



English 370 – 1

Spring 2013

## Literary New Orleans A Tocqueville Seminar

“New Orleans resembles Genoa or Marseilles, or Beirut or the Egyptian Alexandria more than it does New York, although all seaports resemble one another more than they can resemble any place in the interior. Like Havana and Port-au-Prince, New Orleans is within the orbit of a Hellenistic world that never touched the North Atlantic. The Mediterranean, Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico form a homogeneous, though interrupted, sea.”

A. J. Liebling, 1961

**Professor Suzanne Jones**, Ryland Hall 308, 289-8307, email "sjones@richmond.edu"

**Office Hours:** TR 2:45 – 3:30 p.m., and by appointment

### Course Description:

Americans have long been fascinated with New Orleans. Its tropical climate, its racially and ethnically diverse population, its mixing of peoples and cultures, its distinctive architecture, cuisine, and music, and even the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina have distinguished it to many as the most “foreign” city in the United States. From its origins, New Orleans has been both praised and denigrated, but almost always, it’s been thought of as America’s “exotic other.” In this course we will discuss how American writers have represented New Orleans in literature and film from the late nineteenth century to the present. We will analyze how some of the country’s most interesting writers have engaged the city—its geography, culture, and myths—as we compare the representations of New Orleans by natives, such as George Washington Cable and Alice Dunbar-Nelson, to those by newcomers, such as Kate Chopin, William Faulkner, and Tennessee Williams, and by frequent visitors, such as Eudora Welty and Robert Olen Butler. Literary critic Lewis Simpson has argued that early on “the literary imagination isolated the Vieux Carré as the only interesting setting in the city thereby reducing the whole expanding city to one of its small parts,” but recent writers such as Walker Percy, John Gregory Brown, Christine Wiltz, and Brenda Marie Osbey, and filmmakers Spike Lee and J. Leo Chiang, have put other neighborhoods on the map: Gentilly, Uptown, the Garden District, Tremé, the lower Ninth Ward, and New Orleans East. Over the course of the semester, students’ short research essays will be published online as part of a collaborative interactive map of Literary New Orleans. The map can be found at <http://dsl.richmond.edu/tocqueville.richmond.edu/LiteraryNewOrleans.html>, and the WordPress blog, which will host the essays for the map, is at <http://urliteraryneworleans.wordpress.com/>. Streetcar image courtesy of “*NewOrleansOnline.com*.”

### Primary Texts

- Peirce Lewis. *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape*. Second Edition. Santa Fe, New Mexico: Center for American Places, Inc., 2003.
- George Washington Cable. *The Granddissimes*. [1880] Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988.
- Kate Chopin. *The Awakening*. [1899] New York: Dover Publications, 1993.
- William Faulkner. *Absalom, Absalom!* [1936] New York: Vintage International, 1990.
- Tennessee Williams. *A Streetcar Named Desire*. [1947] New York: New Directions, 2004.
- Walker Percy. *The Moviegoer*. [1961] New York: Vintage International, 1998.
- John Gregory Brown. *Decorations in a Ruined Cemetery*. [1994] New York: Avon Books, 1995.
- Christine Wiltz. *Glass House*. [1994] Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001.
- Brenda Marie Osbey. *All Saints*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997.
- Robert Olen Butler. *A Small Hotel*. [2011] New York: Grove Press, 2112.

### Films

- A Streetcar Named Desire*. Dir. Elia Kazan. Screenplay by Tennessee Williams. Starring Vivien Leigh, Marlon Brando, Kim Hunter, Karl Malden. Warner Brothers, 1951. 122 minutes.
- Interview with the Vampire*. Directed by Neil Jordan. Screenplay by Anne Rice. Starring Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt. Geffen Pictures, 2000. 122 minutes.
- Faubourg Tremé: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans*. Directed by Dawn Logsdon. Written by Lolis Eric Elie. California Newsreel, 2007. 68 minutes.
- When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts*. Directed by Spike Lee. Forty Acres and a Mule Film Works, 2005. 4 hours, 17 minutes.
- A Village Called Versailles*. Directed by S. Leo Chiang. Walking Iris Films, 2009. 67 minutes.

### Works on Electronic Reserve

To access the following selections, go to the Boatwright Library's home page, <http://library.richmond.edu/>, scroll down, and click on "Course Reserves" under "Students."

Simpson, Lewis P. "New Orleans as a Literary Center: Some Problems." *Literary New Orleans: Essays and Meditations*. Ed. Richard S. Kennedy. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992. (pp. 77-86)

Dunbar-Nelson, Alice. "Stones of the Village." [circa 1900-10] *Works of Alice Dunbar-Nelson*. Volume 3. Ed. Gloria T. Hull. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. (pp. 3-33) PS3507 .U6228 1988 v.3.

