Expository Writing 20.59 and 20.60
Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement
Course Description:

The civil rights movement, according to civil rights scholar Charles Payne, “continues to exercise a considerable hold on the American imagination. Our understanding of social change, our conceptions of leadership, our understanding of the possibilities of interracial cooperation are all affected by how we remember the movement.” In this seminar, we investigate the work of remembering and interpreting the civil rights movement of the mid-twentieth century. We consider both popular and scholarly renditions, and we focus on the use of speeches, accounts by participants, and newspaper articles to reconstruct the events of the past.

In the first unit, we begin with the March on Washington, one of the most iconic moments of the movement. Yet we dig beneath the surface of the popular memory that focuses only on Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech by comparing it to the other speeches of the day, many of which included often-forgotten demands for economic justice and passionate critiques of politicians and the failures of American democracy. Students have the opportunity to develop the skill of analyzing historical texts. We next turn to an examination of student activism, comparing a scholarly interpretation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to accounts written by participants themselves. Focusing on the sit-ins and Freedom Rides, we explore the ways in which the voices of historical actors can be used to assess the theories of professional historians. We end the course with a research project in which students investigate the role of the press, considering both its relationship to civil rights activism in the 1950s-1970s and the reliance of scholars on newspapers accounts as evidence to recount the history of the movement. Students will begin the research project by reading excerpts of The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for history.

Required Text Available for Purchase at the Coop:


Please do NOT purchase the Kindle edition of The Race Beat.

All other texts will be available on-line.

Due Dates (subject to change):

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Assignments:

*Essay 1: Comparative Analysis (5-6 pages; 1500-1900 words)*

Compare two to four speeches from the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, focusing on the speakers’ understandings of civil rights and/or the purpose of the March. Your assignment is to construct an argument regarding the similarities and/or differences among the views expressed by speakers during the March.

*Essay Two: Critique or Refine a Theory (6-8 pages; 1800-2500 words)*

Using selections from the firsthand accounts of James Lawson, John Lewis, Joseph McNeil, Diane Nash, and/or David Richmond as evidence, critique and/or refine historian Clayborne Carson’s interpretation of the sit-ins and/or the formation of SNCC.

Your assignment is to reconsider Carson’s assessment by incorporating a greater consideration of the students’ own recollections. Your essay should focus on specific aspects of Carson’s analysis. You might, for example, consider his views on the influence of “middle-class values” in shaping student activism or the role of Christian nonviolence in the founding of SNCC. Regardless of your focus, your assignment is to analyze the accounts of these student activists in order to 1.) offer a careful consideration of Carson’s position and 2.) put forth your own interpretation of one or more aspects of these episodes in the civil rights movement.

*Essay Three: Joining a Scholarly Conversation (8-10 pages; 2,400 to 3,100 words)*

One review of *The Race Beat: The Press, The Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* opens with the claim that “[j]ournalism … is the first rough draft of history.” Your assignment is to use historical newspaper articles and at least one additional type of primary source as evidence to construct an argument regarding a key moment in the civil rights movement. To establish the question or problem that motivates your essay, you must explain how your argument relates to the work of two to four other scholars.

**Final Grades:**

- Essay 1 (Revision) 20%
- Essay 2 (Revision) 30%
- Essay 3 (Revision) 40%
- Participation 10%
Participation encompasses active participation in class discussions, pre and post draft assignments, response papers, drafts, cover letters, and workshop letters to your peers. If you neglect to submit these written assignments, you will not receive any credit towards your participation grade.

Please note that I expect your revisions to be free of grammatical, spelling, and formatting errors. (I am happy to explain any technical issues that seem confusing or obscure.) Failure to meet these expectations may result in a lowered final grade.

Extensions and Late Papers:

I will be happy to grant each of you ONE extension of 24 hours on a pre-draft, response paper, or a draft. After you have used this extension, I will not be able to offer feedback on late assignments. The deadlines for revisions, however, are firm. I will deduct $\frac{1}{3}$ of a grade for every 24 hours that revisions one and two are late (an A would become an A-, an A- a B+, etc.) I cannot accept any late papers for the revision of essay three.

