



*Jasper Johns' Flag, 1954-55*  
*Encaustic, oil, and collage on fabric mounted on plywood (three panels)*  
*42 1/4" x 60 5/8" (107.3 x 154 cm)*  
*The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York*

## AESTHETIC INVESTIGATIONS OF THE AMERICAN DREAMSCAPE

A first-year seminar

**Class Meetings:** T/Th 10:00 – 11:15am  
 Buttrick Hall, Room G-23

**Instructor:** Dr. Toby Emert  
 Department of Education

Office: Buttrick 321

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays,  
 1:00 – 2:30pm (and by appointment)

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The goals of First-Year Seminars are multiple and varied. The seminars provide an intellectual orientation to college learning, including appreciation of liberal education and academic engagement; emphasize certain fundamental intellectual skills including writing, speaking and critical thought; and embody a structural experience often associated with the upper division, yet exclusively tailored for first-year students.

From the Agnes Scott College website

### WHAT IS AN FYS?

FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS provide students with an introduction to college learning. They seek to foster intellectual excitement and intellectual engagement with the world; an appreciation of

interdisciplinary study; a recognition that learning involves assessing and interpreting and not the mere accumulation of facts and data; an ability to make judgments and defend them reasonably; and an awareness of the social dimensions and implications of ideas and their applications.

Emerging from these core goals and commitments are specific learning outcomes. Each First-Year Seminar is designed to help students improve their ability to ...

- Summarize and explain the main ideas of a written text, a speech, a work of art, a doctrine, principle or belief;

- Analyze and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of an argument;
- Compare and judge the strengths and weaknesses of two or more sources that address the same topic or argument;
- Develop, focus and organize ideas around a central topic;
- Create, revise, and present ideas in both written and spoken forms;
- Support claims with relevant evidence;
- Identify a research question and locate, summarize and evaluate a variety of sources to develop a greater understanding of some formal product or performance;
- Demonstrate the ability to make connections between theory and practice, ideas, and applications.

## WHAT IS THIS FYS ABOUT?

THIS COURSE investigates the broad question, “What does it mean to dream ‘in American?’” We will examine portrayals of the “American dreamscape”—especially as represented by dramatic texts (plays)—reading widely and discussing how artists have conceptualized and critiqued the idea of a uniquely American identity. We will also read essays by cultural critics and virtually view the work of visual artists who seek to represent some aspect of the “dream of America” through various

media. We will write about the intersections of ideas from artists and critics, analyzing, evaluating, synthesizing, and personalizing.

The instructional strategies in the course are designed to elicit personal re-examinations of beliefs and biases and encourage you to develop a personal vision for what it means to be an inhabitant of the “American dreamscape.” Centered around the “popular education” philosophy of Paulo Freire and building on the ethno-drama educational strategies proposed by Johnny Saldana and others,

the course invites you to re-imagine what it means to interact with new ideas in deep ways, what it means to “walk inside the closet of a text and try on all the clothes to see what fits best,” what it means to develop a life script that allows for the expression of grand dreams. In addition to formal writing projects, you will create a variety of creative written responses to the ideas you encounter and those you formulate, including a readers’ theatre script that weaves together the questions, discussions, and texts that the course is structured to explore.



Troy & Bono in a scene from *Fences*

## WHAT ARE THE IN-COMMON TEXTS?\*

*A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry

*Angels in America: a Gay Fantasia on National Themes* by Tony Kushner

*Claybourne Park* by Bruce Norris

*Fences* by August Wilson

*Hair* (the movie musical based on the musical play)

*The Heidi Chronicles* by Wendy Wasserstein

*The Laramie Project*, Moisés Kaufman and members of the Tectonic Theater Project

Other readings as assigned (Check the course website on Moodle for readings related to each play.)

