

African and African American Studies 130x
Richard Wright: Literature, Philosophy, and Politics
Harvard College—Fall 2014; Weds. 1-3; Barker Center 24

Prof. Glenda R. Carpio, carpio@fas.harvard.edu, Barker Center (office hours Tues. 2:30-4pm and by appointment).

Prof. Tommie Shelby, tshelby@fas.harvard.edu, Barker Center 242 (office hours Weds. 3-5 and by appointment).

Course Description:

This course examines the major fiction and nonfiction works of Richard Wright from a literary, philosophical, and political perspective. We will take an interdisciplinary approach to this wide-ranging and canonical American author, contextualizing him within the broader tradition of black letters. Readings include but are not limited to *Uncle Tom's Children*, *Native Son*, *Black Boy (American Hunger)*, *12 Million Black Voices*, *The Outsider*, *Black Power*, *The Color Curtain*, *White Man Listen!*, *The Long Dream*, and *Eight Men*. The course also explores major influences in Wright's development including the work of Marx, Sartre, and Freud.

Required Texts:

- Richard Wright, *Early Works: Lawd Today! Uncle Tom's Children, Native Son* (The Library of America, 1991)
- Richard Wright, *Later Works: Black Boy (American Hunger), The Outsider* (The Library of America, 1991)
- Richard Wright, *Twelve Million Black Voices* (Basic Books, 2002)
- Richard Wright, *Black Power: Three Books from Exile: Black Power; The Color Curtain; and White Man Listen!* (Harper Perennial, 2008)
- Richard Wright, *Savage Holiday* (University of Mississippi Press, 1992)
- Richard Wright, *Eight Men* (Harper Perennial, 2008)
- Richard Wright, *The Long Dream* (Northeastern University, 1958).

Sources marked (x) are available through our course iSite

Recommended Texts:

- Michel Fabre, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright* (Univ. of Illinois Press)
- Michel Fabre, ed. *The Richard Wright Reader* (Da Capo Press)
- Hazel Rowley, *Richard Wright: The Life and Times* (Univ. of Chicago Press)

Course Requirements:

Undergraduates: Regular, active attendance; oral presentation in class (may be based on short task or paper project); weekly responses to prompts (1-2 pages); two essays (8-10 pages each) one due on Oct. 13th by 5pm and the other on Dec. 8th by 5 p.m. Your final grade will

comprise the following: 10% for class participation in seminar discussion (attendance will be taken into account); 10% for weekly response papers; 20% for the class presentation, 30% for the first paper; 30% for the second paper. A list of possible topics will be circulated.

Graduate Students: Regular, active attendance; oral presentation in class (based on term paper project); bibliography and abstract for term paper (due Nov. 1st via email); and term project (ca. 15 to 20 page paper) due on Dec. 8th by 5 p.m. Your final grade will comprise the following: 10% for class participation in seminar discussion (attendance will be taken into account); 20% for the class presentation; 30% for the bibliography, abstract, and the first draft of your research paper (to be discussed with Prof. Carpio or Prof. Shelby at office hours); 40% for the final draft of your essay. A list of possible topics will be circulated.

Accommodations for students with disabilities:

Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the [Accessible Education Office](#) (AEO) and speak with me by the end of the second week of the term (September 16). Failure to do so may result in my inability to respond in a timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential, although Faculty are invited to contact AEO to discuss appropriate implementation.

Collaboration Policy:

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work and learning. For writing assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics, to discuss readings, and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers, particularly if you are working on the same topic as a classmate. *However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own ideas and approach to the topic.* You must also adhere to standard citation practices and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work. If you received any help with your writing (feedback on drafts, etc.), you must also acknowledge this assistance.

Schedule of Readings:

Sept. 3rd: **Introduction. *For our first meeting please read:*** “Blueprint for Negro Writing” (1937), and “Long Black Song” (in *Uncle Tom’s Children*, Library of America edition, *Early Works*: 329-354) (x, both available through the course iSite)

Sept. 10th: Early short fiction: *Uncle Tom’s Children* (1938); Carla Capetti, “Sociology of an Existence: Richard Wright and the Chicago School” (x).

Recommended: Abdul JanMohamed, “Rehistoricizing Wright: The Psychopolitical Function of Death in *Uncle Tom’s Children*,” in *Richard Wright*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), pp. 191-228.

Sept 17th: First major novel: *Native Son* (1940)

Sept 24th: Autobiography: *Black Boy/American Hunger* (1945)

Oct. 1st: *12 Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro in the United States* (1941); “I Tried to Be a Communist” (1944); “Introduction” to *Black Metropolis* [1945; xvii-xxxiv]; “How Bigger Was Born” (x); “I Choose Exile” (1951); Nicholas Rinehart, “Native Sons; or, How ‘Bigger’ Was Born Again”

Oct. 8th: “White” novel: *Savage Holiday* (1954): Stephan Kuhl, “Guilty Children: Richard Wright’s *Savage Holiday* and Fredrick Wertham’s ‘Dark Legend’” (x)

Oct. 15th: Later Works: *The Outsider* (1953)

Oct. 22nd: “The Man Who Lived Underground” from *Eight Men; Pagan Spain* (1954) (selections); Jay Garcia, “Richard Wright: The Unconscious Machinery of Race Relations” (x); Michel Fabre, “Richard Wright and the French Existentialists” (x)

Oct. 29th: *Black Power* (1954); Cornel West, “Four Traditions of Response,” from *Prophesy Deliverance!* (x)

Nov. 5th: *The Long Dream* (1958)

Nov. 12th: *The Color Curtain* (1956), skim the whole but focus on pp. 437-443, 529-552, 569-609; *White Man Listen!* (1957)

Nov. 19th: Selected Secondary Sources on Richard Wright:

James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel” from *Notes of a Native Son* (x)

Ralph Ellison, “Richard Wright’s Blues” from *The Antioch Review* (x)

Paul Gilroy “Richard Wright, France, and the Ambivalence of Community,” from *The Black Atlantic* (x)

Sherley Anne Williams, “Papa Dick and Sister-Woman: Reflections on Women in the Fiction of Richard Wright,” in *Richard Wright: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Arnold Rampersad (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1995), pp. 63-82

Cedric Robinson, “Richard Wright and the Critique of Class Theory,” from *Black Marxism* (x)

Nov. 26th: Thanksgiving Holiday

Dec. 3rd Student Presentations