

LIT 6856: Desperate Domesticity: The American 1950s
Class # 14723 Section 11G1

(Spring 2021)

Class meets synchronously on Zoom, W periods 6-8 (12:50-3:50)

*Zoom links on Canvas

Virtual *Office Hours* on Zoom: W 4:00-4:30 + R 3:00-3:30

*Zoom links on Canvas

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DESCRIPTION

This course explores fraught constructions of domesticity in American literary and popular culture of the 1950s, including the nuclear family, gender roles, consumerism, the rise of suburbia, the civil rights movement, and alternative domesticities. Our writers will include John Cheever, Gwendolyn Brooks, James Baldwin, Flannery O'Connor, Patricia Highsmith, Allen Ginsberg, Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, and Ray Bradbury. We'll explore fifties family sitcoms (*Ozzie and Harriet*, *Father Knows Best*, *Leave It to Beaver*) plus the teen rebellion films *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Blackboard Jungle*. Our unit on Design features architectural historian Beatriz Colomina's *Domesticity at War*. We will end with retrospective images of the American 1950s in contemporary culture, considering how the fifties shapes responses to pandemic domesticity in the U.S.

TEXTBOOKS

John Cheever, *Stories of John Cheever*

Gwendolyn Brooks, *Selected Poems*

James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*

Flannery O'Connor, *The Complete Stories*

Patricia Highsmith, *The Price of Salt*

Beatriz Colomina, *Domesticity at War*

Robert Lowell, *Life Studies*

Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*

Ray Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles*

(Any edition with the complete text should work; I posted a list on UF's Text Adoption site. Additional course readings + viewings available online through Canvas).

ASSIGNMENTS (see Canvas for details)

Seminar Report on a postwar cultural text

Collaborative Study Guide for James Baldwin

Conference Paper Proposal

Seminar Paper (MFA option: conference paper + 10 pages of creative response)

Class Discussion

MY POLICIES

As this is a graduate seminar, I'll keep it short & simple:

1. We need you to be present in class each week. (Contact me if there is an issue.)
2. We need your weekly participation.
3. You need to submit all assignments, and to consult with me before beginning extensive work on the paper/conference paper.
4. *Paper Format for Assignment submissions on Canvas*: Please use a 12 point font, 1-inch margins, and double spacing. Thanks.
5. *Glitch happens*. If you get bumped off your internet connection, please rejoin our class meeting as soon as you're able.

UF POLICIES:

1. You must *complete all assignments* to receive credit for this course.
2. *UF's policy on Harassment*: UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty. Read the policy [here](#).
3. *Academic Honesty and Definition of Plagiarism*. Plagiarism violates the Student Honor Code and requires reporting to the Dean of Students. All students must abide by the [Student Honor Code](#).
4. Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center. [Click here to get started with the Disability Resource Center](#). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester. (DRC phone # is 352-392-8565.)
5. Students who face difficulties completing the course or who are in need of counseling or urgent help may call the on-campus [Counseling and Wellness Center](#): (352) 392-1575.
6. For information on UF Grading policies, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>
7. *Course Evaluations*. Toward the end of the semester, you will receive email messages asking you to go online and evaluate this course: <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals/Default.aspx>

SEMINAR SCHEDULE (Links & other details in Canvas Modules, which are up-to-date)

Week	Date	Module	Topic
1	Jan 13	1	Course Introduction: Framing the American Fifties <i>Read</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Elaine Tyler May, Introduction to <i>Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era</i>• John Cheever, "The Season of Divorce"• Gwendolyn Brooks, "A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, A Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon" + "The Last Quatrain in the Ballad of Emmett Till"• Allen Ginsberg, "A Supermarket in California"• Sylvia Plath, "The Applicant"