Grading Standards:

(adapted from the original by Kerry Walk, formerly of the Harvard College Writing Program)

A paper in the **A range** deploys the “Elements of Academic Argument” with exceptional grace and mastery:

- **Thesis and motive**: interesting, arguable, incisive; sufficiently limited in scope; stated early on and present throughout; supported by a clear motive that suggests why it is original or worthwhile
- **Structure**: logical, progressive (not just a list); invites complications, considerations of counter-arguments; strong and obvious links between points; coherent, well-organized paragraphs
- **Evidence**: sufficient, appropriate, and well-chosen; presented in a readable and understandable manner
- **Analysis**: insightful and fresh; more than summary or paraphrase; shows how evidence supports thesis
- **Sources**: well-chosen; deployed in a range of ways (to motivate the argument, provide key terms, and so on); quoted and cited correctly
- **Style**: clear and conversational yet sophisticated; diction level appropriate to audience; smooth, stimulating, a pleasure to read

A **B range** paper may in part resemble an A range paper but may also exhibit any of the following qualities:

- **Thesis and motive**: arguable but may be vague or uninteresting or feature unintegrated parts; may be only implied rather than articulated clearly and/or not stated early on; may not be argued throughout and disappear in places; may be supported by a functional but unsubstantial motive
• **Structure:** generally logical but either confusing in places (big jumps, missing links) or overly predictable and undeveloped; few complications or considerations of counterarguments; some disorganized paragraphs (excessively long or short; could be confusing)

• **Evidence:** generally solid but may be scanty or presented as unanalyzed or unexplained quotations

• **Analysis:** at times insightful but sometimes missing or mere summary; may make inconsistent connections between evidence and thesis

• **Sources:** quoted and cited correctly (for the most part) but deployed in limited ways, often as a straw person or simply as affirmation of writer’s viewpoint

• **Style:** generally clear but lacking in sophistication; may be weighed down by fancy diction meant to impress; may exhibit some errors in punctuation, grammar, spelling, and format

A **C** range paper may in part resemble a **B** range paper but may also exhibit any of the following qualities:

• **Thesis and motive:** vague, descriptive, or confusing; parts unintegrated (e.g., three unrelated prongs); only implied or not stated early on; not argued throughout, disappears in places; supported by a simplistic motive or none at all

• **Structure:** confusing (big jumps, missing links) or overly predictable (“five-paragraph”); few complications or considerations of counter-arguments; disorganized paragraphs, often headed with descriptive (versus analytical) topic sentences

• **Evidence:** either missing or presented as undigested quotations; may be taken out of context

• **Analysis:** some insightful moments but generally either missing or mere summary; may present some misreadings

• **Sources:** plopped in (if used at all); may be quoted and cited incorrectly, used merely as filler or affirmation of writer’s viewpoint

• **Style:** may be generally unclear and hard to read, or simplistic; may evince many technical errors

A **D** range paper may in part resemble a **C** range paper but may also exhibit any of the following qualities:

• **Thesis and motive:** missing or purely descriptive (an observation or statement of fact), or may be a total misreading; lacking a clear motive

• **Structure:** confusing; little focused development (paper usually short but may be rambling); disorganized paragraphs (also usually short); missing, garbled, or purely descriptive topic sentences (plot summary)

• **Evidence:** very few examples; unanalyzed or unexplained quotations; often taken out of context

• **Analysis:** missing or based on misinterpretations or mere summary

• **Sources:** plopped in (if used at all); incorrectly quoted or cited; used as filler

• **Style:** either simplistic or difficult to read; probably riddled with technical errors

An **F** paper is similar to a **D** paper but is significantly shorter than the assigned length and addresses the assignment superficially.
Communication:

E-mail: In an effort to hold in-class announcements to a minimum, I will be using e-mail to relay most of the nuts and bolts of the course, which, logistically, is quite complex. I ask that you check your e-mail every day. You are responsible for any information that I pass along via this medium.

Conferences: We will have four conferences over the course of the term to discuss your writing and ideas: two twenty-minute individual draft conferences, a briefer meeting to discuss your plans for the research paper, and, in the third unit, a group conference on your draft. I expect you to be prepared for these conferences—to have reviewed your writing and to have developed a plan of attack.

Office Hours: My office hours are Tuesdays 2-3:30. I am also happy to meet with you by appointment to discuss writing, reading, or any other issues pertaining to this seminar. Just ask or e-mail me, and we can arrange a time to meet.

