

ENGL 6923: Working-Class Literature

Fall 2005

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Course Goals:

This course has two purposes: to help you develop an understanding of central debates about and themes in American working-class literature and to help you develop your skills as a researcher and teacher of literature in general. To achieve these goals, you will read a number of texts, both literary and critical; discuss the ideas in the texts with your colleagues and your instructor; and pursue an individual project exploring the work and developing a thorough website about one working-class writer.

Texts:

Dorothy Allison, *Bastard Out of Carolina*

Jimmy Santiago Baca, *A Place to Stand*

Nicholas Coles & Peter Oresick, *Working Classics*

Pietro Di Donato, *Christ in Concrete*

Paul Lauter and Ann Fitzgerald, eds., *Literature, Class, and Culture: An Anthology*

Ann Petry, *The Street*

You will need to have ready access to the two anthologies, but we will use relatively little material from these books. I recommend them highly as resources for your personal library. If money is tight, you might make an arrangement with a colleague to share the two books. I would have copied materials from these books for you, except I want you to choose most of the reading material from them.

Additional materials will include readings available in electronic format, handouts, and a book of poetry by a working-class writer. You'll find some readings on the Working-Class Literature Resource [site](#).

Assignments & Grading:

You will complete three kinds of assignments for this course:

1) Preparation work – 20 points

Before class, a little more than 20 times during the semester, you'll submit a paragraph or two in response to a question that I will announce in the previous class session. These short, informal preparation notes are due by 3 pm on class days (send them by e-mail or deliver them to my box in the English Department). This writing serves two purposes: it helps ensure that you come to class prepared and it helps me prepare the class session. These assignments are not graded, but they are required. You receive a point for each one, but only if you turn it in on time and if it

demonstrates that you have completed the reading assignment. I will read these, but I will not write comments on them. I may quote from or paraphrase your comments in class; let me know if you prefer not to be quoted, or if you prefer to be quoted anonymously.

2) Essays applying course concepts – 60 points

Two of these essays will focus on one working-class writer, of your choosing, and they will help you prepare for the website assignment. The third essay will focus on working-class poetry.

1. How is your writer working class? – 20 points
2. How does your writer's work reflect common themes in working-class literature? – 20 points
3. Review of a book of poetry – 20 points

In grading these essays, I will focus on evidence that you can use ideas and critical methods from class appropriately. To earn maximum points, your papers must also demonstrate a clear and readable academic style, appropriate editing, and effective use of evidence.

3) Website discussing one working-class writer – 20 points

At the end of the semester, you'll create a resource website that includes an introduction to the writer you've been studying, discussion of how his/her work fits into the landscape of American working-class literature, links to on-line texts and resources, and an annotated bibliography listing up to 5 critical articles or books about this writer.

In grading the websites, I'll look for clear, accurate, thoughtful, and useful presentation of information about your writer. As always, the quality of your writing and accuracy of your editing and documentation will count. The best of these websites will be published as part of the CWCS online resource collection on Working-Class Literature. I will provide a template for these sites (which you must follow in order to have your site considered for publication) and plenty of assistance to those who do not have experience making websites.

Final grades will be calculated on a standard grading scale:

- 90-100 = A
- 80-89 = B
- 70-79 = C
- 60-69 = D
- 50 or below = F

Course Policies:

Plagiarism involves two illegal practices: submitting papers that were written by someone else as if they were your own and quoting or paraphrasing someone else's work without citation. This includes cutting and pasting anything from a webpage or paraphrasing information from a source. In both cases, you must provide a citation, and if you're using direct quotation (like a paragraph from someone else's website) you must put their words in quotation marks. If you misrepresent someone else's work as your own, you will fail the course. If you quote or paraphrase without attribution, you will rewrite the paper in question. If you quote or paraphrase without attribution a second time, you will fail the course. If you include plagiarized material in your website, you will fail the course.

You may take an incomplete in this course if something beyond your control prevents you from finishing all of the assignments, but only if you have completed enough of the course, and done well enough, that I am persuaded that you are well-prepared to finish the course independently. If you take an incomplete, you have up to a year (we will negotiate this individually) to complete the course requirements. If you do not complete them, the incomplete grade will change to an F.

The standards of academic writing include correct spelling and grammar, editing for effective prose, clear introductions to information from sources, appropriate use of MLA-style documentation, and a serious and relatively formal tone. I expect your writing to conform to these conventions. In addition, the standards of academic writing require that your papers be typed. Please do not use extra-wide margins or any font bigger than 12 point or smaller than 10 point.

Course Schedule

Date	In class	Readings and Other Assignments
August 29	Introductions & syllabus	n/a
August 31	What is class?	
September 7	The problem of definition	
September 12	Defining WC literature	As assigned, read one of the following: "Life in the Iron Mills" (in Lauter) <i>The Street</i> <i>Christ in Concrete</i>
September 14	Comparing notes between the books	Read the other two assigned texts
September 19	Understanding the critical debate	Read <i>one</i> of these articles: Zandy (on CD) Lauter (on CD) Christopher & Whitson (on website) Rosenbaum (on website)
September 21	Understanding the	Read the other critical articles

	critical debate	
September 26	The landscape of WC literature	
September 28	The landscape of WC literature	Essay #1 due
October 3	Small group work: mapping themes	Read Allison
October 5	Small group work:selecting readings	Choose one piece from the Lauter and Fitzgerald anthology that represents your group's chosen theme
October 10	Groups present themes	
October 12	Groups prepare theme discussions	
October 17	Theme discussion 1	Read assigned short texts from Lauter and Fitzgerald
October 19	Theme discussion 2	Read assigned short texts from Lauter and Fitzgerald
October 24	Theme discussion 3	Read assigned short texts
October 26	Theme discussion 4	Read assigned short texts
October 31	Lab day – evaluating existing websites	Essay #2 due
November 2	Thinking about genre	Read Baca
November 7	More on genre	Read assigned poems from <i>Working Classics</i>
November 9	Groups prepare poetry discussions	Select a poem that you'd like your group to present
November 14	Poetry discussions	Read assigned poems in <i>Working Classics</i>
November 16	Poetry discussions	Read assigned poems in <i>Working Classics</i>
November 21	What qualities define "working-class poetry"?	Read Daniels essay (on CD)
November 23	Individual consultations on websites	
November 28	Poetry presentations	
November 30	Poetry presentations	Essay #3 due
December 5	Website workshop	Bring an outline of your website
December 7	Website workshop	
December 12	Website presentations	Completed websites due