

**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  
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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**