

English 211:
American Pluralism



Professor Jim Holstun
Spring Semester, 2013
The University at Buffalo

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SCHEDULE OF READINGS

The individual previews for the works will give you the page numbers you are responsible for.

WEEK ONE

Monday, 1/14: Introduction

► No short essay due in class.

Wednesday, 1/16

— Finish reading Terkel on C. P. Ellis

— Read Connie Porter, *All-Bright Court*, through chapter 4 (pp. 1-37).

► Short essay due in class. It can be on Ellis, Porter, or both.

Friday, 1/18

— Connie Porter, *All-Bright Court* through chapter 10 (pp. 38-90)

► Short essay due in class. On Porter

WEEK TWO

Monday, 1/21

No class (MLK Day). Everybody has read the “I Have a Dream” Speech. But his speech at Riverside Church against the Vietnam War is at least as important. If you have a minute, have a read and/or a listen! You can read it and listen to it here:

“‘Beyond Vietnam’: Address delivered to the Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam, at Riverside Church, 4 April 1967. New York City.”

<http://www.ratical.org/ratville/JFK/MLKapr67.html> From *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* Web. 13 Jan. 2013.

Wednesday, 1/23

— Finish reading Connie Porter, *All-Bright Court*

► Short essay due in class.

Friday, 1/25

— *All-Bright Court*, continued

— Pearlman, Mickey. “Connie Porter.”

► Short essay due in class on Porter or Pearlman or both.

WEEK THREE

Monday, 1/28

— *All-Bright Court*, continued

Wednesday, 1/30

— Read Frisch and Rogovin interviews with Kemp and Daniels (H)

► Short essay due in class.

Friday, 2/1

On your own, before class, view [Unseen Tears: The Impact of Native American Residential Boarding Schools in Western New York](#). Dir. Ron Douglas. View at the URL above (it's one of the few places on the web where it still seems to be obtainable), or download [the copy](#) (153MB) in my dropbox. We'll view selected parts and discuss them in class.

► Short essay due in class.

WEEK FOUR**Monday, 2/4**

Seaver, James E. *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*.

► Short essay due in class.

Wednesday, 2/6

Seaver, James E. *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*.

► Short essay due in class.

Friday, 2/8

Seaver, James E. *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*.

► Short essay due in class.

WEEK FIVE**Monday, 2/11**

Seaver, James E. *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*.

► Short essay due in class.

Wednesday, 2/13

Seaver, James E. *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*.

► **Short essay due in class.**

Friday, 2/15

Susan Walsh, “With Them was My Home” (H).

—Discussion of first paper

—Last day to resign

WEEK SIX**Monday, 2/18**

Dave Eggers, *Zeitoun*.

“Dave Eggers” (H).

► Short essay due in class.

Wednesday, 2/20

Dave Eggers, *Zeitoun*.

► Short essay due in class.

Friday, 2/22

Dave Eggers, *Zeitoun*.

- ▶ Short essay due in class.

WEEK SEVEN

Monday, 2/25

Dave Eggers, *Zeitoun*.

- ▶ Short essay due in class.

Wednesday, 2/27

Dave Eggers, *Zeitoun*.

Friday, 3/1

Eliot and Shivani Interviews with Eggers (H)

- ▶ Paper topic due to me at jamesholstun@hotmail.com, following the format below on page 28, by 6:00P.

WEEK EIGHT

Monday, 3/4

—in-class screening of Kopple, *Harlan County USA*.

- ▶ Full five-page paper draft due in class at the beginning of class for peer-editing exchange; copy also sent to me at jamesholstun@hotmail.com by the beginning of class. Follow format below, on p. 28.

Wednesday, 3/6

—in-class screening of Kopple, *Harlan County USA*.

- ▶ Peer-edited papers returned in class.

Friday, 3/8

—in-class screening and discussion of Kopple, *Harlan County USA*.

- ▶ Short essay on Kopple due in class.
- ▶ Final paper packets due in class at the beginning of class, following the described format.

SPRING BREAK!

