New Orleans in Literature/Film: From the Old St. Louis Hotel to Hurricane Katrina

Course Number: FYSEM-UA 706
Instructor: Greg Weiss.
Email: gw50@nyu.edu. I'll always respond to emails within 24 hours—usually much sooner but guaranteed by then.
Office Location: Dibner 114, Tandon School of Engineering.
Office hours: By appointment—just ask me after class or via email. We'll set up a time and place to meet.
Class meetings: Thursdays from 3:30-6 PM.

Course Description

“There are a lot of places I like,” writes 2016 Nobel Laureate Bob Dylan, “but I like New Orleans better. There's a thousand different angles at any moment.” Due to its status as a mercantile port, New Orleans was/is where much of what we now think of as “American” originally entered America, either literally or metaphorically. These different angles include the direct and indirect results of slavery, colonialism, immigration, war, corruption, and natural disaster. Over the course of the semester we will read writers such as Tennessee Williams, John Kennedy Toole, and Anne Rice, as well as viewing films such as A Streetcar Named Desire, Beasts of the Southern Wild, and When the Levees Broke as a means of considering the relationships between slavery, colonialism, etc. and words that more often come to mind when one considers New Orleans—jazz, Bourbon Street, “The Big Easy.” How does thinking about New Orleans help us think differently about America in general, as well as even larger concepts such as time, memory, history, and place?

Required Texts
Rebecca Solnit, Unfathomable City
Kate Chopin, The Awakening
Tennessee Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire
John Kennedy Toole, A Confederacy of Dunces
Anne Rice, Interview with the Vampire

A couple notes on the reading:
1. This course is reading-intensive, and you should expect to read approximately 60-100 pages per week. If you haven’t done the reading (or watched the film if we’re watching a film that week), the class session that is structured around that reading will be a total waste of time for you. Your completing the reading is essential for you to (a) enjoy the course and (b) do well in the course.
2. You must bring any reading materials that we’re discussing to class. You will not be able to participate meaningfully in class discussion if you don’t have the reading material with you.
Graded Writing Assignments

- Discussion Lead Paper (5-6 pages): A paper that asks an intellectual question about at least one of the readings assigned for a particular week, and offers insightful reflection in response to that question. Due to our NYU Classes site by 11:55 PM on the Wednesday before the relevant class.
- Midterm Paper (4-5 pages): A paper that asks an intellectual question about at least one of the readings and offers insightful reflection in response to that question. Due to our NYU Classes site by 11:55 PM on Friday, February 21.
- Final Project (8-10 pages): This paper may be either an academic essay or a creative project. If you choose to pursue a creative project, you will still need to hand in a written component—i.e., script, reflection. All final projects will include a significant element of research. Due to our NYU Classes site by 11:55 PM on Sunday, May 10.

Your essays should be formatted according to MLA guidelines. Those guidelines can be found at https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/.

Grading

- Discussion Lead Paper: 20% of your grade for the course.
- Participation: 10% of your grade for the course.
- Midterm Paper: 30% of your grade for the course.
- Final Project: 40% of your grade for the course.

A note on participation: While I encourage all of you to contribute vocally to class discussions, speaking in class is only one form that participation may take. Participation involves, at a minimum, (a) showing up to class, (b) doing the assigned reading and writing assignments completely and as well as you can, and (c) contributing to your classmates’ intellectual experiences.

Please note that religious observance, documented illness, and family emergency are grounds for an absence to be excused.

Computers and Phones

You're free (and encouraged) to bring your computers to class for taking notes or any other class-related activity.

The Writing Center

The Writing Center is a place where any NYU student can get help with any piece of writing except for exams. Students work one-on-one with writing faculty, and are encouraged to make an appointment at any stage in their writing processes (i.e., you can go in if you’re having trouble thinking of an idea to write your paper about, or when you’re totally done with your final draft and just want for somebody to look it over one last time before you hand it in). To learn more about the Writing Center, and to make an appointment, go to http://cas.nyu.edu/ewp/writing-resources/writing-center.html.
Academic Integrity

Plagiarism (presenting others' work without adequate acknowledgement of its source, as though it were one’s own) and cheating (deceiving a faculty member or other individual who assesses student performance into believing that one’s mastery of a subject or discipline is greater than it is) are not permitted. We’ll go over this in more detail during the first week of class, but please ask me at any point in the semester if you’re unsure if something that you would like to do is allowable under NYU’s Academic Integrity Policy. That policy can be found at http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html.

Disability Resources

The Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities provides comprehensive services and programs for undergraduate and graduate students with hearing and visual impairments, mobility impairments, learning disabilities and attention deficit disorders, chronic illnesses, and psychological impairments. The Moses Center functions to determine qualified disability status and to assist students in obtaining appropriate accommodations and services. Services provided are designed to encourage independence and self-advocacy, backed by a comprehensive system of supports. Learn more about their services and programs at nyu.edu/csd.
Weekly Schedule

Week 1 (Thursday, January 30)
Introduction + selection (pp. 174-221) from *Chronicles, Vol. 1* (Bob Dylan). The selection from *Chronicles, Vol. 1* can be found under the “Resources” tab of our NYU Classes site.

