

English 0626-3885-01
Fall 2019
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James Baldwin and His Legacies

James Baldwin was one of the most influential African American and queer writers of the twentieth century, not to mention one of its supreme literary stylists. Not only his writing but his biography—characterized by celebrity and nomadism—is remarkable. This seminar explores Baldwin's career from the 1940s to the 1980s, exploring the major preoccupations, literary forms, stylistic maneuvers, and identity positions adopted in his works. We will read widely across his fiction and non-fiction. How does Baldwin as essayist and novelist configure identities of nation, gender, race, sexuality, and class? How do his works respond to cultural pressures of the Cold War? In what ways do his works inaugurate or anticipate concepts now foundational in queer theory and critical race theory? Although our focus will remain squarely on Baldwin's works themselves, we will track the travels and dislocations within Baldwin's own life that invigorated the reflections on selfhood that pervade his writing.

After surveying Baldwin's major works, we will search out his literary legacies in the works of two major contemporary authors, Toni Morrison and Ta-Nehisi Coates. In examining their work, we will ask what Baldwin has bequeathed to contemporary U.S. culture, as well as what forces have mediated that bequest.

Required Texts (available to purchase online)

James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*
James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*
James Baldwin, *Another Country*
James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*
Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*
Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*

Additional Recommended Texts

M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*
Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*
Diana Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual*
A good desktop dictionary (e.g. Oxford)

Evaluation

15% Seminar Participation
10% Term Paper Abstract (to be presented at class conference)
75% Term Paper

Notes on Written Assignments

Please type and double-space your paper according to standard formatting (i.e. Times New Roman font, standard margins). Late papers will be marked down by 2% per weekday.

Extensions will be granted under exceptional circumstances, but they must be negotiated with me in writing and before the deadline. Finally, a note on plagiarism: I take this academic offence very seriously; please do not discredit yourself and endanger your academic reputation by attempting it. Plagiarism involves claiming someone else's ideas or material as your own; be sure to cite every last source.

Reading Schedule

Week One

October 27 – Introduction

October 30 – “Going to Meet the Man”

Week Two

November 3 – “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” “Notes of a Native Son,” and “Many Thousands Gone”

November 6 – “Sonny’s Blues”

Week Three

November 10 – “Stranger in the Village,” “A Question of Identity,” and “Equal in Paris”

November 13 – “Princes and Powers,” “Encounter on the Seine: Black Meets Brown,” and “A Fly in Buttermilk”

Week Four

November 17 – *Go Tell It on the Mountain*

November 20 – *Go Tell It*

Week Five

November 24 – *Go Tell It*

November 27 – *Go Tell It*

Week Six

December 1 – *Giovanni’s Room*

December 4 – *Giovanni’s Room*

Week Seven

December 8 – *Giovanni’s Room*

December 11 – *Giovanni’s Room*

Week Eight

December 15 – *Another Country*

December 18 – *Another Country*

Week Nine

December 22 – *Another Country*

December 25 – *Another Country*

Week Ten

December 29: No Class

January 1 – *Another Country*

Week Eleven

January 5 – *The Fire Next Time*

January 8 – Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

Week Twelve

January 12 – Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

January 15 – Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

Week Thirteen

January 19 – Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*

January 22 – Conference (Paper Ideas)

Week Fourteen

January 26 – Conference (Paper Ideas)