

Instructor: Michael Tavel Clarke
Winter 2010
Thursday 12-2:30
Social Sciences 1015
Course Web Page: <http://blackboard.ucalgary.ca>

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
COURSE SYLLABUS

609.52-01: CONSTRUCTING CLASS IN POSTWAR AMERICAN LITERATURE

Course Description

One of the reigning contemporary myths of the United States is that it is a classless society. A variation of the same idea is that the nation is a uniformly middle class society. This has not, however, always been a reigning myth of the nation, nor has it gone unchallenged in periods when it has been a dominant idea. There has been an active discourse on the nature of class in America, and literature has contributed significantly to developing this discourse.

Many scholars have acknowledged, however, that the nature of contemporary class formation defies many of the conventional theories about classes and class struggle. Marxist and kindred scholars are actively reinventing their methods of analysis in the light of contemporary socioeconomic change and evolving theories of class. At the same time, many scholars are acknowledging that class analysis has lagged behind other contemporary forms of analysis (especially race, gender, and sexuality studies), particularly when it comes to U.S. literature. This is increasingly coming to seem like a problem at a time when socioeconomic divisions are becoming more and more pronounced in the country; one influential economist recently called the turn of the 21st century a “new gilded age.” It has also seemed like a problem at a time when many national policies are increasingly privileging class over other concerns; consider, for example, the substitution of socioeconomic background for racial preferences in many affirmative action programs. At this moment in time, class analysis in the U.S. poses special problems and special opportunities.

This course examines literary constructions of class in the United States since World War II. It will examine the development and historical changes in ideas about class during that time, the nature of class struggle in a nation that often denies it experiences such struggle, and contemporary theories about the history and nature of class formation.

Required Texts

J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*
David Mamet, *Glengarry Glen Ross*
Sloan Wilson, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*
Gwendolyn Brooks, *A Street in Bronzeville*
Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger for Memory*
Phillip Levine, *What Work Is*
Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*
Richard Powers, *Gain: A Novel*
Course Pack

<u>Course Requirements</u>	<u>Percentage of Final Grade</u>
Seminar Paper (10-12 pp.)	35%
Short Essay (6-8 pp.).....	25%
Teaching Essay or Book Review (5 pp.).....	15%
Blackboard Contributions	10%
Class Presentation	10%
Class Participation	5%

Grading System

You must complete all written work to qualify for a passing grade.

Grade conversions on the University of Calgary's 4-point system are as follows:

A+/A = 4.0	B = 3.0	C = 2.0	D = 1.0
A- = 3.7	B- = 2.7	C- = 1.7	F = 0
B+ = 3.3	C+ = 2.3	D+ = 1.3	

About Teaching Essays

You have the choice of writing a teaching essay or a book review. If you choose the former, you will write a brief essay on an assigned text of your choice explaining how you might teach it. Here are some questions to consider in your essay. In what kinds of courses might you teach this text? How might you situate the text in the course(s) (i.e., in relation to what other works or topics)? How might you lecture on it; on what issues or topics would you focus? How might you lead discussion on it (i.e., what sorts of questions might you ask about it and why)? What assignment(s) might you create around it? If you're looking for models for this essay, read entries in one of the MLA teaching guide series (e.g., *Approaches to Teaching Miller's Death of a Salesman*). You may turn in the teaching essay any time during the semester up to April 1.

About Book Reviews

If you choose this option, you will prepare a five-page review of a book published in the past three years for submission to a journal of your choice. You will turn in a hard copy to me and also post the review on Blackboard for the benefit of your classmates. You may turn in the book review any time during the semester up to April 1.

About Blackboard Contributions

For seven of the class sessions of your choice, you will post one discussion question on Blackboard the day before we meet. These questions should address the week's assigned readings or enduring questions in the course. Questions should be well-considered and provocative; they should also allow for multiple responses. Posted questions may be used to assist in-class discussions led by presenters. In addition, for two of the weeks of your choice you will post 600-word responses to the assigned readings. Responses may take several forms: analyses or critiques of the assigned texts, comparisons among assigned texts, discussion of outside readings applicable to the assigned texts (e.g., discussion of a published essay on *Hunger for Memory*), responses to questions posted by classmates, or discussion of persisting questions in the course. These 600-word reading responses should be delivered to me in hard copy during class as well as posted the day before class on Blackboard.

About Class Presentations

You will be responsible for presenting on one of the assigned readings during the course. Presenters should be prepared to lead class for roughly half the session; I will lead the remainder of the class. I will pass around a sign-up sheet on the first day that will allow you to choose the readings you wish to help facilitate. The schedule will be posted on Blackboard. I will provide more information about the presentations on the first day of class.

Late Papers

You have the option of turning in one written assignment (including the Blackboard contributions) up to a week late without penalty. Class presentations may not be completed late, and the final essay may be turned in late only with permission. If you turn in an assignment more than a week late, or if you turn in a second assignment late, your grade on the work will be lowered by a third of a grade for each late day (i.e., an A paper that is one day late will receive an A-, two days late a B+, and so on; weekend days and holidays are counted in this total).