----- . "Brass Ankles Speaks." [circa 1928-1931] *Works of Alice Dunbar-Nelson*. Volume 2. Ed. Gloria T. Hull. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. (pp. 311-321) PS3507 .U6228 1988 v.2

Faulkner, William. from *Mosquitoes*. [1927] *Literary New Orleans*. Ed. Judy Long. *Literary New Orleans*. Athens, Georgia: Hill Street Press, 1999. (pp. 93-113) PS559.N49 L58 1999

Percy, Walker. "The City of the Dead." [1984] *Signposts in a Strange Land*. Ed. Patrick Samway. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1991. (pp. 23-25) PS3566.E6912 S57 1991.

----- . From "The Loss of the Creature." *The Message in the Bottle*. New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1975. (pp. 46-56) PS3566.E69 12 M4.

----- . "Why I Live Where I Live." [1980] *Signposts in a Strange Land*. Ed. Patrick Samway. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1991. (pp. 3-9) PS3566.E6912 S57 1991.

Welty, Eudora. "No Place for You, My Love." *The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1980. (pp. 465-481) PS 3545.E6 A15 1980. First published in *The New Yorker*, 25 September 1952 and then collected in Welty's *The Bride of the Innisfallen and Other Stories*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955.

----- . "Place in Fiction." *The Eye of the Story: Selected Essays and Reviews*. New York: Random House, 1978. PS3545.E6 E9.

Dent, Tom. "secret messages." [1976] *Literary New Orleans*. Ed. Judy Long. Athens, GA: Hill Street Press, 1999.

**Books about place in literature and about the cultural and literary history and the social geography of New Orleans; all are on four-hour reserve in Boatwright Library:**

Barker, Deborah E. Barker, and Kathryn McKee, ed. *American Cinema and the Southern Imaginary*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011. PN1995.9 .S66 A44 2011.

Berry, Kate A. and Martha L. Henderson, ed. *Geographical Identities of Ethnic America: Race, Space, and Place*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2002. E184 .A1 B44 2002. See "Creating Vietnamese Landscapes and Place in New Orleans" by Christopher A. Airriess.

Bryan, Violet Harrington. *The Myth of New Orleans in Literature*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993. PS267.N49 B78 1993.

Campanella, Richard. *Geographies of New Orleans : Urban Fabrics Before the Storm* . Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 2006. HN80 .N45 C36 2006

Campanella, Richard. *Time and Place in New Orleans : Past Geographies in the Present Day*. Gretna: Pelican Publishing Company, 2002. F379 .N557 C24 2002.

Eckstein, Barbara J. *Sustaining New Orleans: Literature, Local Memory, and the Fate of a City*. NY: Routledge, 2006. PS267.N49E27 2006.

Jones, Richard C., ed. *Immigrants Outside Megalopolis : Ethnic Transformation in the Heartland*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008. JV6465.I46 2008. See especially "Spaces and Places of Adaptation in an Ethnic Vietnamese Cluster in New Orleans, Louisiana" by Christopher Airriess.

Kaplan, David H. and Wei Li, ed. *Landscapes of the Ethnic Economy*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006. HT215.L36 2006. See "How geography shapes the ethnic economy" by the editors and "Scaling Central Place of an Ethnic-Vietnamese Commercial Enclave in New

Orleans, Louisiana” by Christopher Airriess.

Kennedy, Richard S., ed. *Literary New Orleans: Essays and Meditations*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992. PS 267.N49L58 1998.

----- ed. *Literary New Orleans in the Modern World*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998. PS267.N49.L583 1998.

Larson, Susan. *The Booklover’s Guide to New Orleans*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999.

Lipsitz, George. “New Orleans Today: We Know This Place.” *How Racism Takes Place*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011. E185.615.L5765 2011.

Long, Judy, ed. *Literary New Orleans*. Athens, Georgia: Hill Street Press, 1999. PS559.N49 L58 1999

Lutwack, Leonard. *The Role of Place in Literature*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1984. PN56.S48. L8.

Marshall, Bill. *The French Atlantic, Travels in Culture and History*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009. See especially Chapter Five, “Common Routes to New Orleans.” DC59.8.N7M37 2009.

Schein, Richard H., ed. *Landscape and Race in the United States*. New York: Routledge, 2006. E184 .A1 L256 2006. See especially, “Historical Geographies of Race in a New Orleans Afro-Creole Landscape” by Michael Crutcher.