Course iSite and Electronic Submissions: Throughout the semester, you will need to download course materials and upload assignments to specific dropboxes to our course iSite, available through my.harvard.edu. Please familiarize yourself with this site as soon as possible. As you send or upload each document, it is your responsibility to ensure that you have saved the document in a form compatible with Microsoft Word. It is also your responsibility to ensure that your file is not corrupted or damaged. If I cannot open or read the file you have sent, the essay may be subject to a late penalty.

Laptops and Cell Phones: Please turn off laptops and cell phones at the start of class.

Library Visits: When you begin your research papers, we will be visiting Widener Library during our regularly scheduled class times on Thursday, April 4 to meet with Frederic Burchsted, a Research Librarian. In order for us to make the best use of our time on this day, you should plan to take a tour of Widener before October 29. Tours run on Thursdays from 3:00-4:00. They begin by the Security Desk at the main (Yard) entrance of Widener.

The Writing Center: At any stage of the writing process – while brainstorming ideas, reviewing drafts, approaching revisions – you may find yourself wanting help with your essays above and beyond your conferences with me and our peer workshops. The Writing Center (located on the garden level of the Barker Center, telephone 617-495-1655) offers hour-long appointments with trained tutors. Visit the Writing Center's web site at http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr to make an appointment. Tutors also hold drop-in office hours in Lamont, Hilles, and designated Houses.

Collaboration: Students in writing courses receive feedback on their drafts from their peers, from their instructors, and also often from tutors in the Writing Center. Developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students is also permitted and encouraged in this course. Indeed, most scholars customarily turn to their colleagues for feedback on their work. When such assistance is significant, you should thank your colleague(s) in your cover letter. Please keep in mind, however, that all the work you submit must be your own: writing any of your assignments (response papers, drafts, or revisions) with another person is prohibited and can
result in disciplinary action by the Ad Board. For more information, please see Harvard’s Plagiarism Policy: http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k70847&pageid=icb.page355322

Policy on Academic Honesty: Throughout the semester we’ll work on the proper use of sources, including how to cite and how to avoid plagiarism. You should always feel free to ask me questions about this material. All the work that you submit for this course must be your own, and that work should not make use of outside sources unless that is explicitly part of the assignment. Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and to be subject to disciplinary action by the Administrative Board.

Harvard College Writing Program Policy on Attendance: Because Expos has a shorter semester and fewer class hours than other courses, and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential. If you are absent without medical excuse more than twice, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade. On the occasion of your second unexcused absence, you will receive a letter warning you of your situation. This letter will also be sent to your Resident Dean, so the College can give you whatever supervision and support you need to complete the course.

Apart from religious holidays, only medical absences can be excused. In the case of a medical problem, you should contact your preceptor before the class to explain, but in any event within 24 hours: otherwise you will be required to provide a note from UHS or another medical official, or your Resident Dean. Absences because of special events such as athletic meets, debates, conferences, and concerts are not excusable absences. If such an event is very important to you, you may decide to take one of your two allowable unexcused absences; but again, you are expected to contact your preceptor beforehand if you will miss a class, or at least within 24 hours. If you wish to attend an event that will put you over the two-absence limit, you should contact your Resident Dean and you must directly petition the Expository Writing Senior Preceptor, who will grant such petitions only in extraordinary circumstances and only when your work in the class has been exemplary.

Harvard College Writing Program Policy on Completion of Work: Because your Expos course is a planned sequence of writing, you must write all of the assigned essays to pass the course, and you must write them within the schedule of the course—not in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind. You will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements, therefore, if you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by the final due date in that essay unit. The letter will also specify the new date by which you must submit the late work, and be copied to your Resident Dean. If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay by this new date, and you have not documented a medical problem, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.

