

Tulane University
Fall 2014
English 403-01
T. R. Johnson

Literary New Orleans

"There is on the globe one single spot, the possessor of which is our natural and habitual enemy. It is New Orleans."
-- President Thomas Jefferson, April 18th, 1802.

"There is no way to imagine America without New Orleans"
-- President George W. Bush, September 17th, 2005

"To know yourself you first gotta know where y'at"
-- Anonymous

MWF / 11:00-11:50 / Tilton #305

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Course Description

Over the span of the semester, we will explore the extraordinary ways New Orleans has figured in the literary imagination of the United States through novels, short stories, memoirs, histories, plays, scholarly research, film, literary journalism, and song. Our central goal will be to enable students to derive from this survey of the literature a cultural geography of the city, both broadly hemispherical and pointedly local. The course will be divided into three, interrelated units: we'll begin by considering, through work by Larry Powell and Ned Sublette, the colonial era, the rise of the creole at the edges of empire, and, in particular, the impact of the Haitian Revolution on the city; we'll also take up Walter Johnson's work on the slave market and how human trafficking here enabled New Orleans to become a kind of staging area in the formation of subjectivities, black, white, and mixed, as invoked in William Faulkner's masterpiece *Absalom, Absalom*. Next, we'll consider how these tensions inform broader dynamics between New Orleans and the rest of the United States in Lafcadio Hearn. We'll then conclude this unit by considering in these terms Kate Chopin's 1899 masterpiece, *The Awakening*, and Valerie Martin's prize-winning novel of 19th-century New Orleans a century later as a sort of counter-narrative to both Chopin and Faulkner, *Property*. In the next unit of the course, we'll consider the classic twentieth-century literature associated with the city, and in particular, the way each of them takes up the themes of sexuality and spirituality, of trauma and transcendence, of geography and ethics, all bundled into the binary of body and soul. Specifically, we'll read Tennessee Williams, Walker Percy, Michael Ondaatje, Irna Brodber, and the memoirs of two celebrated musicians, Sidney Bechet and Louis Armstrong to consider the tensions, in New Orleans, around the idea of the human, and the particular ways that traces of the preceding century's racial politics shape these dramatic conflicts. In the third and final unit of the course, we'll continue this study of traditional and emerging classics with a particular focus on who has the power to preserve – and erase – what dimensions of the past and how they cultivate this power, a discussion that will lead us into the political and, ultimately, the conspiratorial and even the criminal. In this last unit, called "Politricks," we will make our way through Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*, Robert Stone's *A Hall of Mirrors* and watch Oliver Stone's *JFK* – ultimately to consider what "knowledge" can mean in a city defined by such endlessly complex power struggles.

General Outcomes and Measures

As with all courses in the English Department, students in this course will master the knowledge of the discipline by analyzing texts closely, by acquiring the theoretical and critical vocabulary to join in the current scholarly discussion of texts, and by situating the textual object in a larger context or discursive frame. Indicators of this mastery include performance in written assignments, oral presentations, on-line posts, and exams.

Service-Learning Option

A maximum of ten students may register for service-learning credit for this course. These students will devote 20 hours over the course of the semester to interviewing and writing profiles of people who are engaged with The New Orleans Healing Center on St. Claude Avenue in downtown New Orleans. Much of this work will be done at the Anba Dlo Festival, which takes place on October 18th, from noon to midnight. These profiles will be published in a column in the newsletter and website for the New Orleans Healing Center. To help promote the festival, students will post short writings on the event's Facebook page, and after the event, similarly, they will post written coverage of the event in the same place. Our community partner will be Sallie Anne Glassman, a celebrated voodoo priestess and the co-founder and co-chairman of the Board of Directors of The New Orleans Healing Center.

For more information about the logistical aspect of the course's service-learning component (how to keep track of your service-hours, how to schedule transportation, etc), you may click here: <http://tulane.edu/cps/students/service-learning-courses.cfm>

Specific Goals

Students who have successfully completed this course will gain:

- a detailed understanding of the way remote historical forces (the rise of a creole society in the 18th century, the rise of the slave-market in the 19th century) shape the major literary artifacts associated with New Orleans; how these forces foster, on one hand, a relatively high degree of cosmopolitanism and, on the other, a system of acute trauma, both of which, in turn, foster a culture of performative self-fashioning, whether for the accumulation of great wealth or for psychological survival, and which is crystallized in the city's literary texts.

