

ENGL 309/POLS 499: Lynching in Political and Literary Memory

Professor Metress, Fall 2017

Office Hours: W 9-11; TTh 10-12, and by appointment

Office: Samford Hall 220; Office Phone: 2192

Email: cpmetres@samford.edu

“Perhaps nothing about the history of mob violence in the United State is more surprising than how quickly an understanding of the full horror of lynching has receded from the nation’s collective memory.” W.F. Brundage, *Lynching in the New South* (1993)

History, despite its wrenching pain,
Cannot be unlived, but if faced
With courage, need not be lived again.
—Maya Angelou, “On the Pulse of Morning” (1993)

Course Description:

In August of 2016, the Montgomery-based Equal Justice Initiative announced its plan to build a national memorial to the victims of lynching. According to EJI director Bryan Stevenson, “our nation’s history of racial injustice casts a shadow across the American landscape. This shadow cannot be lifted until we shine the light of truth on the destructive violence that shaped our nation.” This course will focus on one particular manifestation of that violence—lynching—and explore how it has shaped our political and literary history, expressing the worst aspects of racial supremacy while inspiring heroic and transformative resistance. Combining poetry and short fiction, essays and political documents, historical works and visual images, this interdisciplinary course will provide an opportunity for us to have a meaningful discussion about the intersections of literature, politics, race, and social justice.

Required Texts:

Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America*

J. Royster, ed. *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900*

Walter Van Tilburg Clark, *The Ox Bow Incident*

Ernest Gaines, *A Gathering of Old Men*

Readings on Moodle (marked with * on the syllabus)

Course Objectives:

- Develop critical reasoning skills through reading significant texts and evaluating different viewpoints and arguments.
- Develop the ability to investigate an issue and construct a well-reasoned and coherent viewpoint.
- Learn to communicate ideas and arguments clearly and persuasively through written and spoken means.
- Learn how different disciplines advance our understanding of historical events and recognize the interconnectedness of the disciplines.
- Become part of a larger academic community.

Course Requirements: Assignment and Discussion Journal; Historical Marker Proposal; Major Project; and Class Discussion. In addition, all students must set up a Google alert (or other news source) for “lynching.”

Assignment and Discussion Journal: The final course objective listed above, to “become part of a larger academic community,” has a two-fold meaning. First, there is the larger academic community of this course as we help each other to build a deeper awareness of lynching’s place in our national history and memory. Second, there is an even larger community of teachers and students from across the country who are also exploring similarly

difficult histories. This July in Savannah, the Georgia Historical Society hosted “Recognizing an Imperfect Past: History, Memory, and the American Public,” a National Endowment for the Humanities seminar devoted to exploring how “we as a country recognize, remember, and memorialize controversial people and events in the American past,” with a particular emphasis on how universities “can play a meaningful role in engaging the American public in a national conversation about” these people and events. I was fortunate enough to participate in this seminar, and our course this semester owes much of its design, and a good deal of its purpose, to what I learned in Savannah. Your journal will help me to understand better how effectively this course is engaging you in a meaningful discussion of our topic (and, by extension, how well this course is preparing you down the road to play a meaningful role in a larger national public conversation). At least once a week, but hopefully more often, you will keep a journal of your responses to selected assignments and/or class discussions. These responses can be of any length (from brief comments to sustained reflections), but they should always address how certain assignments or discussions are helping you to understand our subject better or, conversely, how they are creating frustrations and impediments. I’ll ask to see these journals every few weeks and, although I will not share your reflections with the class, I will use your insights to make adjustments throughout the semester to our assignments and discussions. Moreover, the responses in your journal will help me to share thoughts with colleagues who are teaching or plan to teach a similar kind of course, noting what works well and suggesting ways to frame assignments and issues more effectively.

