



James Baldwin: From Harlem to Paris



“I love America more than any other country in the world and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually.” So writes James Baldwin in the autobiographical notes of his *Notes of a Native Son*. One could argue—and indeed we shall!—that this insistence (and corresponding crestfallen love) is the constant thread that runs through all of Baldwin’s writings, works of fiction and non-fiction which are imbued with the cadences of his childhood Harlem churches, Civil Rights activism and experiences as a black expatriate in Paris. Our class will explore a sampling of Baldwin’s writings, from both his fiction and essays, while paying particular attention to the manner in which his works offer us a critique of the politics of race, sexuality and nation in post-War American culture.

Number of Class Sessions:

In a five-day week (or one cycle A-E), our class meets three times. Each meeting is 40 minutes long. Given your Christian Service commitments, should a class fall on the morning of a Tuesday, that meeting will be canceled.

Methodology:

Mini-Lectures, class discussions, student presentations.

Course Expectations:**HOMEWORK:**

This primarily means reading. Students are expected to read well for this course, which means: (1) that you have read *every last word* of the assigned reading and (2) that you have carefully and thoughtfully annotated the text. Having read well, it is also expected that you will come in ready to participate. Because this is a discussion-orientated course (instead of a boring, lecture-orientated course), things work a whole lot better if you enter class with helpful and insightful questions, interesting and thoughtful comments, and serious objections and criticisms.

QUIZZES AND IN-CLASS RESPONSES:

Do the work as outlined above and I won't find quizzing necessary. Occasionally, we may have in-class writing assessments of 1-2 handwritten pages each. These in-class responses, meant to assess a deeper knowledge of the reading, *will be* announced.

ESSAYS:

There will be two short writing assignments and one longer writing assignment. You will find full descriptions of these assignments in the final section of this syllabus.

Grading Policies:

Your trimester grades will be calculated based on the following breakdown:

Quizzes and In-class responses (10%)

Class Participation (30%)

Major Writing Assignments (60%)

Teacher Availability:

Though I have a formal "office hour" on Mondays from 3:00-4:00, I am frequently available most days before, during, and after school.

Writing Assignments

Reflection Papers

During the course of the trimester, you will compose two 2-3 pg. Reflection Papers, the first of which will be due on 19 December and the second of which will be due on 29 January. While they ought to pertain to the essays and stories we will have read and discussed, the subject and form of these reflection papers is entirely up to you—treat them as an opportunity to think through some questions or issues a story/essay raises, to muse on a particular theme, to draw comparisons between stories/essays, or place them in dialogue with your reading on similar topics from outside our classroom, &c. These reflections may very well serve as a starting point or springboard for your longer essay.

Critical Essays

During the course of the trimester, you will compose a 6 pg. Critical Essays (due 14 February). This essay will develop and defend, by way of textual evidence and critical analysis, a thesis of your choosing. That is to say, the subject of these essays is entirely up to you! Your essays may treat a single text or several Baldwin texts and may include secondary literature you have judiciously sourced. I would suggest that you run your topics by me before you begin crafting and drafting your essays. You're Seniors now and so I would like you to try and move beyond the sometimes stifling 5-paragraph Essay format which you have by now mastered—let the form of your paper grow and change and, most importantly, conform to better allow your ideas to speak.