\* All of the required course texts are available for purchase in the Agnes Scott College Bookstore, though you may be able to find them for less expensive prices in online stores. *You will need your own copy of each text and you will need to bring your copy to class with you.*

## OUTLINE OF CLASS MEETINGS & TOPICS

| DATE        | IN-CLASS READING/ACTIVITY                                    | HOMEWORK/ASSIGNMENTS DUE             |
|-------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| TH – Aug 29 | <i>The Heidi Chronicles</i>                                  | Act I                                |
| T – Sept 3  | <i>The Heidi Chronicles</i>                                  | Act II                               |
| TH – Sept 5 | <i>The Heidi Chronicles</i>                                  | Autobiographical response to THC due |
| T-Sept. 10  | Writing & Research Workshop #1: Meet in McCain 211 (library) |                                      |
| TH-Sept 12  | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>                                   | Act I                                |
| T-Sept. 17  | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>                                   | Act II, Act III                      |
| TH-Sept 19  | <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>                                   | Draft of Formal Paper #1 due         |
| T- Sept 24  | Writing & Research Workshop #2                               |                                      |
| TH-Sept 26  | <i>Clybourne Park</i>  | Act I                                |
| T-Oct 1     | <i>Clybourne Park</i>  | Act II                               |
| TH-Oct 3    | <i>Clybourne Park</i>  | Draft of Formal Paper #2 due         |
| T-Oct 8     | <i>Hair, the American Tribal Love-Rock Musical</i>           |                                      |
| TH-Oct 10   | <b>FALL BREAK</b>  |                                      |
| T-Oct 15    | <i>Hair, the American Tribal Love-Rock Musical</i>           |                                      |
| TH –Oct 17  | <i>Hair, the American Tribal Love-Rock Musical</i>           |                                      |
| T-Oct 22    | In-class Response to Mid-term                                | Formal Paper #3: Mid-term due        |
| TH-Oct 24   | <i>The Laramie Project</i>                                   | Act I                                |
| T-Oct 29    | <i>The Laramie Project</i>                                   | Act II, Act III                      |
| TH-Oct 31   | <i>Angels in America</i>                                     | Part I                               |
| T-Nov 5     | <i>Angels in America</i>                                     |                                      |
| TH-Nov 7    | <i>Angels in America</i>                                     | Part II                              |
| T-Nov 12    | <i>Angels in America</i>                                     |                                      |
| TH-Nov 14   | <i>Angels in America</i>                                     |                                      |
| T-Nov 19    | In-class Response to Paper #4                                | Draft of Formal Paper #4 due         |
| TH-Nov 21   | <i>Fences</i>  | Entire play                          |
| T-Nov 26    | <i>Fences</i>  |                                      |
| TH-Nov 28   | <b>THANKSGIVING BREAK</b>                                    |                                      |
| T-Dec 3     | Writing & Research Workshop #3                               |                                      |
| TH-Dec 5    | In-class performance: Details TBA                            |                                      |
| T-Dec 10    | <b>READING DAY</b>   |                                      |
| W-Dec 11    | <b>READING DAY</b>   |                                      |
| TH Dec 12   | <b>EXAMS BEGIN</b>   | Final Portfolio Due                  |
| T Dec. 17   | <b>EXAMS END</b>   |                                      |

**NOTE:** For the reading assignments, you will have completed the reading that's assigned for the class date it's due before coming to class. So, for example, you will already have read Act I in *The Heidi Chronicles* when you come to class on Thursday, August 29<sup>th</sup>.

### WHAT ARE THE CLASS POLICIES?

#### ACADEMIC HONESTY

THE AGNES SCOTT College

honor code embodies an ideal of character, conduct, and citizenship, and is an important part of

the College's mission and core identity. This applies especially to academic honesty and integrity. Passing off someone else's work as your own represents intellectual fraud and theft and violates the core values of our academic community. To be honorable, you should understand not only what counts as academic dishonesty, but also how to avoid engaging in these practices. You should:

- review each course syllabus for the professor's expectations regarding course work and class attendance.
- attribute all ideas taken from other sources; this shows respect for other scholars. Plagiarism can include portraying another's work or ideas as your own, buying a paper online and turning it in as if it were your own work, or not citing or improperly citing references on a reference page or within the text of a paper.
- not falsify or create data and resources or alter a graded work without the prior consent of your professor. This

includes making up a reference for a works cited page or making up statistics or facts for academic work.