Get a little jump on Smedley if you like; if you don't, dont.

WEEK NINE

Monday, 3/18

“Smedley, Agnes” (Brief biography) (H).

Agnes Smedley, *Daughter of Earth*

- ▶ Short essay due in class.

Wednesday, 3/20

Agnes Smedley, *Daughter of Earth*

- ▶ Short essay due in class.

Friday, 3/22

Agnes Smedley, *Daughter of Earth*

► Short essay due in class.

WEEK TEN**Monday, 3/25**

Agnes Smedley, *Daughter of Earth*

► Short essay due in class.

Wednesday, 3/27

Agnes Smedley, *Daughter of Earth*

► Short essay due in class.

Friday, 3/29

Agnes Smedley, *Daughter of Earth*

► Short essay due in class.

WEEK ELEVEN**Monday, 4/1**

Agnes Smedley, "Cellmates" (H)

Guttman on Smedley (H)

► Short essay due in class.

Wednesday, 4/3

Amitava Kumar, *A Foreigner*

► Short essay due in class.

Friday, 4/5

Amitava Kumar, *A Foreigner*

► Short essay due in class.

WEEK TWELVE**Monday, 4/8**

Amitava Kumar, *A Foreigner*

► Short essay due in class.

Wednesday, 4/10

Amitava Kumar, *A Foreigner*

► Short essay due in class.

Friday, 4/12

Amitava Kumar, *A Foreigner*

► Short essay due in class.

WEEK THIRTEEN**Monday, 4/15**

Amitava Kumar, "Teaching September 11 in the Classroom"

Wypijewski on the Lackawanna Six (H)

Goodman on Steve Kurtz (H)

► Short essay due in class.

Wednesday, 4/17

Robert Birnbaum, “Barbara Ehrenreich” (H).

Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*

► Short essay due in class.

Friday, 4/19

Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*

► second paper topic sent to me in the body of an email message by 6:00 p.m. Follow format below, on p. 28.

WEEK FOURTEEN

Monday, 4/22

Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, complete.

► Short essay due in class.

Wednesday, 4/22

Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*

► Short essay due in class.

Friday, 4/26

► By the beginning of class, a copy of your second paper draft sent to me at jamesholstun@hotmail.com, and another hard copy for peer editing, following format below, on p. 28.

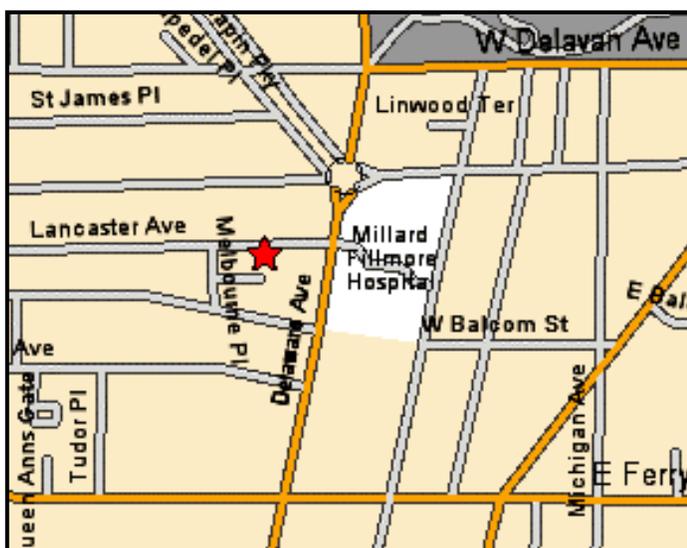
WEEK FIFTEEN

Monday, 4/29

► Peer-edited copies returned in class; course evaluation.

Friday, 5/3, noon.

Please send electronic paper copy of your final draft to me (jamesholstun@hotmail.com) by noon. Complete paper packets (including rough draft and topic) due by noon at my office (319 Clemens Hall), my departmental office (306 Clemens Hall), or my home: 38 Lancaster Avenue, near Gates Circle, five houses in from Delaware Avenue, dark blue, chimney up front, red mailbox with a yellow star.