Service-Learning students, in particular, will see moreover how these forces continue to define the identities of New Orleanians through the stories they tell about their lives in the neighborhoods along St. Claude Avenue.

- a detailed understanding of the way the geographical location of the city shapes its literary culture, the presence of swamps and the attendant, intricate waterways in particular creating a haven, historically, for smugglers and maroons, thereby mitigating state-power and nurturing a greater degree of freedom relative to neighboring regions; and also the ways its vulnerability to floods and hurricanes further exacerbate the instability of state-power; the way both of these together (swamps, storms) constitute an environment that challenges state power, and enables a different – more purely artistic and literary – tradition of anchoring and articulating the city's various identities.

Service-Learning students, in particular, will develop a yet more fine-grained grasp of these issues by recording the stories of living witnesses to this instability and, in turn, by helping to stabilize the New Orleans Healing Center as a meeting ground for a diverse range of New Orleanians.

- a coherent introduction to the canonical texts that define the literary legacy of New Orleans, in particular as a body of work aimed at addressing and recovering from acute trauma.

Service-learning students, in particular, will develop a yet greater grasp of these texts by tracing the ways their themes and patterns recur in the living oral traditions and local lore of the St. Claude corridor.

- a detailed understand of the dynamics of music and memory as these inform the autobiographical writing of some of the city's legendary musicians and function as a complex mechanism for "healing" the wounds of the slave trade.

Service-Learning students, in particular, will come to trace these patterns in the narratives of those they interview at The Healing Center.

- A detailed understanding of how the long, complex history of electoral politics in and around the city has engendered a series of ambitious literary works by way of chronicling the characters and intrigue that have emerged at this global crossroads.

Service-Learning students, in particular, will consider these works in the context of their experiences at The Healing Center to see the way the stories they collect their further contextualize and illuminate the major literature.

Assignments and Grades:

You will write five short papers (no more than two pages each, submitted as posts on the Discussion Board), two longer papers (five-to-seven pages each) on the units of your choice; take one exam (again, on the unit of your choice) and produce an annotated bibliography. In other words, in addition to the short papers that you post, you will, for each of the three units of the course, either write a longer paper or take an exam, but you are free to choose which units you complete in which way, as long as you write, over the course of the semester, two papers and take one exam.

The following rules apply:

- The short papers *can be* recycled, expanded, even synthesized to help with the drafting of the longer papers; however, they *cannot be* submitted after the date the relevant material was discussed, *nor* can they be revised and resubmitted for more

credit, *nor* can you submit more than one short paper per week. These short papers must be posted to the Discussion Board before 9:30am on the day that the relevant material will be discussed in class.

- A longer paper may be revised to raise the grade by one-letter, but only once and only with the permission of the professor, and the revised version must be submitted within one week of the original paper's return to the student. Only one of the longer papers can be revised this way, not both.
- The annotated bibliography must be submitted at least one week before the second major paper, and that paper must include at least four sources from the bibliography (this rule does not apply to service-learning students, who will not create a bibliography)

All papers should be submitted as hard copy only during class, except for the final paper, which may be submitted via email anytime between the last day of class and Tuesday, Dec 9th.

Grades will work thus:

Five short papers / DB posts at 2 points each	= 10 points
Two major papers at 20 points each	= 40 points
One exam at 20 points	= 20 points
Three oral presentations at 5 points each	= 15 points*
Annotated Bibliography at 15 points	= 15 points*

*(service-learning students will not deliver oral presentations or create an annotated bibliography – instead, they will write three short papers that will be published through the Healing Center's website and/or on the FB page for Anba Dlo: one will be part of the promotional campaign leading up the event; one will be reportage of the event after it has been held; and one will be a profile of someone interviewed at the event. Each of these will be worth five points. And finally the students will produce a longer reflection essay at the end of the semester of about 8 pages and that will be worth 15 points).