Historical Marker Proposal: Public monuments commemorate the past, and deciding what past to commemorate, and how to do so, requires careful deliberation. At their best, public monuments reflect our history in all its complexity, celebrating heroic accomplishments as well acknowledging tragic mistakes. Too often, however, public monuments misrepresent this complexity, either by commission or omission, leading to inevitable disagreements about how communities should tell their stories (witness this summer’s heated debate on the suitability of Confederate monuments, which is only the most recent manifestation of a disagreement that has been going on for more than a century). Commemorating racial violence may be the most difficult subject of all, but many organizations and individuals are taking up this challenge and leading the way forward. To understand the complexities of commemorating racial violence, as well as to appreciate more deeply the work of groups that are doing so, you will research a lynching in your home county or state that has not received public commemoration and, using the appropriate forms provided by your home state’s historical commission, you will complete (but not officially submit) a proposal for establishing a historical marker in memory of that lynching.

Major Project: Students in this course are pursuing majors in eight disciplines (English, Classics, Politics, Communication Studies, Public Administration, Biology, Philosophy, and Law, Politics and Society), and the major project this semester encourages you to think freely and creatively across disciplinary lines. To that end, the subject and genre of your major project will be self-generated. If you wish, you may submit a research paper in your field, using the familiar sources and professional standards of your discipline (a literary analysis, a comparative political study, a historical essay based on archival research, a literature review of key texts in the field, etc.). However, you may also conduct interviews, produce a video, submit a collection of stories or poems, build a web site, develop and execute a survey, create a lesson plan, propose an administrative or public policy initiative, etc. All projects, of course, must be cleared with me first, and I will try to be as flexible and accommodating as possible.

Class participation: This is a discussion-based seminar. Although there will be times when we have to cover a lot of a straight history, there won’t be a lot of lecturing. Instead, I’ll use discussion prompts throughout the semester to get your thoughts and insights, and everyone is expected to participate. Participation comes in many forms. A good question is as valuable as a good observation, and be prepared to participate in both ways. In addition to general discussions, there will be times during the semester when I will assign the discussion responsibilities for a particular reading to a group of two or three students. On these days, although everyone will be required to do all of the assigned readings, these students will be responsible for knowing their designated texts especially well, generating discussion prompts and leading the seminar.

Grade Distribution and Scale: Reading journal 25%; Historical Marker Proposal 15%; Major Assignment 40%; and Class Participation 20%. Scale: 93-100, A; 90-92, A-; 87-89, B+; 83-86, B; 80-82, B-; 77-79, C+; 73-76, C; 70-72, C-; 67-69, D+; 63-66, D; 60-62, D-; Below 59, F. Please note that you must complete all course requirements in order to pass the class. Thus, failing to complete a historical marker proposal, or failing to turn in a final project, will result in an F for the course.

Attendance Policy: Students who miss more than 4 classes will receive an “FA” for the course. Make-up work may be negotiated for absences due to medical or emergency reasons.

University Policies: The university has set policies regarding academic integrity, accommodation, emergency readiness, and Title IX. Please send the end of this syllabus for those policies.

Class Schedule:

