

**English 390: Junior Seminar**  
**Imagining Democracy and Social Justice in Late-Nineteenth-Century American Literature**

Spring 2014 / 8:30-9:23 AM (T) / Fairchild 3L5

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*We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.*  
—Preamble, Constitution of the United States

*I consider the unjust spirit of caste which is so insidious as to pervade a whole nation, and so powerful as to subject a whole race and all connected with it to scorn and social ostracism—I consider this a barrier to the moral progress of the American people; and I would be one of the first to head a determined, organized crusade against it. Not a fierce indiscriminate onslaught; not an appeal to force...but a moral revolution which must be brought about in a different manner...*  
—Charles W. Chesnutt, journal entry for 29 May 1880

**Overview:** Both founding texts of American democracy—the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution—claim among their aims the realization of “justice.” But what precisely is the relationship between democracy and justice? In what ways does this political form promote the configuration of just social structures, and in what ways does democracy hinder the realization of the common good? In this seminar, we will explore these questions by studying American literary works published at the close of the nineteenth century. A period of great economic, political, and social unrest, this era produced literature that explored and exposed pressing issues such as political corruption, urban poverty, gender inequality, and racial violence, and in so doing meditated, sometimes implicitly and other times quite overtly, on the possibilities and problems that democracy presents for the realization of social justice. We will begin by considering various conceptual accounts of the relationship between democracy and justice by classical, early national, and contemporary thinkers. We will then turn to narratives by Henry Adams, Stephen Crane, Kate Chopin, and Charles W. Chesnutt, reading these authors’ works through both historical and conceptual lenses. The course will conclude with student presentations of their research papers, in which they will advance an original conception of the relationship between democracy and social justice through the analysis of a literary text. The intense focus on a discrete literary-historical period and set of texts will enable us not simply to devote sustained attention both to the works themselves and to their various historical and conceptual contexts; it will also allow us to consider different ways of pairing text and context (historical, cultural, and philosophical). In this way, the seminar will ultimately function as an exploration of different methods of reading and interpretation.

**Objectives:** This seminar guides students through the intellectual challenges and pleasures of writing a research paper about literature. To this end, you will:

- define, apply, and interrogate key course terms and concepts, such as democracy, liberty, equality, and social justice;

- practice the skills of literary analysis and close reading, focusing in particular on how to read texts through the lens of their specific historical and cultural contexts as well as from more theoretical vantage points;
- deploy the research tools available via the McDermott Library, including the MLA International Bibliography and online databases and archives; and
- cultivate the ability to formulate an original, compelling argument about a literary text and support this argument with evidence of various kinds and analysis.

**Required Texts** (it is essential that you purchase these specific editions, which include secondary materials we will read):

- Susan Harris Smith and Melanie Dawson, eds. *The American 1890s: A Cultural Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000. ISBN: 9780822325123
- Henry Adams, *Democracy: An American Novel*. New York: Penguin, 2008. ISBN: 9780143039808
- Stephen Crane, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets (A Story of New York)*. Ed. Kevin J. Hayes. Bedford Cultural Edition. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999. ISBN: 9780312152666
- Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*. Ed. Margo Culley. Norton Critical Edition. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Norton, 1994. ISBN: 0393960579
- Charles W. Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition*. Ed. Nancy Bentley and Sandra Gunning. Bedford Cultural Edition. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002. ISBN: 9780312194062
- Theoretical and contextual readings available on SharePoint (print hard copies for yourself)

**Recommended Texts & Resources** (available in the library and/or online):

- Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.)
- *America: History and Life*. Available online at:  
<http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/search/advanced?sid=69762d90-d614-4b9e-a880-a4bba5e9745d%40sessionmgr4003&vid=1&hid=4114>
- *MLA International Bibliography*. Available online at:  
<http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/search/advanced?sid=a200a477-a37c-4718-80c9-26c178ea5ced%40sessionmgr4005&vid=1&hid=4114>
- Lexis-Nexis Academic (news and legal archive). Available online at:  
<http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic/>

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## ASSIGNMENTS AND EXERCISES

**Participation:** This seminar requires your active, informed, and energetic participation. Participation counts for 20% of your final grade (more than each of the short essays), and as such it will have a significant impact on your overall course performance. Besides attending all class meetings and bringing the appropriate materials to class (e.g. readings in hard copy, essays), to receive a strong participation score you must also contribute in a meaningful way to the discussion in every class session. To “contribute in a meaningful way” signifies to answer a question, ask an informed question, respond to a colleague’s point, or put forth your own idea, and in so doing to move our conversation forward. In other words, both the quantity and the quality of your contributions matter. Your comments should emerge from your engagement with the readings, and thus you should be able to refer to specific page numbers to support your points. The sessions in which your role is to open our discussions will count toward your participation score. So that we can engage in

genuine face-to-face conversations, laptops are prohibited unless a special class activity requires their use.

