Democratic Vistas: Dreams and Divisions in Modern American Thought  
(HONORS 200-010 and HONORS 200-011)

Sem 010: TR 11am-12.15pm HON 180  
Sem 011: TR 12.30-1.45pm HON 180  

Professor S. Ani Mukherji  
mukherjs@uwm.edu  
Honors 151, Honors College  
Office Hours: Tuesday, 10-11AM; Wednesday, 1-3PM

Course Description

If you wish to know a country, the American writer James Baldwin (pictured above) argued, you should not look to government officials, the wealthy, or comfortable members of society. Rather, you should go to the disadvantaged and unprotected for their testimony. This seminar will take Baldwin’s counsel seriously. We will turn to thinkers who felt dissatisfied and disserved by their government in order to understand the broad contours of American social thought in the past 150 years. In particular, we will attempt to understand how these thinkers perceived the promise (and failures) of American democracy during the long twentieth century, a period during which the United States ascended to global dominance at the same time that its citizens endured profound conflicts within their society. To fulfill this goal, we will read texts in terms of their historical contexts and their social, political, individual meanings. Our discussions will center on trying to understand what these authors perceived to be the major problems facing America. We will also enlarge our discussions by examining paintings, photography, music, and films.
Required Reading

- Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*
  ISBN: 978-0140436792
- Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Yellow Wallpaper, Herland, and Selected Writings*
  ISBN: 978-0143105855
- James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*
  ISBN: 978-0679744726
- Various online readings
  *Online reading should be printed out and brought to seminar.*

Required Viewing

- Stewart Bird, Rene Lichtman and Peter Gessner, *Finally Got the News*
- Warren Beatty, *Reds*

Course Assignments

I. **Active participation in class and online responses to other students’ reflections**
   [15% of the final grade]

Seminars are intended to be active sites of inquiry and sharing. Students are expected to complete ALL assigned readings, come to every class with ideas and questions about the reading, and participate in discussions. Completing the reading does not mean that your eyes passed over the words; rather, you should be able to state the major point the author intended to make, to evaluate how well the author accomplished this task, and to connect the new evidence and interpretations with previous readings.

**GRADING**

A – frequent, unprompted class participation that demonstrates an engagement with assigned texts and the ideas of fellow students. Regularly introduces new questions, ideas, and perspectives. In-class writing is always clear and thoughtful. Frequent comments on other student’s posts on the online discussion forum. No absences.

B – regular class participation that demonstrates an engagement with assigned texts and ideas of fellow students. In-class writing demonstrates reading of the assigned texts and an honest attempt to understand texts.

C – occasional class participation. In-class discussion and writing demonstrates a familiarity with the texts and lectures, but no depth of engagement.

F – more than three unexcused absences; little or no active participation in class.
II. Two short online reflections (300-500 words) on the assigned reading posted to the course website
   [15% of the final grade]

Over the course of the quarter, students must post TWO short reflections to the class discussion forum. These posts should be treated as formal writing assignments.

Each post should have a clear argument that synthesizes ALL of the assigned readings for the week or answer the posted question for the week. The post SHOULD NOT just summarize the reading. Rather, you should make your own argument about the topic for the week BASED on the arguments and evidence in the assigned reading and classroom discussions.

At the conclusion of each post, you should pose TWO discussion questions for the class to consider. A good discussion question should spark a conversation or debate, bringing up the big issues from the readings.

**THESE MUST BE POSTED BEFORE 6PM ON WEDNESDAY.**

You are free to choose which two weeks you would like to post your reflections. You are encouraged, however, to complete the reflections early in the semester, both to get feedback on your writing and to clear your schedule for later in the semester when your energies should be dedicated to the final essay.

III. Two short formal papers (3-4 pages, 800-1000 words); students will be able to revise these papers for a higher grade
   [40% of the final grade]

At the conclusion of the first two units of this seminar, you will be given a set of questions about the major themes dealt with in each unit. Using the insights gained from the course readings and classroom discussions, you will be asked to answer one of these questions. You will have at least 72 hours to produce this work.

Students will be encouraged to revise these papers in order to clarify their ideas and arguments; improve their prose; and clean up any remaining grammatical or typographical errors. If students choose to revise their paper, the final grade for the paper will be calculated as follows: (First Revision * 33%, + Second Revision * 67%)
IV. One longer formal paper (5-7 pages, ~1500 words)
[30% of the final grade]

For the final essay, you are asked to theorize some aspect or aspects of modern American social thought. “Theory,” as I mean it here, refers to the practice of making wider claims about (1) the characteristics of a set of texts, (2) the nature of an idea or ideas, and/or (3) the qualities of certain practices.

Your essay should consider at least two of the writers or thinkers from this course (e.g. Whitman, Riis, Gilman, Du Bois, Miller, Ginsburg, et al). All topics must be approved by the instructor, either in class or during office hours.

EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR FORMAL WRITING

Content: All written work should insightfully and innovatively address its subject matter. Argumentative essays should state a clear, substantive, contestable, and precise claim early and support this claim with appropriate evidence.

Clarity: Written work should present information in a clear, logical fashion. In particular, paragraphs should typically begin with precise topic sentences, followed by clear, well-organized sentences that support the topic sentence. The writer should use transitional words and phrases effectively to guide the reader through the information.

Readability: Written work should engage the reader with lively, concise writing and should generally lack typographical errors, as well as lapses in tone, register, punctuation, spelling, word choice, and grammar. Written work should effectively incorporate source material with proper use of attribution, paraphrases, and quotations. Longer essays should begin with an engaging introduction and include a satisfying conclusion. Essays also should have an attractive, professional appearance.
COURSE SCHEDULE

**Week One: An Introduction to the Study of Ideas**

3 September

Welcome and Introductions

5 September

- James T. Kloppenberg, “Thinking Historically”
- OPTIONAL: Dominick La Capra, “Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts”

**UNIT ONE: The Gilded Age and Progressive Era, Democracy and Knowledge**

**Week Two: Walt Whitman – American Visionary in an American Renaissance**

10 September

- Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 25-52

Screening: *Walt Whitman* (excerpt)

12 September

- Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas*, 31-51
- OPTIONAL: *Democratic Vistas*, entire.
- OPTIONAL: George Kateb, “Walt Whitman and the Culture of Democracy”

**Week Three: Theorizing the Practice of American Reformer Jacob Riis**

17 September

- Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*, 3-40, 46-72
- OPTIONAL: Reginald Twigg, “The Performative Dimension of Surveillance”

19 September

Week Four: W.E.B. Du Bois, Double-Consciousness, and the Veil

24 September

➢ W.E.B. Du Bois, “Forethought” and “Of Our Spiritual Strivings”

Screening: A Biography in Four Voices(excerpt)

26 September

➢ OPTIONAL: Robert Gooding-Williams, “Intimations of Immortality”

Week Five+: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Feminist Ideas, Nightmares, and Utopias

1 October

➢ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wall-Paper”
➢ Carol Smith-Rosenberg, “The Hysterical Woman”


3 October

➢ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Herland, 1-84

8 October

➢ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Herland, 85-143

Week Six: Democratic Knowledge and Imagination – Unit One Wrap-Up

10 October

Paper #1 Workshops
UNIT TWO: Modern Americans and American Modernism

Week Seven: The Modernist Journal

15 October: Writing *The Masses*

- Irving Howe (ed.), *Echoes of Revolt*, selections from *The Masses*
- Screening: *Reds* (1983)

17 October: More *Masses*

- Screening: *Reds* (1983)
- OPTIONAL: John Reed, *Ten Days that Shook the World*

Week Eight: Modern Bohemians and Radicals

22 October

Discussion of *Reds* and *The Masses*

24 October

- Mike Gold, “Love on a Garbage Heap,” “Birth,” and “Go Left, Young Writers”

Week Nine: The New Negro as Modern American

29 October

- Claude McKay, *The Passion of Claude McKay*, 120-125
- Claude McKay, *A Long Way From Home*, 95-115
- Countee Cullen, “Heritage”

- OPTIONAL: Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 52-83

31 October

- Robert A. Hill, “Marcus Garvey Dada”

Aaron Douglas, Slideshow of Selected Work
Week Ten: UNIT TWO Wrap-Up

5 November

- Daniel Singal, “Toward a Definition of American Modernism”

7 November

Paper #2 Workshops
UNIT THREE: Dominance, Democracy, and Fracture

Week Eleven: Unease and Power: Looking Backwards and Forwards

12 November

➢ Henry Miller, “Murder the Murderer”
➢ OPTIONAL: Anatole Broyard, Kafka was the Rage

Screening: New York in the 1950s (excerpt)

14 November

➢ David McReynolds, We Have Been Invaded by the 21st Century, 87-102
➢ Paul Goodman, Growing Up Absurd, ix-xvi, 3-16

Week Twelve: Rejecting the Nightmare

19 November

➢ Allen Ginsburg, “America” and “Howl”

21 November

➢ Students for a Democratic Society, “Port Huron Statement”

Screening: Berkeley in the Sixties (excerpt)

Week Thirteen: A Second Reconstruction

26 November

➢ James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time, entire

Week Fourteen: A Second Reconstruction Continued

3 December

➢ Marvin Surkin and Dan Georgakas, Detroit, I Do Mind Dying, 23-41, 107-130

Screening: Finally Got the News

5 December

➢ Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas, 93-167
Week Fifteen: Attacking the Problem that Had No Name

10 December

- Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 11-61; 326-364

12 December

- Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality” and “Blood, Bread, and Poetry”

FINAL PAPER DUE EMAILED TO ME by NOON, 18 DECEMBER 2013