

American Protest Literature from Tom Paine to Tupac

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Course Description:

This interdisciplinary course examines the rich tradition of progressive protest literature in the United States from the American Revolution to the rise of globalization, Hip Hop, and modern-day slavery. Using a broad definition of “protest literature,” we focus on the production and consumption of dissent as a site of social critique, using a wide variety of print, visual, and oral forms. We examine the historical links between forms of protest, social change, and meanings of literature; and we explore how various expressions of dissent function as political, ideological, rhetorical, aesthetic, and performative texts within specific cultural contexts. “Readings” range from novels and political pamphlets to photographs, music, sociology, and history.

Required Texts:

Zoe Trodd, ed., American Protest Literature (Harvard)
Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John McMillian, eds., Protest Nation (New Press)
Tom Paine, Common Sense (Penguin Classics)
David Walker’s Appeal . . . to the Coloured Citizens of the World (Hill and Wang)
Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass: The First (1855) Edition (Penguin)
Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom’s Cabin (Norton Critical Edition)
Rebecca Harding Davis, Life in the Iron Mills (Bedford/St. Martins)
W.E.B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk (Penguin)
Upton Sinclair, The Jungle (Norton Critical Edition)
John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath (Penguin)
James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time (Vintage)
Tony Kushner, Angels in America DVD (HBO Home Video)
Michael Herr, Dispatches (Vintage)
Kevin Bales, Disposable People (California)
Joan Williams, Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict (Oxford)
Charles Ferguson, dir., Inside Job DVD (Sony Pictures Classics)

Coursepack (readings marked *)

Requirements:

- Weekly readings (averaging 200 pages per week)
- Lecture attendance and section participation (20%)
- 4-6 page paper due in class (15%)
- 4-6 page take-home midterm exam due in class (15%)
- Research papers (25%); proposals due a month earlier.
 - Final papers can take one of two forms:**
 - 1) Create your own protest literature, and include a 3-4 page critical essay analyzing it within a formal and historical tradition; **OR**
 - 2) 12-15 page research essay, including 7 or more primary and secondary sources.
- Final Examination TBD (Essays and short answers) (25%)

Course Schedule:

Week One: What Is American Protest Literature?

Lecture:

Thursday: Introduction

Readings: (33pp)

*Zoe Trodd, ed., *American Protest Literature*, Foreword and Intro (28pp)

McCarthy and McMillian, eds., *Protest Nation*, Introduction (5pp)

Week Two: Revolutionary Protest

Lectures:

Tuesday: The Common Sense of Declaring Independence

Thursday: From Rights to Citizenship

Readings: (85pp)

Tom Paine, *Common Sense* (1776), Intro and Chs. 1-2 (“Of the Origin ...” and “Of Monarchy ...”) (18pp)

**American Declaration of Independence* (1776) (5pp)

**French Declaration of the Rights of Man* (1789) (1p)

Week Three: Other Declarations of Independence

Lectures:

Tuesday: Slavery in the Age of Revolution

Thursday: Race, Region, and Reform

Readings: (204pp)

*James McCune Smith, “Lecture On the Haytien Revolutions” (1841) (22pp)

*William Apess, “Eulogy on King Philip” (1836) (20pp)

David Walker, *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (1829),
Preamble and Article 1 (18pp)

*Theodore Dwight Weld, ed., *American Slavery As It Is* (1839), pp. 4-10,
22-27, 45-47, 52-57, 90-94 (22pp)

*Lydia Maria Child, *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called
Africans* (1833), pp. 186-207 (22pp)

Begin Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) (100pp)

Week Four: The Politics and Poetics of Abolition

Lectures:

Resisting Civil Government (Thoreau, Douglass)

Millennial Vistas (Whitman, Brown)

Readings: (219pp)

*Henry David Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government" (1848)
(12pp)

*Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" (1852)
(15pp)

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1855), Preface and "Song of
Myself" (82pp)

*John Brown, *Selected Prison Writings* (1859) (10pp)

Continue Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) (100pp)

Week Five: Slavery and Sentimentalism

Lectures:

The Sentimental Novel as Feminist Political Protest

The Book That Caused the Civil War

Guest Lecture by Adena Spingarn

Readings: (307pp)

Finish Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) (300pp)

*James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel" (1949) (7pp)