#### Online resources:

Bonner, Tom. “New Orleans and its Writers: Burdens of Place,” *The Mississippi Quarterly* 63.1-2 (Winter-Spring 2010): 195-210. Search the journal title.

Kowalewski, Michael. “Writing in Place: The New American Regionalism,” *American Literary History* 6.1 (Spring 1994): 171-183. Search the journal title.

Lowe, John, ed. *Louisiana Culture from the Colonial Era to Katrina*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008. An ebook.

#### Course Outline:      **“Laissez les bon temps roulez.”**

Tues. Jan. 15            Introduction: New Orleans in the Literary Imagination  
**Welty**, “Place in Fiction” (e-reserve)  
**Percy**, from “The Loss of the Creature” (e-reserve)  
**Simpson**, “New Orleans as a Literary Center: Some Problems” (e-reserve)

Thurs. Jan. 17            **Workshop** with Reference Librarian, **Marcia Whitehead**, and Academic Technology Consultant, **Ken Warren**, in **Boatwright Library, Room B 26**

### “The Crescent City”: Place and Identity

“The old French part of New Orleans—anciently the Spanish part—bears no resemblance to the American end of the city.”

Mark Twain, 1883

“New Orleans was a mystery and a promise.”

Oliver La Farge, 1945

- Tues. Jan. 22      **Lewis**, *New Orleans*, “Eccentric City” 3-18  
**Cable**, *The Grandissimes* 1-89
- Thurs. Jan. 24      **Cable**, *The Grandissimes* 90-168; **Ken Warren**, Mapping Workshop
- Tues. Jan. 29      **Cable**, *The Grandissimes* 169-262
- Thurs. Jan. 31      **Cable**, *The Grandissimes* 263-339
- Tues. Feb. 5      **Lewis**, *New Orleans*, “Internal Divisions” 44-47; “The Street Pattern” 47-50;  
“Racial Geography” 50-52; “Regularities in an Irregular City” 52-53  
**Dunbar-Nelson**, “Stones of the Village,” “Brass Ankles Speaks” (e-reserve)
- Thurs. Feb. 7      **Chopin**, *The Awakening* 1-56
- Tues. Feb. 12      **Mardi Gras lunch**, noon, Dining Hall  
**Chopin**, *The Awakening* 56-116
- Thurs. Feb. 14      **Faulkner**, excerpt from *Mosquitoes*, optional (e-reserve)  
**Faulkner**, *Absalom, Absalom!* 1-69
- Tues. Feb. 19      **Faulkner**, *Absalom, Absalom!* 70-140
- Thurs. Feb. 21      **Faulkner**, *Absalom, Absalom!* 141-234
- Tues. Feb. 26      **Faulkner**, *Absalom, Absalom!* 235-303
- Thurs. Feb. 28      **Brown**, *Decorations in a Ruined Cemetery* 1-124
- Tues. Mar. 5      **Brown**, *Decorations in a Ruined Cemetery* 125-244  
**Conversation with John Gregory Brown**

### “The Big Easy”: Myths and Manners

“In the Vieux Carré of New Orleans, and in the Vieux Carré alone, you will find that lingering charm of the Old World, that remnant of a bygone culture which is unique in America.”

Lyle Saxon, 1928

“When the fact is made secondary to the desire to live, to love, and to understand life, it may be that we will have in more American cities a charm of place such as one finds in the older parts of New Orleans now.”  
 Sherwood Anderson, 1922

- Thurs. Mar. 7           **Faulkner**, excerpt from *Mosquitoes* (e-reserve)  
**Welty**, “Place in Fiction,” “No Place for You, My Love” (e-reserve)
- Spring Break**
- Tues. Mar. 19           **Williams**, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Scenes 1-6
- Wed. March 20           Screening of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, MRC Adams Auditorium, 9-11 pm
- Thurs. Mar. 21           **Williams**, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Scenes 7-11
- Tues. Mar. 26           **Percy**, “Why I Live Where I Live” (e-reserve)  
**Percy**, *The Moviegoer* 1-116
- Thurs. Mar. 28           **Percy**, *The Moviegoer* 117-242  
 Lecture by **Professor Helen Taylor**, “From ‘The Big Easy’ to ‘My City of Ruins: The Transformation of British and European Relationships with New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina,” Jepson Lounge, 4:30 pm
- Mon, Apr. 1              Screening of film, *Interview with the Vampire*, MRC Room #4, 6-8 pm
- Tues. Apr. 2              **Percy**, “The City of the Dead” (e-reserve)  
**Rice**, film *Interview with the Vampire*