NUMBERS, TIMES, AND PLACES

Reg. No. 24309
 Class Time: MWF 9-9:50
 Class Place: O'Brian 214
 My office: Clemens Hall 319
 My phones: Office phone and voice mail: 645-0672; you don't need to call me up just to say you're going to miss class. My home phone is 884-0895, but please phone for emergencies only, 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
 My e-mail: jamesholstun@hotmail.com. Please feel free to write whenever you like—even if you're just wondering about this or that in our reading—it's no bother!
 My mailbox: Under the door of my office (Clemens 319) or in the main office of the English Department (Clemens Hall 306).
 Office hours: MWF10-11:00; other times by appointment on MWF and sometimes other days are generally no problem.

DISCUSSION LIST

Still being set up. I will enroll you as soon as I can, using the name and email address you provide me. As soon as you are enrolled, you will receive instructions for using the list, including instructions for unsubscribing, in case you resign the course. To avoid embarrassment and bother, please distinguish between messages to me and messages to the whole list.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF AMERICAN PLURALISM

“The American Pluralism course examines the multicultural, multi-ethnic nature of American society. It introduces students to five important areas of American experience and culture: race, gender, ethnicity, class and religious sectarianism. Writings by and about Americans of color, women, and people from diverse ethnic, class and religious groups provide background and context for discussions of contemporary issues. Students learn from a variety of contemporary and historical sources, including literature, art, journalism, research articles, guest lecturers, films, and the experiences of their classmates.”

DESCRIPTION OF MY SECTION

This section of American Pluralism will focus on migration, race and ethnicity, and class struggle. Most of our works will be non-fiction memoirs, creative journalism, or autobiographical novels. We'll begin with an old white guy, C. P. Ellis, and the story of how he changed from being a racist Ku Klux Klansman to an anti-racist labor organizer. Then we'll turn to two local works: Mary Jemison's remarkable narrative of her abduction in 1763, and her transformation into an Iroquois (Seneca) wife and mother—one of the great American “captivity narratives.” We'll also consider some of Milton Rogovin's photographs of contemporary Iroquois people in Western New York, and we'll view a short documentary about the survivors of the Thomas Indian School. We'll read the great Buffalo novel: Connie Porter's *All Bright Court* (about black steelworkers in Lackawanna and their families), and an interview with a retired Buffalo steelworker by Michael Frisch.

We'll read two works bearing directly on the struggles of the American working class: Agnes Smedley's *Daughter of Earth* (her astonishing autobiographical novel of the 1920s (which describes how a Missouri sharecropper's daughter becomes a revolutionary communist journalist

in China), and Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickled and Dimed* (which details her undercover efforts to examine the life of the American minimum-wage working class from within).

And we'll read two works that bear on Muslims in America: Dave Egger's *Zeitoun* (about a Syrian-American in New Orleans, in the midst of Katrina, falsely imprisoned as a "terrorist") and Amitava Kumar's *A Foreigner Carrying in the Crook of His Arm a Tiny Bomb* (about a group of South-Asian Americans lured into establishing a "terror cell." We'll also talk a bit about the Lackawanna Six (as does Kumar).

You'll write regular informal essays and a short (five-page) essay at mid-semester, which you'll develop into a ten-page essay at the end of the semester. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have questions: jamesholstun@hotmail.com.

ME

I've been teaching and writing for publication since 1983, focusing primarily on Renaissance English literature. I've taught at UCLA, UC Irvine, the University of Vermont, and since 1991, at UB. I've written one book on Renaissance utopias, another on class struggle in the English Revolution, and I've edited a collection of essays on the English Revolution. I've written essays on Renaissance lesbianism, Shakespeare, Tudor peasant revolts, and marxist theory. I've recently moved away from the Renaissance to proletarian literature, twentieth-century radicalism, and world literature, with emphasis on the Arab world. I'm currently working on the journalism of Agnes Smedley; on fiction by Joseph Conrad, Sahar Khalifeh, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and Alifa Rifaat; and on the history of the Fugitive Slave Law in nineteenth-century Buffalo

REQUIRED BOOKS

The other books are or will soon be available in the University Bookstore. Or you may order copies yourself. Below, I've provided links to online bookstores, which sell new and used copies, sometimes quite cheaply—though of course, you'll need to pay postage too. **SATAN** (i.e., Amazon—see this [essay](#) on Amazon working conditions) is first, **Alibris** second. If you order different editions, please check the page count so that the pagination will be the same—important for class discussion. If you have difficulty ordering online, I'll gladly help.