The *major papers* will be graded according to a four-part rubric (see appendix). Students can choose their own topics from a list provided by professor, or, with instructor's approval, pursue a topic of their own devising.

The *short discussion board posts* will be graded according to a simple, four-point checklist (see appendix). You can post in as many weeks as you like until you've accumulated the maximum ten points that are possible. Your purpose in them is to identify key aspects of the reading for that day and link them to wider themes of the course.

The *oral presentations* will be of three kinds. You must do one that initiates discussion of the reading assignment for that day, and another that functions as a

response to someone else's initiation of the discussion for that day. And you must also do one that functions as a secondary response to both the initiator and the first response. When you initiate discussion, your remarks should have four elements in this order: 1) a very brief synopsis of the content of that day's reading assignment and the professor's short lecture; 2) a comment about some connection between two distinct parts of that day's reading assignment; 3) a comment about how that day's reading assignment connects with some other reading assignment from earlier in the semester; 4) two open-ended questions to start the class's wide-ranging, collective reflection about what's most important in today's reading. When you're in the role of responder, you need not prepare any particular comments in advance of class, though you're free to email or talk with the first presenter that day in advance to draw up some ideas; your only responsibility is to add to or complicate the first speaker's synopsis and connections, and to start an answer to each of the two questions. Finally, the third student that day will respond to the first two, drawing out further connections or implications. Despite the structured nature of these presentations, they can be relatively informal – in other words, there will be no need to stand up in front of the class with notes; they can be offered in a conversational style from one's desk. Their purpose is to start a conversation.

The *exam* will include a few short essay responses (paragraph in length) and several objective identifications, all culled from a review sheet distributed at least one class-meeting prior to exam.

The *annotated bibliographies* must include five sources focused on a well-defined topic. Each source should be summarized in a single-spaced paragraph; the introduction should be also be a single-spaced paragraph that describes the precise focus of the bibliography and its importance. All sources must be cited in MLA bibliographical form. Sample annotated bibliographies will be made available.

Service-learning students, again, won't create annotated bibliographies or do oral presentations. They will instead create profiles of people in the community around The New Orleans Healing Center for publication in the center's newsletter and for the FaceBook page of the Healing Center's Anba Dlo festival. This work will be structured as follows:

- short paper to help promote Anba Dlo (5pts) (Instructions forthcoming);
- two short reflections immediately after Anba Dlo on a) how the event as a whole links to course readings, and vice versa (5 pts); and b) on the particular points of connection between one's particular interview subjects and the readings.
- one long reflection on the service-project as a whole (8 pages – worth 15 pts).

At the end of the semester, I will tabulate your final grade as simply the total number of points you've accumulated.

Required Texts:

1. *Inventing New Orleans: Writings of Lafcadio Hearn*. Ed by Frederick Starr. University Press of Mississippi, 2001.
2. *Absalom, Absalom!* By William Faulkner. Vintage International (313pp)
3. *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* by Walter Johnson. Harvard University Press, 1999.
4. *The Moviegoer* by Walker Percy. Vintage International. 1960/1998. (242pp)
5. *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin. Createspace, 1899/2008
6. *All the King's Men* by Robert Penn Warren. Harvest books, 1996. (661pp)
7. *Property* by Valerie Martin.
8. *A Hall of Mirrors* by Robert Stone. Mariner Books, 1997.
9. *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans*. by Louis Armstrong. Da Capo Press, 1954.
10. *The Accidental City: Improvising New Orleans*, by Lawrence Powell, Harvard UP 2012.
11. *Coming Through Slaughter* by Michael Ondaatje, 1976
12. *Louisiana* by Irna Brodber

Available as electronic files on the web-page for this course:

1. [Excerpt from] *The World that Made New Orleans* by Ned Sublette
2. *Suddenly Last Summer* by Tennessee Williams
3. *Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams
4. [Excerpt from] *Treat it Gentle* by Sidney Bechet