### “The City That Care Forgot”: The Paradox of Contemporary New Orleans

“Without its pagan and decadent ambience, its strip shows, hookers, burlesque spielers, taxi pimps, and brain-damaged street dopers, the city would be as attractive to most tourists as an agrarian theme park in western Nebraska.”  
 James Lee Burke, 1993

“New Orleans cannot truly be called a fine city while a part of its population lives in physical and intellectual privation and has little hope of escaping.”  
 Peirce Lewis, 2003

- Thurs. Apr. 4           **Lewis**, *New Orleans*, “Tourism in New Orleans” 154-161  
**Dent**, “Secret Messages” (e-reserve)  
**Lewis**, *New Orleans*, “Racial Geography & the Future of New Orleans” 95-100  
**Osbey**, from *All Saints*: “Invocation,” “Alberta,” “House of the Dead Remembering,” “Peculiar Fascination with the Dead,” “Faubourg,” “Faubourg Study No. 3: The Seven Sisters of New Orleans,” “Everything Happens to (Monk and) Me,” “Mother Catherine,” “Suicide City”

- Tues. Apr. 9            **Logsdon and Elie**, *Faubourg Tremé*  
**Lewis**, *New Orleans*, “Yet Still a Fine City?” 101-04, “End of the Boom” 121-37  
**Wiltz**, *Glass House* 1-95
- Thurs. Apr. 11        **Lewis**, *New Orleans*, “A New Population Geography” 138-153  
**Wiltz**, *Glass House* 96-189
- Mon. Apr. 15         Screening of *When the Levees Broke*, MRC Room #4, 6-10 pm
- Tues. Apr. 16        **Lewis**, *New Orleans*, “Menace of Hurricanes” 81-83; “Rising Water” 162-171  
**Lee**, *When the Levees Broke*  
**Elie**, clips from *Faubourg Tremé*
- Wed. Apr. 17         Screening of *A Village Called Versailles*, Adams Auditorium, 9-10 pm
- Thurs. Apr. 18        **Chiang**, *A Village Called Versailles*
- Tues. Apr. 23         **Butler**, *A Small Hotel* 1-136
- Thurs. Apr. 25        **Butler**, *A Small Hotel* 136-241  
5:30 pm                **Dinner**, Lady N’Awlins Cajun Café, 2329 W. Main Street, Richmond, VA
- Thurs. May 2         **Final Examination, 9 – 12 noon**

## Requirements

**1. Three short oral presentations and short research essays.** Before your presentation, consult with me about your plans. Follow MLA citation style for each essay. In choosing images that are in the public domain for your essays, you may find helpful this page on the UR Writers Web: <http://writing2.richmond.edu/writing/wweb/ccimages.html>. When you have polished your essay for the final time, you will post it on our class blog, and provide information on a Google Doc so that your essay can be linked to a map of “Literary New Orleans.” This map and the blog will be public.

**A. Biographical analysis.** Write a short research essay (1000-1250 words) explaining this writer’s relationship with New Orleans. You should not attempt to write about the author’s entire life, but rather focus on his or her time in New Orleans. Be sure to note the dates that the author lived there and the date the work we’re discussing was published. Find an appropriate image(s) of the writer, and if you can, another image of significance to the author and/or time period, such as where he or she lived or frequented, or some pertinent cultural image. Also if possible pinpoint on a Google map street view the location in New Orleans where the author lived (if deceased) or frequented, noting the address in your essay and providing a Google map link to the street view, though this location will not be noted on the comprehensive map. On the first day that we discuss that author’s work, you will present your findings orally to the seminar, taking about 8-10 minutes to share your most significant findings and the images. Based on feedback from the class, you will then have a chance to revise your essay as needed; the revision is due about a week after the presentation.

**B. Literary analysis.** Write a short research essay (1000-1250 words) about how New Orleans and/or its culture is used in one of the works we will be reading. Pinpoint on a Google Map the street view of the neighborhood where the literary work is set, and record this information and the location on the Google doc for our comprehensive map of New Orleans. Find a current image or two of significance to go with your essay. Perhaps you can find an historical image. On the last day that we discuss the work, you will make an 8-10 minute oral presentation to the seminar. Based on feedback from the class, you will then have a chance to revise your essay as needed; the revision is due about a week after the presentation.

**C. Mapping analysis.** This third project will be either a combined biographical/literary analysis with mapping in relation to a writer and his or her work that we're only spending one day on OR a more comprehensive map of key places mentioned in a novel that we are spending at least a week on, accompanied by an analysis of the significance of your findings.

**2. Class participation.** Because participation in class discussion will count as part of your final grade, absences will lower your final grade. So will failure to do the readings scheduled by the dates due or failure to insert on the Google.doc spreadsheet the appropriate information needed for our collaborative map.