**Essays:** In preparation for the culminating assignment for the seminar, a research paper, you will write two short essays: a definitional essay exploring the relationship between democracy and social justice that draws on both a conceptual and historical text on our syllabus (2-3 pp.), and a close reading of Henry Adams’s *Democracy* that puts this novel into dialogue with one of the conceptual texts we have read (3-4 pp.). In a research paper (10-12 pp.) due at the end of the term, you will develop an original argument about the relationship between democracy and social justice in one of the literary works we have studied, drawing on both conceptual and historical contexts to advance your claim. To prepare for this final project, you will submit preliminary research questions; prepare a proposal that identifies your primary text, outlines your argument, and identifies and explains the kinds of sources you will use and how you will deploy them; and complete a number of exercises related to components of your paper, including your argument.

**Critical Synthesis Project:** One of the aims of this seminar is for you to consider various methods for interpreting literary works. In order to achieve this goal, you will work with a group of your colleagues to lead a “critical synthesis” class session for one of the literary works on our syllabus. Your main task will be to synthesize our discussion of your assigned text, making a claim about the vision of democracy and social justice held out by the work. As you present and develop your argument, you should offer a close reading of key passages from the text to support your ideas; draw on literary criticism of the text; and pair your work with illuminating historical and theoretical contexts (both those we’ve read in class and some we have not read). Your in-class presentation should be 15-20 minutes long, and should conclude with questions to provoke discussion. Be sure that all group members take an active role in the presentation. Your group will also submit a written document that outlines the presentation’s main idea, identifies key passages from the primary text and secondary sources, and includes a list of works cited and consulted. On the days of discussion leading up to the synthesis presentation, members of the group will be responsible for opening each session’s class discussion by selecting key passages for close reading, raising provocative questions about the text, and, as appropriate, offering insights from critical materials.

**Assessment:** Your performance in this class will be based on the quality of your two short essays and your critical synthesis project, as well as on the strength of your class participation and especially the research paper you will submit at the end of the term. All written work will be assessed based on the *clarity*, *complexity*, and *precision* of the *argument*, *evidence*, and *analysis* you put forth. Your final grade will be calculated according to the percentages outlined below.

### Grading Breakdown

*Before PROG*

Participation: 10%

Essay 1: 10%

Essay 2: 15%

*After PROG*

Participation: 10%

Critical Synthesis: 15%

Research Essay: 40% (includes preparatory assignments)

## POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND OTHER IMPORTANT POINTS

**Course SharePoint Site:** Announcements, questions to guide your reading of the assigned texts, electronic versions of course documents, and other useful information will be available on our

SharePoint site, which you can reach at:

<http://eis.usafa.edu/academics/english/390Laski/default.aspx>.

**Communication:** E-mail is an official mode of correspondence for this class. As such, you are responsible for all communiqués I send to your USAFA e-mail address. E-mail is also the best way for you to contact me.

**Extra Instruction:** I am available for extra instruction should you need it. Send me an e-mail, and we will work together to arrange a meeting at a mutually convenient time. Please note that while I will not review complete essay drafts, I will gladly listen to your ideas and help you to think through the steps of your argument or a particularly challenging paragraph or two. Should you wish to have someone review a draft of your paper, please visit the Writing Center. Be sure to seek any assistance you may need well in advance of paper deadlines.

**Reading Assignments:** Reading assignments outlined below on the course calendar will be discussed in class on the day on which they are listed. Most of our readings are contained in the required texts for the course; the relevant page numbers are listed on the schedule below. All other readings are available on our SharePoint site within the Additional Readings tab and are marked as “SP” below. Please read the assigned piece(s) by this date, annotate key passages in the text, and come prepared to engage in a lively discussion about the text(s). Note that electronic versions of our readings are not permitted; you must bring a paper copy of whatever work(s) we are discussing with you to class.

**Writing Assignments:** Unless specified otherwise, all written work is to be submitted in hard copy form at the beginning of the class session in which it is due. Late assignments will be penalized. Because of the cumulative nature of the assignment sequence in this course, and so that I can return your graded work promptly, extensions will not be granted except under extraordinary circumstances. Only typed papers will be accepted; please double space your essays, set your margins to one inch, and use a standard font (e.g. Times New Roman) at the 12 pt. size. Number your pages in the upper right-hand corner, only print on one side of each page, and staple your essay before turning it in. Be sure to give your paper a provocative title that speaks to the essay’s argument (e.g. not “Essay 1”). Finally, follow MLA guidelines; for details, see our SharePoint site.

**Documentation and Academic Integrity:** Crucial guidelines and resources regarding documentation standards for your written work and the Dean’s policy on academic integrity are posted on our SharePoint site under “Documentation Resources.” Be sure to review these items. You are required to abide by these regulations; failure to do so will hurt your grade and may cause you to commit plagiarism inadvertently.