			<p><i>Watch</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Eyes on the Prize</i>, Part 1: Awakenings (Emmett Till) • Leave it to Beaver, “Lumpy Rutherford” (January 1958)
2	Jan 20	2	<p>John Cheever, the <i>New Yorker</i> story & the Nuclear Family</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheever stories: “The Enormous Radio,” “The Cure,” “The Sorrows of Gin,” “O Youth and Beauty!” “The Five-Forty-Eight,” “The Housebreaker of Shady Hill,” “The Worm in the Apple,” “The Trouble with Marcie Flint,” “The Wrysons,” “The Country Husband” “Just Tell Me Who It Was,” “The Brigadier and the Golf Widow,” “The Swimmer” • Trysh Travis, “What We Talk About When We Talk about <i>The New Yorker</i>” <p>Report 1: Emily Post, <i>Etiquette: The Blue Book of Social Usage (1945 ed.)</i> - any 250-300 pages, including “Mrs. Three-in-One” - Emily</p>
3	Jan 27	3	<p>The Fifties Family Sitcom & Other Fictions</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May chapters: “Containment at Home: Cold War, Warm Hearth” + “The Commodity Gap: Consumerism and the Modern Home” • Erin Lee Mock, “The Horror of ‘Honey, I’m Home!’: The Perils of Postwar Family Love in the Domestic Sitcom” (<i>Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies</i>) <p><i>Watch</i></p> <p><i>Ozzie & Harriet:</i> “The Pancake Mix” (April 1953), “The Bird’s Nest” (May 1954), “David’s 17th Birthday” (October 1953)</p> <p><i>Father Knows Best:</i> “A Lesson in Citizenship” (October 1954), “Jim the Farmer” (January 1955)</p> <p><i>Leave It to Beaver:</i> “Brotherly Love” (November 1957), “Part-Time Genius” (Jan 1958), “The Perfect Father” (March 1958)</p> <p>Report 2: William Whyte, <i>The Organization Man (1956)</i>- Allyson</p>
4	Feb 3	4	<p>Gwendolyn Brooks, Black Metropolis & Postwar Race Relations</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brooks poems: <i>Selected Poems</i> through “The Ballad of Rudolph Reed” • Nate Marshall’s Brooks <u>Centennial piece</u> on “Beverly Hills, Chicago” • MB, “Brooks, <i>Ebony</i>, and Postwar Race Relations” (Canvas) <p><i>Listen</i></p>

			<p>1961 LOC <u>recording</u> of Brooks reading her poems (compare vocal performance with the recording of “The Lovers of the Poor” at Poets.org)</p> <p>Report 3: <i>The White Problem in America</i> (1965), by editors of <i>Ebony</i></p>
5	Feb 10	5	<p>Civil Rights and James Baldwin’s America</p> <p><i>Read</i> Baldwin, <i>Notes on a Native Son</i></p> <p><i>Listen</i> <u>recording</u> of James Baldwin reading from his work, introduced by Gwendolyn Brooks</p> <p><i>Watch</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>trailer</u> for <i>Carmen Jones</i> (1954) • <u>trailer</u> for <i>I Am Not your Negro</i> (2017) • Baldwin’s 1965 TV <u>appearance</u> on The Dick Cavett Show <p><i>Explore</i> Baldwin’s 1980 visit to UF at the <u>Living Archive</u>, hosted by UF African Studies</p> <p>DUE: draft questions for Collaborative Study Guide focusing on these essays: “Notes of a Native Son,” “The Harlem Ghetto,” “Journey to Atlanta,” “Encounter on the Seine,” Black Meets Brown,” “A Question of Identity” (submit on Canvas)</p>
6	Feb 17	6	<p>Flannery O’Connor, Rural Domesticity & Peculiar Children</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • O’Connor stories: “A Stroke of Good Fortune,” “A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” “The Life You Save May Be Your Own,” “A Temple of the Holy Ghost,” “Good Country People,” “Greenleaf,” “A View of the Woods,” “Everything that Rises Must Converge,” “The Enduring Chill,” “The Comforts of Home” • MB <u>blog post</u> ‘Koooped Up with Flannery O’Connor’ • Paul Elie, <u>How Racist was Flannery O’Connor?</u> (<i>New Yorker</i>, 6/22/20) <p>Report 4: Benjamin Spock, <i>Baby and Child Care</i> (1957) – through The One-Year-Old August</p>
7	Feb 24	7	<p>Lovers’ Secrets: Patricia Highsmith & Domestic Surveillance</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highsmith, <i>The Price of Salt</i> • Margaret Talbot, “Forbidden Love” (<i>New Yorker</i> 11/23/15)