Turning in Assignments

Please make all efforts to turn in assignments directly to me (with the exception of some of the Blackboard contributions, which are posted electronically). If this is not possible, take your assignment to Social Sciences 1152 and put it in the drop box, where your work will be date-stamped and placed in my mailbox. Please keep a copy of your assignment in case of loss. Papers cannot be returned by staff in the department office. Papers may not be delivered by email except as noted above.

Students with Disabilities

Please contact me during my office hours and coordinate with the Disability Resource Centre (220-8237) if you have a disability that requires some modification of seating, evaluation, or other class requirements. I will be happy to make appropriate accommodations for you.

Academic Regulations and Schedules

Consult the calendar for course information, university and faculty regulations, dates, deadlines and schedules, student, faculty and university rights and responsibilities. The homepage for the University Calendar is below.

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/index.htm>

Plagiarism

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offence. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course, and possible suspension or expulsion from the university. Please read the attached statement on plagiarism and consult the website below for additional information.

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k-2.html>

Grade Appeals

For information on the grade appeals process please consult the following University Calendar links. Please note that “mere dissatisfaction with a decision is not sufficient grounds for the appeal of a grade or other academic decision.”

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k-2-6.html>

English Department Website

For more information about courses, programs, policies, events and contacts in the Department of English, please consult our website.

<http://www.english.ucalgary.ca>

**609.01: CONSTRUCTING CLASS IN POSTWAR AMERICAN LITERATURE
READING SCHEDULE**

Jan. 14	Introduction	
Jan. 21	Theory: Traditional Marxism, New Marxism, Class in America	Marx and Engels, <i>Communist Manifesto</i> , “Bourgeois and Proletarians,” and “Position of the Communists in Relation to the Various Existing Opposition Parties” (Link in Blackboard—BB) Jameson, “Five Theses on Actually Existing Marxism” (BB) Resnick and Wolff, “A Marxian Theory of Classes” (Course Pack—CP) Schocket, “The Veil and the Vision” (CP) Mantsios, “Class in America” (CP) Krugman, “For Richer” (BB)
Jan. 28	Theory: Alternatives to Marxism, Anti-Marxism, Suspicion of Class	Weber, “Class, Status, Party” (CP) Pakulski and Waters, Excerpts from <i>The Death of Class</i> (CP) Walkowitz, Prologue to <i>Working with Class</i> (CP) Dimock and Gilmore, Introduction to <i>Rethinking Class</i> (CP) Jones, Introduction to <i>American Hungers</i> (CP) Wayman, “To Be Free Full-Time” (BB) Recommended: Burke, Introduction to <i>The Conundrum of Class</i> (Reserve) Peter, Chapter 7 of <i>The Concept of Class</i> (Reserve) Felski, “Nothing to Declare: Identity, Shame, and the Lower Middle Class,” <i>PMLA</i> Jan. 2000 (BB)
Feb. 4	Origins of American Class Ideologies	Crèvecoeur, <i>Letters from an American Farmer</i> , Prefatory Material – Letter III
Feb. 11	Constructing the Middle Class	Mamet, <i>Glengarry Glen Ross</i> Recommended: Arthur Miller, <i>Death of a Salesman</i>
Feb. 18	Reading Week	No Class
Feb. 25	Constructing the Middle Class	Wilson, <i>Man in the Gray Flannel Suit</i> Excerpts from Mills, <i>White Collar</i> (CP)
Mar. 4	Class and Race	Brooks, <i>A Street in Bronzeville</i>
Mar. 11	Class, Race, and Immigration	Rodriguez, <i>Hunger for Memory</i>
Mar. 18	Constructing the Working Class	Levine, <i>What Work Is</i> , “Fear and Fame,” “Coming Close,” “Every Blessed Day,” “Growth,” “Innocence,” “Among Children,” “What Work Is” Tillie Olsen, “I Stand Here Ironing” (CP) Short Essay Due Recommended: Levine, <i>Not This Pig</i> , “In a Grove Again,” “A New Day,” “Commanding Elephants,” “The Everlasting Sunday,” “Blasting from Heaven,” “Obscure,” “Barbie and Ken,” “Possession,” “To a Child Trapped,” “Silent in America,” “Morning after the Storm,” “Yo Soy

		Americano,” “Heaven,” “The Lost Angel,” “Animals Are Passing from Our Lives,” “Baby Villon” http://lion.chadwyck.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/toc.do?action=new&divLevel=0&mapping=toc&area=Poetry&id=Z000204274&forward=tocMarc&DurUrl=Yes Levine, <i>On the Edge</i> , “An Abandoned Factory, Detroit” http://capa.conncoll.edu/levine.ontheedge.htm
Mar. 25	Constructing the Working Class	Ehrenreich, <i>Nickel and Dimed</i> Recommended: Eric Schlosser, <i>Fast Food Nation</i> , Chaps. 7-8
Apr. 1	Class Conflicts	Michael Moore, <i>Roger and Me</i> Teaching Essay or Book Review Due
Apr. 8	Contemporary Class	Powers, <i>Gain</i> , First Half of Book
Apr. 15	Contemporary Class	Powers, <i>Gain</i> , Second Half of Book
April 19-29 Final Exams	Seminar Paper	Seminar Paper Due Noon, Apr. 23