What to Do Now: When you get to this point, please e-mail me to say that you read the syllabus. Feel free to ask any questions that you may have about the seminar. I’ll do my best to answer you.
Week 1

Tues Sept 10  Reading Assignment: None
Writing Assignment: None
In Class: Introduction to the course; writing about history and civil rights

ESSAY 1: Comparative Analysis

Writing Assignment: None
In Class: Close reading and writing historical essays

Week 2

Tues Sept 17  Reading Assignment: Transcripts of Speeches from the March on Washington (to be e-mailed)
Writing Assignment: None
In Class: Discussion of the readings; “Asking Analytical Questions”

Thurs Sept 19  Reading Assignment: “Elements of Academic Argument”
Writing Assignment: None
In Class: Thesis and motive in a close reading

Week 3

Sun Sept 22  Pre-Draft 1 Due at 11:59 PM

Tues Sept 24  Reading Assignment: Samples of student writing (to be e-mailed)
Writing Assignment: None
In Class: Beginning an essay; thesis and motive in a close readings

Thurs Sept 26  Reading Assignment: “Introduction,” “Why Use Sources?” and “Integrating Sources,” Harvard Guide to Using Sources; samples of student writing (to be e-mailed)
Writing Assignment: None
In Class: Writing with sources

Fri Sept 28  Draft 1 Due at 11:59 PM
Week 4

**Sept 30 – Oct 4 Individual Draft Conferences**

**Tues Oct 1**  
Reading Assignment: Student drafts (2)  
Writing Assignment: **Draft response letters due in class (please bring 2 copies)**  
In Class: Draft workshops (2)

**Thurs Oct 3**  
Reading Assignment: Samples of student writing (to be e-mailed)  
Writing Assignment: None  
In Class: Close readings in the sciences and social sciences

**Sun Oct 6**  
Revision 1 Due at 11:59 PM

Week 5

**ESSAY 2: Critique or Refine a Theory**

**Tues Oct 8**  
Writing Assignment: None  
In Class: Critiquing a theory

**Thurs Oct 10**  
Writing Assignment: None  
In Class: Response papers as writing assignments

Week 6

**Sun Oct 13**  
Response Paper 2 Due at 11:59 PM

**Tues Oct 15**  
Reading Assignment: Sample of student writing (to be e-mailed)
Writing Assignment: Please bring a copy of your response paper to class
In Class: Using Sources

Thurs Oct 17  Reading Assignment: None
                 Writing Assignment: None
                 In Class: TBD

Fri Oct 18  Draft 2 Due at 11:59 PM

Week 7

Oct 21 - 25  Individual Draft Conferences

Tues Oct 22  Reading Assignment: Student drafts (2)
                 Writing Assignment: Draft response letters due in class (please bring 2 copies)
                 In Class: Draft workshops (2)

Wed Oct 23  Post-Draft 2 (Point Outline) Due at 8 PM

Thurs Oct 24  Reading Assignment: None
                 Writing Assignment: Bring a copy of your point outline to class
                 In Class: Point outlines and structure

Week 8

Sun Oct 27  Revision 2 Due at 11:59 PM

ESSAY 3: Joining a Scholarly Conversation

Tues Oct 29  Reading Assignment: None
                 Writing Assignment: None
                 In Class: Library visit – meet at Widener

                 Writing Assignment: None
                 In Class: The press and the civil rights movement
Week 9

Writing Assignment: None
In Class: Conceptual leaps – placing sources in conversation

Wed Nov 6  Pre-Draft 3 (Proposal and Annotated Bibliography) Due at 8:00 PM

Writing Assignment: None
In Class: Research, sources, and the internet

Nov 7-8  Individual Meetings to Discuss Research Proposals

Week 10

Writing Assignment: Your research materials
In-class: “Breaking into the Conversation”

Thurs Nov 14  Reading Assignment: Your research materials
Writing Assignment: None
In Class: Research proposals

Week 11

Sun Nov 17  Response Paper 3 Due at 11:59 PM

Tues Nov 19  Reading Assignment: Your research materials
Writing Assignment: Please bring your laptops to class
In Class: Research groups

Wed Nov 20  Draft 3 Due at 11:59 PM

Nov 21-22  Group Draft Conferences
Thurs Nov 21  Reading Assignment: Your research materials
    Writing Assignment: None
    In Class: Sources and bibliographies in research papers

Week 12

Nov 25-26  Group Draft Conferences

Tues Nov 26  Reading Assignment: “Writing Effective Conclusions”
    Writing Assignment: Bring a copy of your most recent conclusion to class
    In Class: Conclusions

Thurs Nov 28  THANKSGIVING

Week 13

Tues Dec 3  Reading Assignment: Your research materials
    Writing Assignment: None
    In Class: Audience and Writing Civil Rights History

Wed Dec 11  Revision 3 Due at 11:59 PM
    No extensions. I cannot accept any late papers.