

HONR 207: HONORS SEMINAR IN DIVERSITY, PLURALISM, AND DIFFERENCE THE HOUSING CRISIS

Fall 2011 Dr. Beth McCoy, Department of English
Class: MF 2:30 – 3:45 Classroom: Welles 119
Office Hours: M 11:30-12:30 Office: Welles 232A
F 10:30-11:30

If I tell you something, you will stick to it and limit your own capacity to find out for yourself.--Shunryu Suzuki, Not Always So.

I'm becoming sympathetic to houses as they breathe in books and movies and my life...Meg Vasey, "Houses," Geneseo Class of 2007.

Course Summary:

This course will examine through multiple perspectives the housing crisis/bubble/mortgage crisis—in other words, that long-percolating disaster of which many became aware in Fall 2008. Students should be prepared for the fact that as part of their literary and cultural study of houses, home, and housing, the course will also engage whiteness and anti-blackness.

Student Learning Outcomes:

By semester's end, you will:

1. write multiple meditations on longstanding and contemporary conversations about art, authorship, appropriation, and aesthetics, issues that are crucial to African American literary and cultural studies, and, by definition, American and global cultural studies;
2. demonstrate an ability to write critically, thoughtfully, and with evidence (rather than writing simply by position-taking) about the above issues, using multiple sources;
3. have engaged first-hand the difficulties and rewards of attempting to build conversations about aesthetic and political issues, including talking about race as an "intellectual proposition" (Joyce Middleton's term). As Thomas Jefferson's "Query XIV" demonstrates beyond all doubt, when it comes to art, literature, "race," and politics in the U.S., all four terms have been entangled from the start.

Required Texts:

William Dean Howells, The Rise of Silas Lapham.

Toni Morrison, A Mercy.

Michael Lewis, The Big Short.

Allison Bechdel, Fun Home.

Additionally, we will be viewing films (Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House, House of Sand and Fog) and documentaries (Inside Job, Frontline episodes), as well as listening to This American Life radio programs..

Means of Assessment:

Response Papers (3 at 20% each)	60%
Discussion Forum on mycourses	20%
Class Participation	20%

Response papers: There are **three (3)** of these listed on the syllabus, **2 pages, typed, single-spaced. You will receive a prompt that presents you with a critical question/issue and some primary texts to use in considering the question/issue (of course, by the time you get most of the prompts, you'll have a lot of reading under your belt; this material is fair game for you if you consider it to be relevant).** I will grade each paper individually and then average the grades together at semester's end. These papers are informal and are designed to help you reflect on complex issues, raise good questions, and synthesize multiple theories and texts. They are *not* argument-driven, formally structured essays; indeed, I have found that folks who stick to something like the 5-paragraph essay, DBQ, or "critical lens" format (usually because it's familiar and safe) end up hamstringing themselves--how?

The best papers:

- Possess a purposeful focus, demonstrating the importance of narrowing down the scope of your reflections/analyses in order to have enough space to unpack your assumptions/what you are using to make a claim.
- Take risks.
- Provide concrete support/illustration/exemplification for your paper's claims, using a blend of direction quotation, paraphrase, specific description, **all of which are attributed clearly to their source** (e.g., "According to Tate," "Joyce suggests," "Neal (quoting Jones) establishes...")
- Feature purposeful, mindful synthesis of multiples sources and ideas.
- Teach your reader (**who cannot get inside your head**) what you are thinking/why it's important so that even when your reader doesn't agree with you, s/he can still say, "Ah, but I see what you're getting at here."
- Inquire beyond the obvious and raise questions about implications and complexity.
- Will meaningfully/purposefully/independently integrate observations/insights from other readings where relevant

Adequate or average papers:

- Will generally address the prompt and will attempt to synthesize multiple sources and ideas.

Inadequate papers:

- May be full of mechanical errors (though inadequate papers can also be mechanically perfect). They may simply summarize a text. They may avoid a major part of the prompt. They may seek to follow every step of the prompt but be unable to develop anything specifically.

Discussion forum on mycourses.geneseo.edu (20% of your final grade): New posts will be put up just about every week; you need to check in regularly.

I will grade the posts portfolio-style at semester's end. The grade will be based on consistency of posting (do you post regularly? do you just start posting at the end of April?), originality,

complexity, specificity, carefulness of writing (this INCLUDES SPELLING AND OTHER MECHANICAL STUFF), whether you write well-developed *paragraphs* or just a few sentences, and your efforts towards building to a conversation, which means listening and considering other's thoughts in addition to itching to contribute your own. I'll look to see if you've been weaving in reading/course concepts and building on that reading as the semester goes on. I'll also look to see if you've been weaving in your own conversations with your class mates in your own posts, as well as to see if you've been replying to others' posts. To give me concrete evidence of this, on the last day of class, you will give me printouts of what you think are your five BEST posts (you can paste them all sequentially onto the page to save paper).

Class participation: *I take this grade very seriously, but folks seem to have a hard time believing me when I write/say that.* Thus, the following criteria will determine your participation grade (*my thanks to Professor Rutkowski for the schema and much of the specific wording*). The criteria focus on what you *demonstrate* and do not presume to guess at what you *know*.

- A.** Demonstrates excellent preparation: has analyzed reading exceptionally well, relating it to other material (e.g., readings, lecture, course material, discussions, experiences, etc.). Offers analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of reading (e.g., puts together pieces of discussion and lecture to develop new approaches that take the class further).
Contributes significantly to ongoing discussion: keeps analysis focused, responds very thoughtfully to other students' comments, contributes to cooperative argument building, suggests alternative ways of approaching material and helps class analyze which approaches are appropriate, etc.
Demonstrates active involvement daily.
- B.** Demonstrates good preparation: knows reading well, has thought through implications of reading.
Offers interpretations and analysis (more than just the facts) to class. Contributes well to discussion in an ongoing way: responds to other students' points, thinks through own points, questions others constructively, offers and supports suggestions that may be counter to majority opinion.
Demonstrates consistent, ongoing involvement.
- C.** Demonstrates adequate preparation: knows basic reading facts, but does not show evidence of interpretation or analysis.
Does not offer to contribute to discussion but contributes to a moderate degree when called on.
Demonstrates sporadic involvement.
- D.** Present, not disruptive.
Tries to respond when called on but little response.
Any response is frequently a summary or appropriation of what instructor said in class.
Demonstrates infrequent involvement in discussion or tries to make up lost discussion ground by monologuing.
- E.** Absent frequently and thus unable to contribute.