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LIT 391.01: ST - James Baldwin

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LIT 391.01

James Baldwin

Instructor Information

Robert Baker (543-4135 / robert.baker@mso.umt.edu)

Spring 2019

TR 2:00 – 3:20

LA 105

Office Hours: TR 11:30 – 1:00 or by appointment (LA 219)

Course Description

James Baldwin (1924-87) is one of the great American writers of the last century. Black, gay, shaped by the Christian religion he broke with as a young man, indebted to the blues tradition, a modernist defender of the distinctive space of art and a politically engaged realist, at once generously receptive and passionately polemical, he is not only an important novelist but also a gifted essayist whose book-length essays on the major issues of the civil rights movement were so influential as to land him on the cover of *Time* magazine. His essays of the sixties and seventies, taking up a range of issues within the civil rights movement, read like a social and psychological seismograph of these years. In this course we will read four of Baldwin's novels, quite a few of his essays (including two of his book-length essays), and one or two of his stories. We will explore his work as both a novelist and an essayist, his vision of American history, his way of thinking about identity, and his complex responses to the political conflicts of his time.

Course Requirements

Reading of all assigned texts

Regular attendance and engagement

Two short papers (5-7 pages)

One longer final paper (10-12 pages)

Texts

James Baldwin

Go Tell It on the Mountain

Notes of a Native Son

Giovanni's Room

Nobody Knows My Name

Another Country

The Fire Next Time

Going to Meet the Man

No Name in the Street

If Beale Street Could Talk

Kwame Anthony Appiah

The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity

Essays and Interviews on Moodle

Learning Outcomes

- Acquire detailed knowledge about the life, work, and larger historical context of a major American writer, James Baldwin
- Become more skilled at writing a persuasive, articulate, insightful essay about a literary text and its place in a writer's trajectory as a whole and/or in a larger social context
- Gain experience in engaging a writer's work through a range of secondary sources

Map of Course

*There may be slight changes as we move along.

R Jan 10

Introduction

Toni Morrison, "James Baldwin: His Voice Remembered; Life in His Language"

Ta-Nehisi Coates, "Notes from the Seventh Year" (from *We Were Eight Years in Power*)

T Jan 15

Go Tell It on the Mountain

R Jan 17

Go Tell It on the Mountain

T Jan 22

Go Tell It on the Mountain

R Jan 24

Go Tell It on the Mountain

T Jan 29

Notes of a Native Son

R Jan 31

Notes of a Native Son

T Feb 5

Giovanni's Room

R Feb 7

Giovanni's Room

*** Paper I Due ***

T Feb 12

“Preservation of Innocence” and “Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood”

“Go the Way Your Blood Beats’: An Interview with James Baldwin” by Richard Goldstein

R Feb 14

“Sonny’s Blues” (in *Going to Meet the Man*) and “The Uses of the Blues”

“This Morning, This Evening, So Soon” (in *Going to Meet the Man*)

T Feb 19

Nobody Knows My Name

R Feb 21

Nobody Knows My Name

“An Interview with James Baldwin” by Studs Terkel

T Feb 26

Another Country

R Feb 28

Another Country

T Mar 5

Another Country

R Mar 7

Another Country

T Mar 12

“They Can’t Turn Back” and “The Dangerous Road Before Martin Luther King”

R Mar 14

The Fire Next Time

*** Paper II Due ***

T Mar 19

The Fire Next Time

Martin Luther King, “Letter from Birmingham City Jail”

R Mar 21

“Lorraine Hansberry at the Summit” and “The American Dream and the American Negro”

Lynn Orilla Scott, “Challenging the American Conscience, Re-Imagining the American Identity: James Baldwin and the Civil Rights Movement”

T Mar 26

Spring Break

R Mar 28

Spring Break

T Apr 2

Clayborne Carson, “Racial Separatism” and “Black Power” (from *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*)

Terry Anderson, “Days of Decision” (from *The Movement and the Sixties*)

R Apr 4

No Name In the Street

T Apr 9

No Name in the Street

R Apr 11

Henry Louis Gates, Jr, “The Fire Last Time”

Douglas Field, “Looking for Jimmy Baldwin: Sex, Privacy, and Black Nationalist Fervor”

T Apr 16

If Beale Street Could Talk

R Apr 18

If Beale Street Could Talk

T Apr 23

“The Price of the Ticket”

Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Lies That Bind*, “Introduction,” “Classification,” “Color,” “Culture,” “Coda”

R Apr 25

Review

*** Final Paper: Due on Monday 29 April by 10:00 a.m. ***

Department and University Policies

Department Assessment

The English Department’s process of curriculum assessment requires that faculty read student papers, outside of specific courses, to measure the progress students are making as they move through the program. One of your papers may be selected to be evaluated in this assessment process. If so, all identifying information will be removed, and no evaluation of your work outside the course will have any effect on your grade. If you wish that your work not be read a second time in this context, please let me know, and I will make sure that none of your work is forwarded to the assessment committee.

Disability Accommodation

It is university policy that students with disabilities receive reasonable accommodations in their course-work. If you wish to request accommodations, please do contact me early in the semester, and I will work with you and Disability Services to make sure that the necessary accommodations are made. For more information, call 406.243.2243 (Voice/Text), or visit the [Disability Services website](#).