Week 2 (Thursday, February 6)
**Have Read:** (1) Selection (pp. 174-221) from *Chronicles, Vol. 1* (Bob Dylan), which can be found under the “Resources” tab of our NYU Classes site and (2) Lydia Pelot-Hobbs’s essay “Of Levees and Prisons: Failures of Containment, Surges of Freedom,” which can be found on pp. 55-63 in *Unfathomable City* (edited by Rebecca Solnit and Rebecca Snedeker).

**Have Listened To:** The album *No Mercy* (Bob Dylan). It’s available on Spotify; if you’re having trouble finding it, contact me.

Week 3 (Thursday, February 13)
**Have Read:** (1) Shirley Thompson’s essay “Sugar Heaven and Sugar Hell: Pleasures and Brutalities of a Commodity,” which can be found on pp. 67-72 in *Unfathomable City* (Solnit and Snedeker),

(2) selection (pp. 3-27, 81-95, 103-105) from *Clotel* (William Wells Brown), which can be found under the “Resources” tab of our NYU Classes site,

and (3) Chapters XII and XXX from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Harriet Beecher Stowe), which can be found at https://www.gutenberg.org/files/203/203-h/203-h.htm#link2HCH0012.

**Discussion Lead Papers 1 and 2**

Week 4 (Thursday, February 20)
**Have Read:** (1) All (pp. 1-116) of *The Awakening* (Kate Chopin) and (2) selections (14 pages total) from *Bellocq’s Ophelia* (Natasha Trethewey), which can be found under the “Resources” tab of our NYU Classes site.

**Discussion Lead Papers 3 and 4**

**Write:** Midterm Paper (4-5 pages)

Week 5 (Thursday, February 27)
**Have Read:** All (pp. 2-179) of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Tennessee Williams).

**Due:** Midterm Paper (4-5 pages)

Week 6 (Thursday, March 5)
**Have Watched:** *A Streetcar Named Desire* (dir. Elia Kazan). I will be showing the movie at the Avery Fisher Center, which is on the seventh floor of Bobst, at 5 PM on
Monday, March 2, so you have a free (ie, you don’t have to pay) option; also feel free to bring anybody that you want, whether or not they’re in our class.

If you can access the movie through a streaming service and would prefer to watch it on your own, that's fine. The important thing is that you watch the movie.

**Have Read:** Rebecca Snedeker’s essay “Juju and Cuckoo: Taking Care of Crazy,” which can be found on pp. 142-46 in *Unfathomable City* (Solnit and Snedeker).

**Discussion Lead Papers 5 and 6**

**Week 7 (Thursday, March 12)**

**Have Read:** (1) The first three chapters (pp. 1-81) of *A Confederacy of Dunces* (John Kennedy Toole). Read everything that comes before the first chapter—ie, the pages with quotations, the Foreword.

(2) Billy Sothern’s essay “Stationary Revelations: Sites of Contemplation and Delight,” which can be found on pp. 37-49 in *Unfathomable City* (Solnit and Snedeker).

**Discussion Lead Papers 7 and 8**

**Week 8**

No Class—Spring Break.

**Week 9 (Thursday, March 26)**

**Have Read:** Chapters 4-7 (pp. 82-183) from *A Confederacy of Dunces* (John Kennedy Toole).

**Discussion Lead Papers 9 and 10**

**Week 10 (Thursday, April 2)**

**Have Read:** Pp. 1-95 of *Interview with the Vampire* (Anne Rice).

**Discussion Lead Papers 11 and 12**

**Week 11 (Thursday, April 9)**

**Have Watched:** *Interview with the Vampire* (dir. Neil Jordan). I will be showing the movie at the Avery Fisher Center, which is on the seventh floor of Bobst, at 5 PM on Wednesday, April 8, so you have a free (ie, you don’t have to pay) option; also feel free to bring anybody that you want, whether or not they’re in our class.

If you can access the movie through a streaming service and would prefer to watch it on your own, that’s fine. The important thing is that you watch the movie.

**Have Read:** pp. 96-158 of *Interview with the Vampire* (Anne Rice).

**Discussion Lead Papers 13 and 14**
Week 12 (Thursday, April 16)

**Have Watched:** Parts One and Two of *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts* (dir. Spike Lee). I will be showing the movie at the Avery Fisher Center, which is on the seventh floor of Bobst, at 5 PM on Wednesday, April 14, so you have a free (ie, you don’t have to pay) option; also feel free to bring anybody that you want, whether or not they’re in our class.

If you can access the movie through a streaming service and would prefer to watch it on your own, that’s fine. The important thing is that you watch the movie.


**Discussion Lead Papers 15 and 16**

Week 13 (Thursday, April 23)

**Have Watched:** *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (dir. Benh Zeitlin). I will be showing the movie at the Avery Fisher Center, which is on the seventh floor of Bobst, at 5 PM on Wednesday, April 22, so you have a free (ie, you don’t have to pay) option; also feel free to bring anybody that you want, whether or not they’re in our class.

If you can access the movie through a streaming service and would prefer to watch it on your own, that’s fine. The important thing is that you watch the movie.

**Due:** Paper Proposal for Final Paper.

Week 14 (Thursday, April 30)

**Research Day.**

**Due:** Rough Draft for Final Paper.

Week 15 (Thursday, May 7)

**Workshop Day.**

**Due:** Rough Draft for Final Paper.