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## COURSE SCHEDULE

### I. Imagining Democracy and/vs. Social Justice

<u>Class</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Assignment</u>
1	Tues 7 Jan	Introductions

- 2            Thurs 9 Jan            Susan Harris Smith and Melanie Dawson, Introduction to *The American 1890s: A Cultural Reader* (pp. 1-14)  
Deliberation on 1890s Timeline Exercise
- 3            Mon 13 Jan            **Due: 1890s Timeline Exercise**  
**(post individual entry to SharePoint by 7 PM on Sun 12 Jan; read all entries by the start of class)**
- 4            Wed 15 Jan            Raymond Williams, “Democracy” (SP)  
Bernard Crick, “The Word and the Deed” (SP)
- 5            Fri 17 Jan            Plato, Book I and Book VIII (excerpt) of the *Republic* (SP)
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Day*
- 6            Wed 22 Jan            Thomas Jefferson, original draft of The Declaration of Independence, from *Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson*; Query XVIII “Manners,” from *Notes on the State of Virginia*; Letter to James Madison, January 30, 1787 (SP)
- 7            Fri 24 Jan            Publius (James Madison), *Federalist* 51 (SP)  
The Constitution of the United States of America (SP)
- 8            Tues 28 Jan            Ian Shapiro, “Preliminaries” and “The General Argument” (selections), from *Democratic Justice* (SP)
- 9            Thurs 30 Jan            **Due: Essay 1**
- 10          Mon 3 Feb            Henry Adams, *Democracy: An American Novel*, pp. 3-63
- 11          Wed 5 Feb            Adams, *Democracy*, pp. 65-136
- 12          Fri 7 Feb            Adams, *Democracy*, pp. 137-202
- 13          Tues 11 Feb            Alexis de Tocqueville, Chapters 1-5, Part II of Volume II of *Democracy in America* (SP)
- 14          Thurs 13 Feb            **Due: Essay 2**

*Presidents’ Day*

## II. Writing Wrongs, Imagining Democratic Justice

- 15          Tues 18 Feb            Stephen Crane, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets (A Story of New York)*, pp. 36-58
- 16          Thurs 20 Feb            Crane, *Maggie*, pp. 59-94

17 Mon 24 Feb Historical Contexts: Alice Wellington Rollins, “The Tenement House Problem” (pp. 106, 112-120); William T. Elsing, “From ‘Life in New York Tenement-Houses’” (pp. 133-144); Edgar Fawcett, “The Woes of the New York Working-Girl” (pp. 233-242); William W. Sanger, “From *The History of Prostitution*” (pp. 266-272); and William Dean Howells, “From ‘New York Low Life in Fiction’” (pp. 333-338)

18 Wed 26 Feb Conceptual Context: Judith Shklar, “Misfortune and Injustice,” from *The Faces of Injustice* (SP)

*NCLS*

19 Tues 4 Mar **Due: *Maggie* Critical Synthesis**

20 Thurs 6 Mar Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, pp. 3-51

21 Mon 10 Mar Chopin, *Awakening*, pp. 51-109

22 Wed 12 Mar Mid-semester Reflection

*Recognition*

23 Mon 17 Mar Historical Contexts: “An Etiquette/Advice Book Sampler” (pp. 122-130); “Fashion Plates from *Harper’s Bazaar*” (pp. 131-136); Wilbur Fisk Tillet, “Southern Womanhood” (pp. 139-144); and Dorothy Dix, “Are Women Growing Selfish?” “The American Wife,” “A Strike For Liberty,” and “Women and Suicide” (pp. 144-147, 148-151)

24 Wed 19 Mar Conceptual Context: Joan Tronto, Preface and Chapter 1 (selections), from *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice* (SP)

25 Fri 21 Mar **Due: *The Awakening* Critical Synthesis**

*Spring Break*

26 Tues 1 Apr Charles W. Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition*, pp. 44-93  
**Due: Research Paper Potential Topics**

27 Thurs 3 Apr Chesnutt, *Marrow*, pp. 93-151

28 Mon 7 Apr Chesnutt, *Marrow*, pp. 151-213

29 Wed 9 Apr Chesnutt, *Marrow*, pp. 213-246

- 30            Fri 11 Apr            Historical Contexts: Charles W. Chesnutt, “From *The Future American*” (pp. 278-288); Ida B. Wells, “From *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*” (pp. 364-377); “Turn-of-the-Century Newspaper Reports on Lynching” (pp. 377-383); “White Man’s Declaration of Independence” (pp.411-414); and Letter to William McKinley, 13 November 1898 (pp. 414-417)
- 31            Tues 15 Apr            Conceptual Context: John Rawls, “Justice as Fairness”; “The Original Position and Justification,” from *A Theory of Justice* (SP)
- 32            Thurs 17 Apr            **Due: *Marrow* Critical Synthesis**

### III. Reimagining Democracy and/vs. Social Justice

- 33            Mon 21 Apr            **Due: Research Paper Proposal**  
**(bring 2 hard copies to class, and e-mail a copy to ProfL)**
- 34            Wed 23 Apr            Library Research
- 35            Fri 25 Apr            Library Research
- 36            Tues 29 Apr            **Due: Argument Delineation Exercise**
- 37            Thurs 1 May            **Due: Paper Mapping Exercise**
- 38            Mon 5 May            Research Paper Drafting
- 39            Wed 7 May            Research Paper Drafting
- 40            Fri 9 May            **Due: Research Paper**  
Conclusions and Celebration