- not allow another party to do your work/exam or submit the same or similar work in more than one course without permission from the course instructors. Cheating also includes taking an exam for another person, looking on another person's exam for answers, using exams from previous classes without permission, or bringing and using unauthorized notes or resources (i.e., electronic, written, or otherwise) during an exam.
- not facilitate cheating, which can happen when you help another student complete a take home exam, give answers to an exam, talk about an exam with a student who has not taken it, or collaborate with others on work that is supposed to be completed independently.
- be truthful about the submission of work, which includes

the time of submission and the place of submission (e.g., e-mail, online, in a mailbox, to an office, etc.).

You should understand that penalties result from dishonest conduct, ranging from failure of the assignment to expulsion from the college. You should speak with your professors if you need clarification about any of these policies.

### Modified Pledge

Students pledge that they have completed assignments honestly by attaching the following statement to each test, quiz, paper, overnight assignment, in-class essay, or other work:

*I pledge that I have neither given nor received any unauthorized aid on this assignment.*

*(Signed)*

*You will need to include this pledge on all formal work for the class.*

## CLASS ATTENDANCE

THE DEPARTMENT of Education has a standard policy on attendance that has been reviewed for fairness and clarity by the members of ASC's academic advising staff, as well as by ASC students. It outlines the expectations about attendance in classes, as well as provides a definition of tardiness.

*"This class really challenged me and pushed me a lot, but because of that, I've learned so much both about the American Dream and myself. Also, I have become a Wendy Wasserstein and Tony Kushner fan now, so thank you for introducing me to two great books and authors."*

Email note from student, fall 2011

Tardiness is defined by the Department of Education as not being in class, ready to begin work at the publicized start time for the course (as specified on AscAgnes). You will lose attendance points for chronic tardiness. Three (3) tardies constitute "chronic" tardi-

ness and will be counted as an absence. Six (6) tardies will count as two absences and so forth.

1. Students will be allowed one absence for a course that meets once a week.

2. Students will be allowed two absences for a course that meets twice a week.

3. Students who incur more than two absences will be asked to meet with the instructor. The instructor may then refer the students to academic advising and their major advisers.

4. Any absence beyond the allowed excused absences will result in the final grade being reduced by three (3) points per absence.

**How you will keep a record of your attendance:** You will record your class attendance in a log that you will keep in your class folder. It's up to you to keep accurate notes about your attendance and to sign in for each class you attend. You will also note any tardiness and offer a brief explanation on the log. The attendance chart becomes part of your final portfolio for the course, giving us both a clear record of your attendance throughout the semester. If you miss no more than two class sessions during the semester, you will have met the expectations for attendance in the course; however, you are expected to come to each class meeting. You should only miss class if you have a very strong reason for doing so.

## PARTICIPATION

THIS IS a course that, at least in part, is designed to teach you how to interact with texts in significant, and perhaps novel, ways. There

will be a strong emphasis on what is called "close reading" (a term we will define together in class) and on text-based discussion. Your efforts to enter the conversations we have in class will be important to the success of the course generally and to your personal success in the course as well.

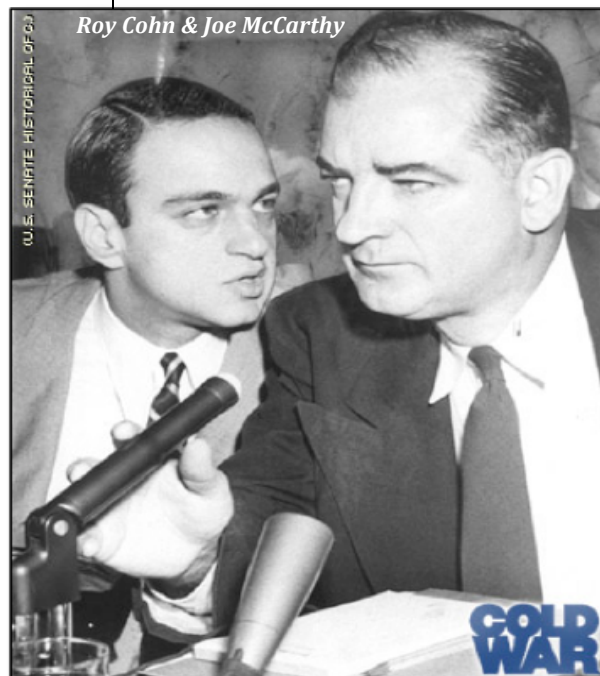
I will also use email as a way of keeping in touch with you throughout the semester and as a way of offering updates, reminders, and additional information about the course. *You will need to check your email every day and respond when appropriate.*

## ASSIGNMENTS

THERE WILL be a number of both formal and informal assignments for this course. You will have assignments in terms of reading and writing for each class meeting, designed to help you prepare for the class lesson. You will want to plan in advance so that you come to class prepared for the discussions.