Films available on reserve in the Media Library, 4th Floor of Howard Tilton (all of these are optional, though strongly recommended, except JFK, which is required):

1. *Down By Law* DVD 2007-5398
2. *JFK* DVD 2008-0193
3. *Tootie's Last Suit* DVD 2008-0284
4. *Storyville: The Naked Dance* DVD 2009-0007

(The Media Library is open Mon-Thurs, from 8:30am to 10:00pm; Friday from 8:30-5:00; Saturday from 10:00am to 5:00pm; Sunday 2:00pm to 10:00pm)

Reading and Writing Schedule

(Note: In order to develop a meaningful grasp of the literature of New Orleans in one semester, we will have to move quickly through a great deal of material. Make sure, therefore, that the nature of your other commitments this semester are such that you'll be able to keep up with what follows. Typically, between a Monday and Wednesday, you'll have about a hundred pages to read, and the same between a Wednesday and a Friday. Over the weekends, you'll have a little less than twice that

amount. When classes are cancelled for holidays or my own work-related travel, the rhythm of the sequence of reading assignments will continue unchanged.)

UNIT ONE

INVENTING NEW ORLEANS: THE RISE OF THE CREOLE AT THE EDGES OF EMPIRE, THE RISE OF THE SLAVE- MARKET IN THE OLD SOUTHWEST

New Orleans was a major city before it became a major *American* city, and the process of its Americanization was slow and fraught with controversy and, some might claim, never entirely complete. As you move through this first unit of the course's readings, pay special attention, therefore, not only to how New Orleans was "invented" as a myth and a symbol and as a set of themes for today's tourist industry (piracy, voodoo, Creole cooking, cemeteries, ghosts, hunting and fishing, etc), but, most importantly, to the way these texts show New Orleans negotiating the stakes of becoming an American city in a complex set of dynamics with a diverse array of other places, namely Africa, Spain, France, Haiti (Saint-Domingue), Cuba, Virginia, and Kentucky. How do the different parts of the city understand the city's relationship to the U. S. and to other key forces in the larger Atlantic and Caribbean context? Beyond simply the moment of sale to the U. S., how would you use these readings to construct a chronology of the city's relationship to American culture through the 18th and 19th centuries? Most importantly, how does the sale of *actual human beings here* determine that relationship? In addition to the slave-trade, think specifically about the notion of the Creole, the patterns of self-fashioning that unfolded in and through this capital of a certain culture (or meeting-place of cultures); think of how the issues of geography and geology give this city a unique and complex situation; think of common features of the literary texts, the kinds of character-types and tensions that they might share, the ways they might echo each other.

Week 1

M 8/25 Introduction to the course – structure, policies, themes.

W 8/27 Discussion of Chapters 1 and 2 in Powell's *The Accidental City*.

F 8/29 Discussion of Chapters 3 and 4 on Powell.

Week 2

M 9/1 Labor Day Holiday – class cancelled

W 9/3 Discussion of Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8 in Powell.

F 9/5 Discussion of Chapters 9 and 10 in Powell.

Week 3

M 9/8 Discussion of Chapter 11 and Epilogue in Powell and Chapter 1 and 2 in *Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom*.

W 9/10 Discussion of Chapter 3 and 4 in Faulkner.

F 9/11 Discussion of Chapter 5 in Faulkner.

Week 4

M 9/15 Discussion of Chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9 in Faulkner.

W 9/17 Discussion of Introduction and Chapters 1, 2, 3 in Walter Johnson's *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*.

F 9/19 Discussion of Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and Epilogue in Walter Johnson.

Week 5

M 9/22 Discussion of Introduction, Section I and Section III in Lafadio Hearn's *Selected Writings*.

W 9/24 Discussion of Chapters 1-25 in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*.

F 9/26 Discussion of Chapters 26-39 in Chopin, plus Part I of Valerie Martin's *Property*

Week 6

M 9/29 Discussion of Part II and III in Valerie Martin.

W 10/1 Rough draft workshop or exam.

F 10/3 Final drafts of paper due. Discussion of drafts. Introduction to Unit II of course.