Aug	29	T	Class Intro
	31	Th	Lynch Law—Origins and Early Transformations <u>Equal Justice Initiative: <i>Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror</i></u> : Intro https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/report/ <u>Dray</u> : Preface; Chapter One, “A Negro’s Life Is a Very Cheap Thing in Georgia”; and Chapter Two, “Judge Lynch’s Law” (pp. ii-52)
			* * *
Sept	5	T	Origins (continued) and the Rise of Resistance <u>Dray</u> : Chapter Three, “To Gather My Race in My Arms” (pp. 53-108)
	7	Th	The Lynching Narrative—The Emergence of a Genre <i>*The Facts in the Case of the Horrible Murder of Little Myrtle Vance and Its Fearful Expiation at Paris, Texas, February 1st, 1893</i> (memoir, 1893): Chapters 1-6 (pp. 1-25)
			* * *
	12	T	The Anti-Lynching Narrative—The Emergence of a Counter-Genre <u>Ida B. Wells: <i>Southern Horrors: The Lynch Law in All Its Phases</i></u> (pamphlet, 1892) <u>Ida B. Wells: <i>A Red Record</i></u> [Preface, Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 10] (pamphlet, 1895)
	14	Th	Lynching and Jim Crow <i>*Hale</i> : “Deadly Amusements: Spectacle Lynching and the Contradictions of Segregation Culture” (pp. 199-215) (essay, 1998)
			* * *
	19	T	Spectacle Lynching and Lynching Photography <i>*Amy L. Wood</i> : “Lynching Photography and the Visual Reproduction of White Supremacy” (essay, 2005)
	21	Th	Lynching and Public Commemoration <i>*Tuskegee Institute</i> : “The Lynching Records at Tuskegee Institute: 1882-1968” <u>Equal Justice Initiative: <i>Lynching in America: A Community Remembrance Project</i></u> (2016) https://eji.org/sites/default/files/lynching-in-america-community-remembrance-project-2.pdf and <i>Racial Terror Lynching</i> [an interactive map] https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/explore <u>Equal Justice Initiative: “Abbeville”</u> (film, 2017) [view in class]

* * *

- 26 T **Promises Broken**
Dray: Chapter Four: “The Compromise” (pp. 109-37)
Dray: Chapter Five: “Let the Eagle Scream!” (pp. 138-89)
- 28 Th **Thomas Dixon and the Fictions of White Supremacy**
Dray: Chapter Six: Writing History with Lightning” (pp. 190-214)
*Thomas Dixon: from *Leopard’s Spots* (novel, 1902) and *The Clansman* (novel, 1905)
- * * *
- Oct 3 T **Fighting the Fictions of White Supremacy**
Independent Lens: *The Birth of a Movement* (film, 2017—on reserve)
* Mary Ovington, “The White Brute” (story, 1916)
- 5 Th **Lynching and Complicity**
*Ashraf Rushdy: “The Accountant and the Opera House” (essay, 2012)
- * * *
- 10 T **Fall Break**
- 12 Th **The NAACP and *The Crisis***
Dray: Chapter Seven: “The Wisest and Best Response” (pp. 215-251)
*The Crisis: “Waco Horror” (article, 1916)
*Walter White: “I Investigate Lynchings” (article, 1929)
- * * *
- 17 T **Lynching and Federal Law**
Dray: Chapter Eight: “The Shame of America” (pp. 252-302)
*NAACP: “The Shame of America” (advertisement, 1922)
- 19 Th **African-American Anti-Lynching Drama and Poetry Between the Wars**
*Mary Powell Burrill: *Aftermath* (play, 1919)
*Claude McKay: “If We Must Die” (poem, 1919); “The Lynching” (poem, 1920);
“To The White Fiends” (poem, 1922)
*James Weldon Johnson: “The White Witch” (poem, 1922)
- * * *
- 24 T **Scottsboro and the Rise of Legal Lynching**
Dray: Chapter Nine: “The Tragedy of Lynching” (pp. 303-320)
PBS: *Scottsboro: An American Tragedy* (film, 2003)
*Langston Hughes: “Christ in Alabama” (poem, 1931)
- 26 Th **The Fight Continues**
Dray: Chapter Ten: “States Rights, States Wrongs” (pp.324-363)
*Howard Kester: “The Lynching of Claude Neal” (investigation, 1934)
- * * *
- 31 T **Anti-Lynching Art of the 1920s and 30s**
*M. Park: “Lynching and Anti-Lynching: Art and Politics in the 1930s” (essay, 2006)
*Newton Galleries: “Art Commentary on Lynching” (exhibition catalog, 1935)
- Nov 2 Th **White Southern Fiction—Three Voices of Protest**

*Mary Johnston, “Nemesis” (story, 1923)
*William Faulkner: “Dry September” (story, 1931)
*Erskine Caldwell: “Saturday Afternoon” (story, 1930) and “Kneel to the Rising Sun” (story, 1935)

