

FRSEMR 32R: Autobiography and Black Freedom Struggles

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Wednesdays 2:30-4:30, Barker Center 316

Office Hours Mondays 5:00-6:00, Wednesdays 1:30-2:30, Barker Center 242

Description: This freshmen seminar introduces the main traditions of African American political thought and the history of the black fight for justice through the genre of autobiography. Students will read some classic autobiographies by African Americans (for example, those by Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington), along with some lesser-known works (for instance, autobiographies by Ida B. Wells and Angela Davis). They will discover how an influential set of black individuals, both men and women, came to political consciousness and participated in the collective struggle for justice in America and beyond. Students will reflect on these figures' personal struggles to find meaning and solace under unjust conditions and to forge dignified modes of resistance.

The seminar provides an opportunity to see how these personalities interpreted key events and periods in U.S. history—the era of slavery, Reconstruction, the Jim Crow era, the two World Wars, the Great Depression, the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement—as social actors who participated in and lived through them. Close attention will be paid to their engagement with and contributions to the political traditions of liberalism, conservatism, socialism, black nationalism, and feminism. And students will critically examine how these influential thinkers and activists understood ideals like freedom, equality, democracy, fairness, and tolerance.

Structure: Each week one student will initiate group discussion with a short (10 minutes) commentary on the assigned reading. The discussion will be guided by this initial response and by a set of reading questions to be provided by the instructor.

Requirements: Students will (1) write three brief (500 words) response papers over the course of the term (each on a different book), (2) make a brief (10 minutes) presentation, and (3) write a final essay (3500-4500 words) comparing two autobiographies on some theme or question (December 8th). Students are expected to be active and informed participants in seminar discussion, which requires doing the reading in advance of each meeting.

Reading Assignments (* = available as an e-book from the course reading reserves list]):

September 7. Harriet Ann Jacobs. [1861] *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*. * Norton, 2001.

September 14. Frederick Douglass. [1892] *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*. * Dover Publications, 2003. Read Part I, Chapters 1-21; Part II, Chapters 1-5.

September 21. Frederick Douglass. [1892] *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*.* Dover Publications, 2003. Read Part II, Chapters 6-19.

September 28. Booker T. Washington. [1901] *Up from Slavery*.* Norton, 1996.

October 5. Ida B. Wells. [1931] *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*. University of Chicago Press, 2013. Read Preface, Chapters 1-11, 16, 18, 20-21, 27-33, 35, 37.

October 12. W. E. B. Du Bois. [1940] *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*.* Oxford University Press, 2007. Read Chapters 1-7.

October 19. Malcolm X, [1965] *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.* (Ballantine Books, 1992. Read Chapters 1-11.

October 26. Malcolm X, [1965] *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.* (Ballantine Books, 1992. Read Chapters 12-19.

November 2. Martin Luther King, Jr. (Ed. Clayborne Carson). *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Grand Central Publishing, 2001. Read Chapters 1-18.

November 9. Martin Luther King, Jr. (Ed. Clayborne Carson). *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Grand Central Publishing, 2001. Read Chapters 19-32.

November 16. Angela Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*.* International Publishers, 1988. Read pp. 3-216.

November 30. Angela Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*.* International Publishers, 1988. Read pp. 216-400.