I've tried to keep prices down as much as possible, but I do expect you to purchase all the texts by the beginning of the semester (otherwise, they may be returned), and I will not accept late work because you were unable to purchase the books until later. "Couldn't afford to buy the books" isn't an excuse—it's a sign that you need to wait this semester out. See me if you have any trouble buying the books and we'll work something out. All books by these titles are not necessarily identical—you must have *these particular editions* so that pagination and (if relevant) supplementary materials are the same! Any old edition by the same author will not do.

Eggers, Dave. *Zeitoun*. Vintage, 2010. ISBN-10: 0307387941; ISBN-13: 978-0307387943. [Amazon](#) new and used from \$3.63; [Alibris](#) new and used from \$4.99. Must be this paperback edition of 368 pages. Copies in the University Bookstore now.

Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*. Picador, 2011. ISBN-10: 0312626681; ISBN-13: 978-0312626686. [Amazon](#) new and used from \$4.24; [Alibris](#) new and used from .99. Must be this paperback edition of 256 pages. Copies in the

University Bookstore later in the first week of classes. Copies in the University Bookstore now.

Holstun, Jim, ed. *UGC211: A Collection of Readings*. Buffalo: Queen City Imaging, 2013. QCI is near the South Campus, 3100 Main Street (see map below), open weekdays 9:00-5:00, 832-8100. I'll let you know when it's available; call ahead to make sure your copy is ready.

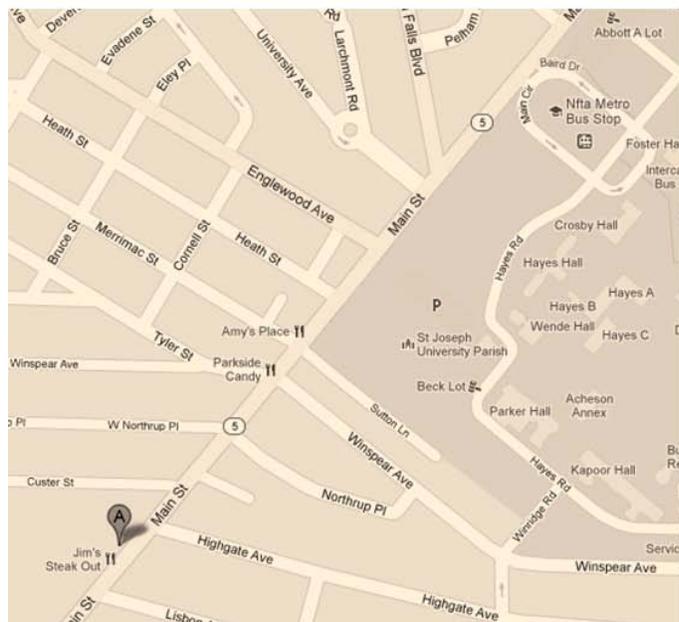
Kopple, Barbara, dir. *Harlan County USA*. First Run Features: 1976.

Kumar, Amitava. *A Foreigner Carrying in the Crook of His Arm a Tiny Bomb*. Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2010. ISBN-10: 0822345781; ISBN-13: 978-0822345787. [Amazon](#) new and used from \$5.24; [Alibris](#) new and used from \$5.24. Must be this paperback edition of 232 pages. Copies in the University Bookstore later in the first week of classes. Copies in the University Bookstore soon.