### Grading

Your grade will be based on short research essays accompanied by power-point presentations with images and on their successful upload to our website (20% each), on class participation (20%), and a final examination (20%). Your essays will be graded on content, form, style, and mechanics. See grading standards below.

### Support Services at the University of Richmond

If you experience difficulties in this course, do not hesitate to consult with me. There are also other resources that can support your efforts to meet the requirements of this course, especially, but not limited to:

Speech Center (<http://speech.richmond.edu>)

Writing Center (<http://writing.richmond.edu>).

### Criteria for Grading Written Work

**A** A superior essay which 1) develops and follows a clear, sophisticated and consistent thesis based upon a thorough and comprehensive reading of the text, 2) is well organized into unified, clearly developed paragraphs which make thorough use of textual evidence that is fully explained and analyzed to support the central assertion or argument of that paragraph, and 3) displays skill not only in analyzing the work as a whole, but in returning to the work and clearly and fully analyzing how specific techniques produce meaning in the text as a whole. The paper as a whole displays careful reading and original, thoughtful presentation of the theme of the work and the way that the text works to present that theme. There should be no major grammatical or syntactic errors.



- B** A well-developed, coherent essay which 1) develops and follows a clear and consistent thesis based upon a careful reading of the text, 2) is well organized into unified, clearly developed paragraphs which contain adequate textual evidence that is explained and analyzed to support the central assertion or argument of that paragraph, though there may be one or two places where an assertion is made without completely adequate support or development, and 3) attempts not only to analyze the work as a whole, but to return to the work and analyze how specific techniques function within the framework of the work. There should be no major grammatical or syntactic errors, and few typing errors.
- C** A generally coherent essay which 1) usually follows a consistent thesis based upon a careful, if not always thorough, reading of the text, 2) follows a generally reasonable organization of paragraphs (though some disorganization may be apparent) which makes some use of textual evidence and displays an attempt to analyze that evidence to support the paragraph's central argument, though the explanation is not always clear or the analysis not always complete, 3) shows several lapses in tone such as repeated use of colloquialisms, ill-conceived attempts at humor, and a tendency to fall back upon impressions as a source of support, and 4) displays little attempt to explore the techniques of the work beyond what is just necessary to support the argument, and thus misses important techniques or skips over sections of the work which complicate the work's meaning. There may be a few points where clarity suffers from awkward phrasing, poor grammar, garbled syntax, or poor diction, but these problems should be somewhat isolated.
- D** A poorly developed, vague essay which 1) suggests a tentative thesis, but fails to fully articulate or develop it, and tends to digress towards barely related discussions, or presents no thesis at all but still manages some enlightened, if unstructured discussion of the work, 2) has serious problems with organization and often contains un-unified, short, and underdeveloped paragraphs which make inadequate use of textual evidence, or provide some evidence but no supporting analysis, 3) contains several major misreadings which suggest a serious lack of understanding of the work, 4) displays a completely inappropriate tone, and 5) displays no attempt to analyze or understand the work beyond a few isolated places in the text which are used as the shaky basis of the paper's meaning. The clarity of the essay is likely to be seriously marred by very awkward phrasing, poor grammar, garbled syntax, or poor diction (although major problems in the areas listed here could justify a D grade in even a grammatically perfect essay).
- F** An essay which, 1) follows no thesis, even though one may be stated somewhere in the essay, 2) is thoroughly disorganized, containing very short paragraphs with no support, development, or relationships from one to the next, 3) offers no interpretation at all, but merely a string of insubstantial observations about the work, 4) displays a completely inappropriate tone, and 5) displays no attempt to pursue any analysis of the text. The essay may be completely unclear or incoherent.

### **Criteria for Grading Class Participation**

- A** A student who works at this level demonstrates excellent preparation. S/he has not only read the text, but has analyzed the text exceptionally well and relates it to other readings and other discussions. S/he offers analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. S/he keeps analysis

focused on the text and the issues involved, responds very thoughtfully to other students' comments, contributes to co-operative interpretation, suggests alternative readings, and helps analyze which approaches and interpretations are appropriate.

- B** A student at his level demonstrates good preparation. S/he knows the text well and has thought through some of the implications. S/he contributes regularly, comments on more than just the facts, responds to other students' points, questions them in a constructive way, and offers and supports his or her own independent interpretation backed up by the text.
- C** A student at this level demonstrates adequate preparation. S/he has read the text but shows no evidence of trying to analyze or interpret it. S/he contributes infrequently and without elaboration. S/he rarely offers to contribute to discussion, but does so when called on.
- D** A student at this level does not contribute, and if called on, does not offer much.
- F** Student at this level is absent.