* * *

7 T **Between the World and Richard Wright**
Richard Wright: “Between the World and Me” (poem, 1934), “Big Boy Leaves Home” (story, 1935), “Long Black Song” (story, 1935), “Bright and Morning Star” (story, 1938)

9 Th **Lynching Goes Underground, and Doesn’t**
Dray: Chapter Eleven: “It Can Happen Here” (362-405)
*Ralph Ellison: “The Birthmark” (story, 1940)

* * *

14 T **What We Don’t Talk about When We Talk about Lynching**
William Wellman, director, *The Ox Bow Incident* (film, 1943)

16 Th **What We Don’t Talk about When We Talk about Lynching**
William Wellman, director, *The Ox Bow Incident* (film, 1943)

* * *

21 T **Lynching and the Modern Civil Rights Movement**
Dray: Chapter Twelve, “Under Color of Law” and Epilogue (pp. 406-464)
Eyes on the Prize: Episode One: “Awakenings: 1954–1956” [on Emmett Till] and Episode Five: “Mississippi: Is This America?: 1963–1964” [on Medgar Evers and the Philadelphia murders] [view in class] (documentary, 1987)

23 Th **Thanksgiving Break—No Class**

* * *

28 T **Discussion: The Lynching of Emmett Till**
*W. B. Huie: “Shocking Story of Approved Killing in Mississippi” (article, 1956)
Stanley Nelson: *The Murder of Emmett Till* (documentary, 2003)

30 Th **The Legacies of Lynching in the Late Twentieth Century**
Ernest Gaines: *A Gathering of Old Men* (novel, 1983)

* * *

Dec 5 T **The Legacies of Lynching in the Late Twentieth Century**
Ernest Gaines: *A Gathering of Old Men* (novel, 1983)

7 Th Semester Wrap Up and Evaluation

University Policies:

Academic Integrity: As stated in the Samford University 2016-17 catalog, “students, upon enrollment, enter into voluntary association with Samford University. They must be willing to observe high standards of intellectual integrity; they must respect knowledge and practice academic honesty.” Unless specified otherwise, students are expected to do their own independent work, and to refrain from cheating, copying or plagiarizing the work of others. When drawing from various resources for assignments, students must provide citations, footnotes and bibliographic information.

Accommodation: Students with disabilities who wish to request accommodations should register with Disability Resources (205) 726-4078, disability@samford.edu, University Center 205, www.samford.edu/dr. Students who are registered with Disability Resources are responsible for providing me with a copy of their accommodation letter and scheduling a meeting with me to discuss how their approved accommodations will apply to this course. Accommodations will not be implemented until we have met to review your accommodation letter.

Emergency Readiness: RAVE is the primary method of communication used by Samford University during a campus emergency. If you have not registered for RAVE alerts, please use the link provided below and go to the My Contact Information box on your Portal homepage to update your RAVE Emergency Alert Information. <https://connect.samford.edu/group/mycampus/student> Samford University utilizes *Samford Alert* for desktop, laptop, tablet, and mobile devices to provide students with information, procedures, and links about what to do in the event of a variety of emergency situations that could occur on our campus. If you do not already have the *Samford Alert* app on your mobile device, laptop, desktop, or tablet, please click on this link <https://connect.samford.edu/group/mycampus/student> and go to the *In Case of Emergency* box on your Portal homepage for instructions on downloading the App. Once you have downloaded the App, please take time to review the information provided, it is important that you know what to do in the case of a campus emergency.

Title IX Policy: Samford University is committed to the creation and maintenance of a safe learning environment for students and the University community. In accordance with federal policy all University employees are required to report information related to discrimination and harassment which includes, but is not limited to, sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, and sexual harassment. For this reason, if you tell a faculty member about a situation of sexual harassment or sexual violence or other related misconduct, the faculty member must share that information with the University Title IX Coordinator. If you wish to speak with an employee who is not required to report information, you can find a list of confidential resources listed in the online student handbook and the Title IX website.