting, gardening, and raising chickens. However, I have only recently turned to it as an area of professional attention by participating in relevant university committees, developing a research project from an environmentally-based WRT220 class, joining professional associations, and extensive reading. You can learn about my other research interests by checking out the faculty pages on the English Department’s website: <http://www.wcupa.edu/arts-humanities/English/facultyListing.aspx>