Porter, Connie. *All Bright Court*. Mariner Books, 2000. ISBN-10: 0618056793; ISBN-13: 978-0618056798. [Amazon](#) new and used from \$.01; [Alibris](#) new and used from \$.99. Paperback or hardback okay: 224 pages. There will be no more copies in the University Bookstore—their sellers are out, so you'll need to order a copy online and get accelerated delivery.

Seaver, James E. *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*. University of Oklahoma Press, 1995. ISBN-10: 0072932848; ISBN-13: 978-0806127170. [Amazon](#) new and used from \$.01; [Alibris](#) new and used from \$.99. **MUST BE THIS PAPERBACK EDITION OF 208 PP.—THERE ARE MANY OTHERS. DON'T BE LED ASTRAY.** Copies in the University Bookstore now.

Smedley, Agnes. *Daughter of Earth*. New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 1993. ISBN-10: 0935312684; ISBN-13: 978-0935312683. [Amazon](#) new and used from \$.01; [Alibris](#) new and used from \$.99. Copies in the University Bookstore now.



ELECTRONICS

Over the years, I have found that students using electronic devices in class almost always get distracted from discussion and begin surfing or texting. So no electronics, please: no open laptops or tablets or pads or Kindle, or anything similar. Concentrate on your classmates, me, the text, and your handwritten notes. Please see me if there's some special reason for an exception.

COURSE GOALS

The English Department has said its classes will pursue one or more of the following goals:

- think, read, speak, and above all write critically and creatively
- read in detail and in cultural context
- understand critical methods and theoretical concepts
- gain knowledge of periods and genres
- develop ability to articulate an idea lucidly and persuasively in writing
- develop skills for doing research and deploying evidence appropriately
- appreciate aesthetic experience

I think we'll be pursuing all these goals. Here's my particular spin in this class:

- To introduce you to some wonderful writings about immigration, race, gender, and class struggle.
- To have some good class discussions, including discussions in which you disagree with me.
- To help you improve your skills as a writer, so that you write some papers you are proud of.
- To provoke you to continue studying this field after the end of the semester.

BASIC REQUIREMENTS

This may be an unusually demanding class—please feel free to consult previous student evaluations of my courses for verification (available in Clemens 301). Students looking for an easy grade typically find themselves dropping; students who stick with the work frequently find themselves surprised at how much they can accomplish and pleased with their grade. You will be writing a lot, because I think people get smarter when they read a lot, discuss and write about what they read, and get feedback on what they write. Please consider the following points carefully.

- Books*: you must have the books for the class in the specified translation/edition in time to read them. Looking up snippets on the Web is no substitute.
- Time Required*. You should not take this class if you are not prepared to spend at least ten hours (including class time) a week on it. You may need more.
- Class Preparation*. You should complete every assignment by the day it appears on the syllabus—not by the day we get done with it. Generally speaking, you should read the reading questions I've given you and read the assignment at least once carefully.
- Class Attendance*. Come to class on time. This is not the class for you if you can picture yourself saying the following sentence: "What's the big deal? I made three-fourths of the classes, and was only late six or seven times!"
- Plagiarism*. If you plagiarize—for a short essay, a final paper, or any other assignment—I will fail you for the class. Please see the Style Sheet for some technical help in avoiding plagiarism, and the discussion of plagiarism below.

HOW TO DO WELL IN THIS CLASS

- Do the work on time, come to class on time, and pass in your short essays on time.
- Synthesize your reading; think *between* assignments in this class, or between your other readings and readings for this class. Use what you know to master what you don't know.
- Come to office hours if you're having problems or if you just want to talk some more.
- Raise questions in class or in conference, even if you are challenging me on something I've said or asking me to clarify.
- Come up with a paper topic that interests you—perhaps on the basis of one of your short essays.
- Come by and see me with a rough draft to talk about paper revision.

HOW TO DO POORLY IN THIS CLASS

- Miss three or four classes, wander into class late five or six times, blow off a few short essays.
- Do as little thinking as possible: copy down what I say about our works so that you can repeat it at some appropriate moment and flatter me with my own brilliant thoughts.
- Take notes passively or not at all.
- Never come see me during office hours.
- If you have a personal problem, just disappear for a couple of weeks without contacting me, and then come back and ask for a quick lecture on what you've missed, and maybe an incomplete.
- Neglect to do paper drafts and revision, and pass in the sloppy product of an all-nighter, or of plagiarism.