UNIT TWO:

BODY AND SOUL,
SEXUALITY AND SPIRITUALITY,
TRAUMA AND TRANSCENDENCE,

All of the works in this unit orbit around the theme of sexuality and also of spirituality, and part of our task as we make our way through these works, will be to sort out the precise dynamics between the two modes of experience, sharing as they do in notions of trauma and of transcendence, and still more broadly, the tensions between the monstrous and the human. This work will allow us to begin to map the different parts of the city according to these various tensions, just as in the preceding unit we sorted out the relationship of New Orleans to other countries and continents, to the surrounding region, even the plantations on the outskirts of the city. Here, in other words, we will consider the internal geography of the city, rather than its external dynamics with other places that had roles in its formation. What, for example, is The Garden District or “downtown” in Tennessee Williams, and what is Gentilly or the lakefront in Percy, and what is Storyville in Ondaatje or Congo Square in Bechet, and so on? How do such configurations carry traces of the global politics of the preceding unit?

Week 7

M 10/6 Discussion of Tennessee Williams *A Streetcar Named Desire*

W 10/8 Discussion of Tennessee Williams's *Suddenly Last Summer*

F 10/10 Fall Break – Class Cancelled.

Week 8

M 10/13 Discussion of Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer*

W 10/15 Discussion of Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter*.

F 10/17 Discussion of excerpt from Sidney Bechet's *Treat it Gentle* (on our BBoard page).

Week 9

M 10/20 Discussion of Louis Armstrong's *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans*.

W 10/22 Discussion of pp1-54 in Irna Brodber's *Louisiana*

F 10/24 Discussion of pp54-94 in Brodber.

Week 10

M 10/27 Discussion of pp94-166 in Brodber, plus film *Down by Law*

W 10/29 Discussion of film *Tootie's Last Suit*.

F 10/31 Rough draft workshop or exam.

Unit Three:

"POLITRICKS"

Week 11

M 11/3 Final drafts due. Discussion of Chapter 1-2 in Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*.

W 11/5 Discussion of Chapter 3 in Warren.

F 11/7 Discussion of Chapter 4 in Warren.

Week 12

M 11/10 Discussion of Chapter 5 and 6 in Warren.

W 11/12 Discussion of Chapter 7 in Warren.

F 11/14 Discussion of Chapter 8 in Warren.

Week 13

M 11/17 Discussion of Chapter 9 in Warren.

W 11/19 Discussion of Chapter 10 in Warren.

F 11/21 Discussion of Book I of Robert Stone's *A Hall of Mirrors*.

Week 14

M 11/24 Discussion of Book II of Robert Stone.

W 11/26 Thanksgiving Holiday – class cancelled

F 11/28 Thanksgiving Holiday – class cancelled

Week 15

M 12/1 Discussion of Book III of Robert Stone.

W 12/3 Discussion of *JFK* (film on reserve in library).

F 12/5 rough draft workshop or exam.

Appendix

Major Papers

Presentation -- 5 points

- Stapled
- Paginated
- Title
- Absence of distracting errors of sloppy grammar, spelling, typing
- Works Cited Section in Correct MLA Format.

Quotations from Texts --- 5 Points

- Well-chosen
- Original, rather than taken from class
- Relevant to argument
- Well-contextualized
- Properly formatted

Complexity of Content – 5 points

- Ideas situated with full reference to themes of unit
- Ideas articulated in explicit tension with diverging perspectives
- Ideas articulated in meaningful detail
- Ideas add to rather than merely reiterate remarks made in class
- Ideas raise interesting questions for further reflection.

Coherence of Arrangement – 5 points

- Introduction states focus of paper and the value/importance of its insight.
- Conclusion re-states introduction with new, refreshing depth or twist.
- Topics of paragraphs constitute, over the course of the paper, a consistent string
- Sentences begin with content referenced in sentences immediately prior and end with material that leads to next sentence.
- Most important points emphasized as distinct from secondary material.

2 points (when grade for post is not a whole number, I round up)

Clarity / Correctness .5

Coherence .5

Complexity .5

Original / Connection to Other Posts .5