Week Six: A Century of Dishonor

First Paper Due in Lecture

Lectures:

Civil War, Gilded Age, and Fictions of the Real (Davis)

"Mad" Women & "Vanishing" Indians (Gilman/Jackson)

Readings: (73pp)

Rebecca Harding Davis, *Life in the Iron Mills* (1861) (35pp)

*Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) (10pp)

*Helen Hunt Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor* (1881), Introduction and
Conclusion (28pp)

Week Seven: The Nadir

Lectures:

Black Dystopia (Wells Barnett)
Color Lines and Creation Myths (Du Bois)

Readings: (195pp)

*Ida B. Wells Barnett, *Southern Horrors* (1892), pp. 49-59 (10pp)
W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Chs. 1-10, 13-14 (185pp)

Week Eight: Muckraking and Socialism

Lectures:

Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?
Are You What You Eat—or What You Produce?

Readings: (233pp)

Eugene Debs, “Address to the Jury” (1918), in *Protest Nation*, pp. 27-31 (3pp)
Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (1906), Chs. 1-22, 28-29 (230pp)

Week Nine: Documenting Depressions

Take-Home Midterm: topic distributed at beginning of week, due at end of week in class.

Lectures:

Documenting Depression in the U.S. and Europe—Slide
Lecture (from Hine and Atget to Wright, Gellhorn, Orwell)
Agee, Evans, and the Problems of Protest

Readings: (260pp)

*Lewis Hine, “Social Photography” (1909) (5pp)
*Paul Strand, “Photography and the New God” (1922) (8pp)
*Richard Wright, “The Ethics of Living Jim Crow” (1936, 1940) (15pp)
*Martha Gellhorn, “Justice at Night” (1936) (7pp)
*George Orwell, “Shooting an Elephant” (1936) (10pp)
*James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1940)
Images and pp. 1-16 (not incl. “Before the Porch”) (15pp)
Begin John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) (200pp)

Week Ten: Dust of Dawn

Lectures:

No Milk and Honey Here—An American Epic
The Failed Revolution

Readings: (300pp)

Finish John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) (300pp)

Week Eleven: Race, Reform, Rebellion

Project proposals due in class this week

Lectures:

From Bus Boycotts to Black Panthers
Baldwin's Prophecy

Readings: (139pp)

Jo Ann Robinson, "The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Made It" (1955), in *Protest Nation*, pp. 50-53 (4pp)

Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (1963), in *Protest Nation*, pp. 80-99 (19pp); "I Have a Dream" Speech, recording in class.

Malcolm X, "The Ballet or the Bullet" Speech (1964), in *Protest Nation*, pp. 100-109 (7pp)

James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (1963) (106pp)

Black Panther Party, "What We Want, What We Believe" (1966), in *Protest Nation*, pp. 118-121 (3pp)

Week Twelve: The Personal Gets Political

Lectures:

The Personal Gets Political
The Nature of *Angels in America*

Readings: (27pp + 5 hr. movie)

*Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Chapter 1 (17pp)

Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" (1979), in *Protest Nation*, pp. 224-228 (4pp)

Harvey Milk, "Hope" Speech (1977), in *Protest Nation*, pp. 217-223 (6pp)

Tony Kushner, *Angels in America* (1993, 2003) DVD (5hrs)

Week Thirteen: Wars at Home and Abroad

Lecture:

Indian History and Vietnam as Indian War

Readings: (152pp)

*Vine Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969), Preface, Ch. 1 (31pp)

*Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (1971), Intro, Chs. 1, 19 (23pp)

American Indian Movement, "Trail of Broken Treaties" (1972), in *Protest Nation*, pp. 185-206 (21pp)

Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (1968, 1977), Ch. 1 ("Breathing In") and Ch. 6 ("Breathing Out") (77pp)

Week Fourteen: Masters of the Universe

Lectures:

Resisting Masters at Home and Abroad
Hip Hop America

Readings: (144pp + 2 hr. DVD)

Joan Williams, *Unbending Gender* (2008) Intro, Chs. 1-2 (64pp)
Kevin Bales, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy*
(1999) Chs. 1-2 (80pp)
Inside Job (Charles Ferguson, dir., 2010) (DVD 2 hrs)

Final Paper/Project Due

Final Exam TBA