CONFERENCES

I encourage you to stop by and talk with me as often as you like, either by catching me during my regular hours, or by making an appointment with me for some other time—I will gladly meet with you at times other than my regular scheduled hours: if you want to meet, I will make myself available. I will be happy to go over points we've discussed in class, talk about your writing, suggest sources for research, talk about teaching as a profession, or talk with you about something I've said in class that you disagree with (hurrah! my favorite!), etc.

I find that students miss about one quarter of the appointments I make with them. This displeases me: when you sign up for office hours, you are making an appointment, not renting my time: if you wander by ten minutes late or blow off an appointment altogether, I will not be pleased. If you must cancel an appointment, please let me know (by e-mail or a call to my office phone) as soon as possible, so that others may use that time slot.

GRADING

Paper 1 (20 %) =
 Paper 2 (50 %) =
 Participation (30%) =
 Total =

Numerical averages are not absolute; improvement certainly counts. By the same token, nobody who does not do all the work can pass the course—that is to say, you will automatically fail if you simply ignore any formal paper. I will give you some idea of how you are doing in the class before the last day of the add/drop.

Please stay in touch: I don't automatically give incompletes to students who simply disappear from class for a few weeks and then come in to tell me about problems. If extraordinary problems come up, please let me know as soon as possible. I know—believe me—that people suffer chronic illness, depression, and mishaps and tragedies of other sorts. My impulse is not to punish but to try to help you do the best work you can for the semester, whatever the circumstances. But I can't do that if you don't stay in touch. If you simply disappear from the last two weeks of class and mail me a late paper, I probably won't be very sympathetic.

ATTENDANCE

It all begins with you showing up in class. When students do poorly in my classes, it's usually because they disappear or miss too many classes. Please read carefully and clarify any lingering questions.

Bottom line: If you miss more than 10 classes, for any reason, you fail, because you haven't really been in the class.

Come to class regularly and punctually, submit your short essays and other assignments on time, and promptly make up missed work. I know that some huge classes encourage disrespect and spotty attendance, but this is not a huge hall or distance learning: I see you, you see me. Some other professors have a looser standard, but this is my standard. If it seems unacceptably harsh, don't take this class. Please get in touch with me as soon as possible if you're having problems.

Here's *the blissfully short version*. Act reasonably, and so will I. Do your work regularly and on time, come to class on time, let me know when you are unavoidably absent or late, make up your missed work promptly, and stay in touch if something unavoidable comes up that keeps you away from class for more than a day or so. Just common sense.

Here's *the painfully long version*, beginning with the [Faculty Senate Code on Attendance](#):

Students may be justifiably absent from classes due to religious observances, illness documented by a physician or other appropriate health care professional, conflicts with university-sanctioned activities documented by an appropriate university administrator, public emergencies, and documented personal or family emergencies. The student is responsible for notifying the instructor in writing with as much advance notice as possible. Instructors may determine a reasonable amount of coursework that should be completed in order to makeup the student's absence. Students are responsible for the prompt completion of any alternative assignments. (<http://undergrad-catalog.buffalo.edu/policies/course/attendance.shtml>)

Modifications: I do not usually require official written notification of absence for religious observances, illness, unmovable job interviews, public or personal or family emergencies. I think that's intrusive, and within reason, your word is good enough. I do require prior and official notice for absence or lateness due to "conflicts with University sanctioned activities."

To my eye, the reasons for "unavoidably absent" and "unavoidably late essay" include those University reasons listed above and also occasional mechanical disaster (car or computer or printer), and other human necessities (say, a sick family member or friend or pet, a job interview that can't

be rescheduled). But they don't include "overslept," "forgot it," "no parking," "finishing a paper for another class," "printers busy," "taking a vacation," "going to a wedding," "airline reservations," etc. Any of these might reasonably come up—that's why I drop your 4 lowest grades.