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paige Glotzer, <i>How the Suburbs Were Segregated</i> (2020): Introduction, Adaptations (Professor Glotzer will visit our class from 3:00-3:30; be prepared to ask her a question) <p><i>Watch</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> trailer for <i>Carol</i> (2015) <p>Report 5: Ferdinand Lundberg & Marina F. Farnham, <i>Modern Woman: The Lost Sex</i> (1947) - Karen</p>
*	Mar 3	8	<p>High School Rebels and Teenpics</p> <p><i>Watch:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Rebel Without a Cause</i> (Nicholas Ray, 1955) <i>Blackboard Jungle</i> (Richard Brooks, 1955) <p><i>Read</i></p> <p>Ramona Caponegro, “Where the ‘Bad’ Girls Are (Contained)”</p> <p><i>Explore</i></p> <p>1955 UF Yearbook, <i>The Seminole</i></p> <p>Report 6: Dorothy Baruch, <i>How to Live with Your Teenager</i> (1953) Judy</p>
9	Mar 10	9	<p>Domesticity by Design</p> <p><i>Read:</i></p> <p>Beatriz Colomina, <i>Domesticity at War</i> (2007)</p> <p>Justus Nieland, <i>Happiness by Design: Modernism and Media in the Eames Era</i> (2020): Introduction + “Happy Furniture: On the Media Environments of the Eames Chair”</p> <p><i>Watch:</i></p> <p>Design Q&A video with Charles Eames</p> <p>Report 7: Marshall McLuhan, <i>The Mechanical Bride</i> (1967 ed.) Payal</p>
10	Mar 15	10	DUE on Monday: Conference Paper Proposals (submit on Canvas)
	Mar 17		** Proposal Conferences: Make a Tuesday afternoon or Wednesday appointment with MB**
11	Mar 24	11	<p>Family Secrets: American Confessional Poetry (Ginsberg & Lowell)</p> <p><i>Read:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allen Ginsberg, <i>Kaddish</i> (PoetryFoundation.org) Robert Lowell, <i>Life Studies</i> Michael Kimmel, “‘Temporary About Myself’: White-Collar Conformists and Suburban Playboys, 1945-1960” Christopher Grobe, “From Midcentury Confessional Poetry to Reality TV” (LitHub)

			Report 8: Alfred Kinsey, <i>Sexual Behavior and the Human Male</i> (1948), Part 2 only - Sarina
12	Mar 31	12	Sylvia Plath and Feminine Mystiques <i>Read:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plath poems: “Morning Song, ”An Appearance,” “The Rabbit Catcher,” “The Applicant,” “Medusa” • Plath, <i>The Bell Jar</i> • MB, “Ariel’s Kitchen: Plath, <i>Ladies’ Home Journal</i>, and the Domestic Surreal” in <i>The Unraveling Archive: Essays on Sylvia Plath</i> Report 9: Betty Friedan, <i>The Feminine Mystique</i> (1963) - Mallory
13	Apr 7	13	Otherworldly Domesticity: Ray Bradbury’s Mars <i>Read:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bradbury, <i>The Martian Chronicles</i> • Andrea Krafft, “Down to Earth: Mundane Concerns and Marginalized Individuals in Ray Bradbury’s Rocket Stories” • Krafft, “Appliance Reliance: Domestic Technologies and the Depersonalization of Housework in Postwar American Speculative Fiction”
14	Apr 14	14	Seminar Paper Pitches <i>in class, you’ll present your paper nutshell + field 2-3 questions</i> <i>Read:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renee Dowbnia: “Consuming Appetites: Food, Sex, and Freedom in Sylvia Plath’s <i>The Bell Jar</i>” • Additional work from DD seminar alums TBA
15	Apr 21	15	Reframing the Fifties <i>Read:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emily Matchar, “June Cleaver 2.0: Bloggers and the Rise of Domestic Chic” • Anne Helen Peterson, “Other Countries Have Social Safety Nets; The US Has Women” • David Brooks, “The Nuclear Family Was a Mistake” • Charles Blow, “We Need a Second Great Migration” • (<i>optional</i>: MB, “Fantastic Plastics in Postwar America”)
	April 28	Exam Week	DUE: Seminar Papers/Conference Papers + Creative Response

