

SOC 101-6 Section 24

AFRICAN AMERICAN NOVELS OF THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY: A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH, fall quarter 2009

Tuesday and Thursday, 9:30 – 10:50, University Hall 318; Wendy Griswold, Professor
Department of Sociology, 1810 Chicago Ave., Evanston, IL 60208
847-491-2701; w-griswold@northwestern.edu

Office hours are Thursday mornings 11 – 12:30, and we can arrange other times as well. You should set up appointments by e-mail first. For quick questions you can always catch me right before or after class for consultations-in-the-hall.

This seminar focuses on three masterpieces of mid-twentieth century African American fiction: Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940), and James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953). We will examine the racial, sexual, and gender contexts in which these writers produced their novels. We will look at the role played by institutions, both literary (e.g. the Federal Writers Project) and social (e.g. the African American church). We will consider the role of regions and communities: Hurston's South, Wright's Chicago, Baldwin's Harlem. We will look at readership and reading practices to understand the audience for these novels. And first and foremost, we will read closely and analyze the novels themselves to understand why they have been judged to be exemplary works.

Books for required reading

- Hurston, Zora Neale, 1891-1960. *Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Novel*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1937. *TEWG* We are using the Harper Perennial Modern Classics edition (2006).
- Wright, Richard, 1908-1960 *Native Son*. New York and London: Harper, 1940. *NS* We are using the Harper Perennial Modern Classics edition (2005).
- Baldwin, James, 1924-1987. *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. New York, Knopf, 1953. *GTIM* We are using the Modern Library edition (1995).

Expectations

- Regular and on-time attendance
- Participation in class discussions
- Written work edited and on time

Writing assignments

Students will write three short papers (4-5 pages), one on each novel, and one longer paper (5-8 pages) in which they develop a theme that relates to all three books. The second short paper will be collaborative, i.e., written by teams of two or three students.

Evaluation

- 3 short papers: 45%
- 1 long paper: 30%
- Class participation 25%

Day-by-day schedule

Tuesday, September 22

Discussion: Introductions. What we should get out of this seminar? What we should put into it?

Sociological topic: Books and sociology: what is the connection?

Assignment: Read *TEWG* 1 – 5 for Thursday

Thursday, September 24

Discussion: *TEWG* 1-5

Sociological topic: Before the Great Migration: Black and White in the South

Assignment: Read *TEWG* 6-10 for Tuesday

Tuesday, September 29

Discussion: *TEWG* 6-10

Sociological topic: Black towns: How common? How successful? Impact on literature?

Assignment: Read *TEWG* 11-15 for Thursday

Thursday, October 1

Discussion: *TEWG* 11-15

Sociological topic: Literary reputations and rediscoveries: The case of Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston.

Assignment: Read 16-20 for Tuesday

Tuesday, October 6

Discussion: *TEWG* 16-20

Sociological topic: Black women as writers and readers. Reading groups

Assignment: **Paper due on Thursday**

Thursday, October 8 PAPER #1 DUE TODAY

Discussion: Discuss *TEWG* papers. Introduction to *NS*.

Sociological topic: The Great Migration

Assignment: Read *NS* Book 1 (3-93) for Tuesday

Tuesday, October 13

Discussion: *NS* Book 1 (3-93)

Sociological topic: The Black Belt in Chicago, and the sociologists who studied it

Assignment: Read *NS* Book 2 (97-184) for Thursday

Thursday, October 15

Discussion: *NS* Book 2 (97-184)

Sociological topic: The Federal Writers' Project under the New Deal

Assignment: Read *NS* Book 2 (184-270) for Tuesday

Tuesday, October 20

Discussion: *NS* Book 2 (184-270)

Sociological topic: Communism and intellectual life in the 1930s

Assignment: Read *NS* Book 3 (273-363) for Thursday

Thursday, October 22

Discussion: *NS* Book 3 (273-363)

Sociological topic: Race and incarceration then and now

Assignment: Read *NS* Book 3 (363-430) for Tuesday

Tuesday, October 27

Discussion: *NS* Book 3 (363-430)

Sociological topic: Race and reading: Who reads?

Assignment: **Paper (team paper) due on Thursday**

Thursday, October 29 PAPER #2 DUE TODAY

Discussion: Discuss *NS* papers. Introduction to *GTIM*.

Sociological topic: The Great Migration: African Americans leave the South

Assignment: Read *GTIM* Part 1 “The Seventh Day” for Tuesday

Tuesday, November 3

Discussion: *GTIM* Part 1 “The Seventh Day”

Sociological topic: The Harlem Renaissance: What was it, why did it happen, why was it important, what are its legacies?

Assignment: Read *GTIM* Part 2-1 “Florence’s Prayer” for Thursday

Thursday, November 5

Discussion: *GTIM* Part 2-1 “Florence’s Prayer”

Sociological topic: Harlemworld: Harlem as cultural capital of Black America

Assignment: Read *GTIM* Part 2-2 “Gabriel’s Prayer” for Tuesday

Tuesday, November 10

Discussion: *GTIM* Part 2-2 “Gabriel’s Prayer”

Sociological topic: The Black Church, South and North

Assignment: Read *GTIM* Part 2-3 “Elizabeth’s Prayer” for Thursday

Thursday, November 12

Discussion: *GTIM* Part 2-3 “Elizabeth’s Prayer”

Sociological topic: The Black Church and the Civil Rights Movement

Assignment: Read *GTIM* Part 3 “The Threshing Floor” for Tuesday

Tuesday, November 17

Discussion: *GTIM* Part 3 “The Threshing Floor”

Sociological topic:

Assignment: **Paper due on Thursday**

Thursday, November 19 PAPER #3 DUE TODAY

Discussion: Discuss *GTIM* papers. Topics for final papers/reports

Sociological topic: Race/sex/class/sexuality and literature-- review

Assignment: Work on final paper/report

Tuesday, November 24

Discussion: Oral presentation of topics for final papers
Sociological topic: Place, region and literature -- review
Assignment: Work on final paper

Thursday, November 26
HAPPY THANKSGIVING

Monday, November 30
Reading period this week; no class

Monday, December 7
FINAL PAPERS DUE TODAY