If you are justifiably absent or submit work late for unavoidable reasons, let me know and make up the work soon. I won't accept it weeks later. On the next day you attend class, write a note saying "This short assignment for [Month/Day] late because . . . " or "I was [absent/late] on [Month/Day] because. . . ."

 Please do not do this orally or by email. All correspondence regarding absence and lateness takes place right on your short essays. This helps me get my grading straight.

 Please note: you will need to do this even for days on which no assignment was due, since I count those absences as well.

If you pass in a short essay late without explanation, I'll give you the regular feedback and a ✓—.

Habitual lateness disrupts class and suggests disrespect. If you are constitutionally incapable of arriving on time, don't take this class. Let me know about any special circumstances (locomotion problems, distance from a prior class, a thoughtless previous professor), and we'll work it out.

TECHNIQUE FOR READING JUST ABOUT ANYTHING

Respond to these questions, and you'll be moving further into the substance of whatever you're reading. The key lies in *writing about what you've read*, even if you simply point at something about the piece you've read and ask "WTF"?

1. What's the *connection* between this work and the last thing I read?
2. What *parts* does it break down into (maybe just draw a line across the page!), and what's the relation between those parts?
3. What *happens* in the work, and what happens to me while reading it?
4. What is the *character* of the persons represented in the work, or speaking the work?
5. What *perplexes* me most about the work?
6. After reading this, what do I want to *know more about*? [For instance, note the question above about the Ku Klux Klan in Western New York.]
7. I've read the work; how does it *read me*? For instance, C. P. Ellis describes a primal change in his way of thinking and acting; have I ever been through such a change? is the reason for that simply chance, or my lack of courage, or my initial perfection, or something else?

PARTICIPATION AND SHORT ESSAYS

Please question, talk, argue, develop, converse with other students. I don't mind you asking me to

clarify something I've said, or arguing with me or with some other student. In fact, I positively thrive on this. One of the best things that can happen is when you start conversing with another student without talking through me. Go for it!

Most of your participation grade depends on your short essays: informal writings on each day's reading. Count on two a week with an occasional free day when you'll receive a ✓ simply for showing up in class on time.) The essays should be relatively low-pain, low-stress, but they're also the very center of the course. They determine most of your class participation grade, and they'll frequently be the first step on the way to your course paper. Procedures:

1. I prefer that you print these out yourself and hand them in—and there are some inexpensive and perfectly functional printers out there. But if you have trouble getting to a printer, you may submit legibly handwritten versions *with margins* (i.e., space for me to comment). Do not send me your short essays by email.
2. To keep track of everything, create a *single* computer document for *all* of your short essays, and write them consecutively with automatic pagination. This will amount to a running journal for the course. As you read each day's assignment, make notes to yourself in the margins of your text, writing down what you are thinking as you read. Then, type your name, the reading assignment, and the due date for the short essay. No need for a bibliographical entry, but otherwise, follow the format in the Style Sheet, quoting accurately, punctuating and annotating properly—it's not too early to acquire this essential scholarly discipline and make it automatic. If you have some housekeeping information from the previous class (i.e., "I was unavoidably absent from the last class because. . ."), be sure to add it.
3. Take five or ten minutes and write about a paragraph or so on the day's reading assignment—but I'll gladly read more if you write more. Your goal isn't simply to quote or paraphrase the work or works for the day, nor is it to wander into some highly abstract or disconnected reverie. Rather, you should try to connect some general analytical point to *some specific passage* or aspect of our reading for the day: give the page number. If you don't talk about some particular passage, with a page number, you're not fulfilling the assignment. Your short essay might be
 - a rough thesis you've formulated while reading
 - an examination of some logical contradiction, some particularly dense and interesting metaphor, some detail of characterization, etc.
 - a comparison or contrast between the text for the day and some other text, whether for this class or another.
 - a careful articulation of some problem you've had with the day's reading, using specific examples, and concluding with a clear question. Frequently, this can be the best sort of short essay. Never hesitate to express perplexity or confusion.
 - a disagreement with something the editor says, or something I said in the previous class.
 - a connection between the text for the day and something that has happened to you, or something you know about, so long as you meditate a bit on the significance connection (i.e., connection alone is not enough). Yes, you are allowed to say "I"—but be aware of the

fact that literature may force you to reflect on your comfortable “I” in an uncomfortable way!