Assignments:

Seminar Report (15 minutes + Q&A – slides are optional)

Discuss the overall argument/value judgments of your postwar text, connecting it with relevant 50s material we've studied thus far. Highlight a few especially interesting examples for the class, and point out the key strengths and problems that you find. For example: Do any aspects of your text connect with contemporary American culture? Which aspect of the book did you find most surprising? Prepare a 1-page handout that gives full bibliographic information of your text, an overview of key points, and a key excerpt or image. Be prepared to field a few audience questions. (All reports books should be available digitally through UF Libraries; you'll see the Hathi Trust name or icon to click for checkout. Let me know if there's an issue.)

Draft Questions for Collaborative Study Guide on James Baldwin

Submit on Canvas: 2 questions for our **Collaborative Study Guide** on James Baldwin, focusing on these essays: "Notes of a Native Son," "The Harlem Ghetto," "Journey to Atlanta," "Encounter on the Seine," Black Meets Brown," "A Question of Identity." I will assign our Finalized Questions to my undergraduate class and report back to you. (Later in the semester, my undergraduate class will share their Faux Fifties ads with your class.)

NOTE: We may do this as a GoogleDoc

Conference Paper Proposal

Find an upcoming conference suitable for your seminar paper topic and address the proposal to the appropriate person. Panel organizers want to know: (1) What is the paper's overall argument & key issues/contexts?; (2) What fresh insights will you bring to the topic? (3) Which critics, theorists, reviewers, artists, a/o other commentators are most useful/not useful to your argument and why?; (4) What's an intriguing example or two that illustrates your approach?

Bottom line: why should the panel organizer select your paper? Will the implications of your analysis be broad enough to connect with other papers and interest a diverse audience? A good place to find Calls for Papers announcements (CFPs) is the link on my website. You can also find them through professional organizations such as the MLA, SCMS, AWP, ASA, and CSA. *I'll discuss your proposals individually during Week 10.*

Seminar Paper (20-24) or *Conference Paper* (10-12 pages) + *Creative Response* (10-12 pages)
Formulate a focused and lively argument that engages any of the texts, contexts, and/or issues in our course. While I'll offer detailed feedback in your Conference during Week 10, *you are welcome to discuss your topic with me* beforehand. Please do consult with me before beginning extensive work on the paper/conference paper. You should cite relevant criticism, reviews, and/or theory on your materials since 2010 (a more authoritative paper would be informed by a wider range of secondary sources). Please use MLA documentation style ([Links to an external site.](#)), and pitch your argument so that it interests a diverse academic audience who may not be familiar with your primary materials. Think of this as a *project* that will yield future work (a conference paper, academic or creative thesis, dissertation chapter, journal article, crossover essay, story, poem series, blog post) rather than merely an end in and of itself. In short, this is graduate rather than undergraduate work. I look forward to reading yours.

*Note: MFA students doing the conference paper/creative response option: pitch your argument to a diverse academic audience at a creative writing or pedagogy conference, or *New Yorker & Atlantic* readers.*