

AML4453 Fall 2025
Post-civil rights Literature & Law
MWF (3:00pm-3:50pm)

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Office hours TBA and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course offers a close examination of how US laws and multi-ethnic US literatures respond to and represent problems of racial inequality, gender disparity, and homophobia. Students will analyze Latinx, Native American, Asian American, and African American novels and short stories alongside state and federal laws to weigh literary and legal discourses against each other. We will study legal cases relating to education law, immigration law, marriage law, and civil rights protections, including *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, *Loving v. Virginia*, *Lawrence v. Texas*, and *Obergefell v. Hodges*. Literary texts will likely include works by Toni Morrison, Chang-Rae Lee, Carmen María Machado, and others—authors writing in the wake of Civil Rights legislations yet still grappling with persistent inequalities. We will therefore pay careful attention to how their literary works engage concepts like post-racialism, colorblindness, homonormativity, and dystopia. Extensive knowledge of US law is not required: even as we focus primarily on US Supreme Court decisions and legislative acts from the 1950s onward, we will also discuss legal protocols and precedents established by the Declaration of Independence, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, and the 14th Amendment, and more.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The work we will do together will be both skill building and knowledge building. By the end of the semester, you will have had the opportunity to:

1. Refine language for academic expression in writing and oral presentation
2. Demonstrate knowledge of major historical events, works, and trends in post-Civil Rights US culture
3. Develop legal and literary analysis skills paying attention to components like race, gender, and sexuality

COURSE STRUCTURE

This course is designed to support your development as a thinker, writer, and speaker. It has been structured to include important texts and building blocks that will support you towards this aim.

Academic policies: This course complies with all UF policies. Please see this link for the most up-to-date University policies about attendance, accessibility, grading, course evals, honesty policies, in-class recordings, academic resources, and Campus Health and Wellness Resources: <https://go.ufl.edu/syllabuspolicies>.

Assignments: The assignments listed below are opportunities for you to demonstrate you are building knowledge and skills in relation to the central focuses of our course. Your course grade will be determined by the quantity of assignments you complete in connection with these goals, assuming they follow instructions and satisfy Canvas rubrics. *Submitting work for this course, including contributions made in live, in-person discussions, presumes compliance with the University's Honesty Code and Honor Pledge.*

Participation (30%): this is a discussion-based seminar, so active listening and active participation are essential. Please be prepared to contribute to every class

discussion. To arrive prepared, consider: completing, annotating, and outlining assigned readings; reviewing your notes after class and identifying remaining questions; discussing ideas and questions with peers and colleagues from class; writing the professor to check in, ask questions, share what is or isn't working, receive additional feedback, ask for more information, or share new ideas. You have to be in attendance to participate actively; please follow [UF policies](#) on excused and unexcused absences. Please note that any additional assignments (in-class reflections, reading quizzes, etc.) will be counted in this category.

Close reading papers (15% each, 30% total): in order to develop legal and literary analysis skills, you will write two short papers: the first focused on close reading a literary text, the second focused on close reading a legal text. This writing takes place in class, responds to a prompt and text provided by the professor, and must be completed by hand and submitted before the end of the period. Given that the prompt will provide a position for you to argue (you don't have to invent your own thesis statement), the focus is on how you use the text as evidence—analyzing, contextualizing, and synthesizing it.

Final Project (30%): in order to refine oral academic expression while demonstrating your knowledge of major historical events, works, and trends in post-Civil Rights US culture, you will prepare an audiovisual project that expands on the themes of our course to put primary sources (literary or legal texts), secondary sources (critical or historical texts) and the student (yourself) in conversation. This can take many forms (like a short podcast, an informative TikTok, a recorded PPT with voice overlay, etc.), but your audience should be an intelligent, non-expert public and you should aim to teach them something through synthesis or analysis (not summary). It may focus on any new theme or topic, but you might consider discussing any of the following: what the aesthetic teaches us about race today, how the literary reframes legal history, how famous or understudied legal cases can be analyzed anew, change or constancy over time re: legal or literary trends, or how to make methods of critical interpretation widely accessible. Five to seven minutes with audio/visual that is clearly you, uploaded to Canvas in an accessible form along with any accompanying materials (your notes, outlines, script, etc.).

Reflection email (10%): in order to refine written academic expression, specifically in a reflexive move, students will send a final reflection email during the last week of class. This email should include at least two components: first, a synthesis of no fewer than three impactful final projects circulated by your peers. What were they about, how were they in conversation, what overarching lessons did they teach you? Second, a paragraph response about which texts, theories, or debates will stay with you after this course ends. What were they about, why are you still thinking about them, how might they appear in your life (or work or studies) in the future? This email should be sent to Tommy (tconners@ufl) by the end of the day on Friday, December 5.

GRADING BREAKDOWN:

Participation 30%

In-class writing

Close reading I (literature) 15%

Close reading II (law) 15%

Final presentation 30%

Final email reflection 10%

REQUIRED TEXTS: These texts have also been placed on reserve at the library. You might also consider purchasing a copy of your own—choose the cheapest option, there's no need for new or hardcover. If this is not a viable option for you now, please be in touch. These texts appear in order of when we will read them; all other readings can be found on our Canvas page.

Toni Morrison, *God Help the Child* (2015)

Louise Erdrich, *The Night Watchman* (2020)

Carmen Maria Machado, *In the Dream House* (2019)

Chang-Rae Lee, *On Such a Full Sea* (2014)

COURSE CALENDAR: Please see Canvas Modules for the most up-to-date schedule of what to read and when.