I encourage you to use your short essay to continue a previous discussion, take issue with some point I’ve made in a previous class, etc. But you should also be sure to write about that day’s assignment, too. Part of the function of the short essay is to show me you’ve read the assignment for the day. If you don’t, check minus.

4. I’ll collect these short essays at the beginning of class. No credit for an essay handed in late or early unless you have a reasonable excuse (see “Attendance” above). You must be in class on time to pass your question in, and stay for the whole class, unless you must leave for some unavoidable reason.
5. I’ll read these questions after every class, make comments, and pass them back at least once a week with the following grades:
 - ✓ + a genuinely creative and thoughtful essay
 - ✓ an honest engagement with the reading
 - ✓ — no essay, late essay, perfunctory essay, essay not on that day’s reading.

You earn participation grades from your short essays, your attendance on days when no essay is due, your paper topics, and your paper drafts.

6. Hold onto these questions when I return them—put them into your binder, intermixing them with your class notes.
7. At semester’s end, I drop your 4 lowest grades. An average of “check” earns a 75, higher higher, lower lower, adjusted higher (not lower) for your oral class participation. Anyone with 8 or more check minuses remaining receives an F for class participation.
8. On the next page, you’ll find a sample short essay about C. P. Ellis.

Jim Holstun
English 211: American Pluralism
Spring Semester, 2013
September 16, 2013

***Please note: this essay is unavoidably late because I added the class late.

C. P. Ellis and Low-Wage Americans

C. P. Ellis enters the Klan and leaves the Klan because he is a low-wage American. The difference comes in how he views his poverty. From his beloved father, he gains a sense of “inferiority feelin’s” (1) that lead him to yearn for something bigger—at first, joining the Klan: “Boy, that was an opportunity I ereally looked forward to! To be part of somethin’. I joined the Klan, went from member to chaplain, from chaplain to vice-president, from vice-president to president. The title is exalted Cyclops.” He is overwhelmed by a sense of belonging: “It was a thrilling moment for C. P. Ellis” (2).

The turning point comes when he is snubbed by a wealthy city council member, white like him of course, who pretends not to see him, and he thinks, “As long as they kept low-income whites and low income blacks fightin’, they’re gona maintain control. . . . That’s when I began to do some real serious thinkin’” The change develops when he begins noting that his fellow Klansmen don’t realize they’re being used, and when he notices a black person who had “ragged shoes or his clothes would be worn. That began to do somethin’ to me inside” (3).

But the process is slow.

Question for Holstun: Did the Klan ever make it as far north as Buffalo? Are there Klansmen near Buffalo today?

ON COURSE PAPERS

General

You'll be writing 2 papers on our texts: the first at least 5 pages, the second at least 10 (an expansion of your first). In evaluating your paper, I'm looking for your ability to develop an *original argument* about one or more works that we've read, arguing for a clear *thesis* (not a vague *topic*) using *literary analysis* and *interpretation* (not mere *paraphrase*, *quotation*, and *plot summary*—though some use of these, subordinated to your argument, will be essential for any paper).

Your papers will not be last-minute efforts, but will proceed through several stages: a paper topic that I will comment on, a paper draft peer-edited by a classmate (if you make an appointment, I will gladly discuss it with you in conference), and a final draft. I will be happy to provide you with as much feedback as you like along the way. I accept all reasonable excuses for late papers. This includes computer failure or printer trouble. But you *must* back up your work as you write, so I will not be moved by an argument that a computer failure has eaten your entire paper, necessitating a two-week extension. Aside from that, I dock papers three points for any unexcused lateness at all up to one day late (including lateness on the day they are due). Ten points off after that.

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