For each formal assignment, you will receive a set of guidelines designed to walk you through the steps of the project. Read closely. Most of what you need to know to succeed with each assignment will be included in the guidelines.

All of the writing assignments for the course are considered "drafts" until you turn in your final portfolio



lio at the conclusion of the semester. This means that you are expected to continue to revise and edit your writing. All good writing requires multiple revisions, so plan to work on your writing consistently throughout the semester.

You will mostly receive "feedback" on your writing, rather than grades. The only graded assignments during the course of the semester are "quizzes," short, somewhat informal "check-ins" that help you keep on task with the readings and help me gauge your comprehension of the content we're working on together.

### Formal course projects:

**Project 1:** Response to *The Heidi Chronicles* (essay)

**Project 2:** Review (formal review of one of the plays we're reading)

**Project 3:** Mid-term (formal creative response to the themes of the course)

**Project 4:** Found poem

**Project 5:** Portfolio (formal collection of revised projects from the course)

Informal assignments: In addition to the formal “papers” for the course, you will also be doing a lot of informal writing. So, you’ll want to have a notebook that is specifically designated for this course. We will write in it in class, and you will jot notes and ideas there outside of class as well. You will be asked to submit part of your notebook as an element of your portfolio, *so keep everything that you write* as you move through the semester.

**You will submit all of your papers in both hard copy format and electronically, as a Word document attached to an email message. This allows me to archive your assignments.**

**FOR YOUR CALENDAR:** On Friday, September 13<sup>th</sup>, all first-year students will attend a special panel discussion with alumnae of the College. This session meets during the community hour at 2PM. The location has not yet been announced, but go ahead and put this meeting on your calendar. It’s considered part of your attendance for the course.

## LATE OR MISSED WORK

LATE WORK will be penalized. If you must miss class when an assignment is due, you are responsible for arranging to turn your

work in early or as soon as possible. All announced work must be completed in order to receive credit for this course.

## COURSE CREDIT

AGNES SCOTT College typically offers four (4) credit hours for each course you take (though there are a few exceptions). That means that you are expected to spend four hours per week “in class” in order to receive this number of credit hours. Since our class only meets at a regularly scheduled time for three (3) hours per week, the fourth hour will include work that is completed outside of the regular class hours, but that is considered mandatory for the class. Different classes manage this “out-of-class” work in different ways. In our case, you will be expected to watch several film

versions of the plays we are reading, which will be available in the library or online and to attend a workshop reading of *The Laramie Project* (details to be announced).

## FINAL EVALUATION AND GRADING

WE WILL share the joy of assessment as we consider your success in the course. Artists of all descriptions are consistently asked to evaluate their own work, as they are expected to be self-aware, critical, and constantly learning and evolving with regard to their craft. It’s exceptionally important,

I think, that we translate that sort of ethos for your work as student-scholars. So, I will ask you to assess your progress in the course both formally and informally. You will submit a “portfolio” of assignments at the end of the course that offers us both a record of your progress.\* I’ll ask you to include an introduction to the portfolio and an evaluation of your learning (specifically with regard to how successful you’ve been in playing the role of “classroom protagonist.”)

For some of you the method(s) we will use to assess your progress in this course will feel “new” and, perhaps, unusual. Consistent with some of the current ideas about authentic assessment, student-centered learning, “autobiography as curriculum,” and students thinking of themselves as apprentice scholars, however, the goals for the course involve introducing you to alternative forms of evaluation.

I’ll offer you feedback at several points during the semester, and I will ask you to write and talk about your learning as well. It’s important to me, as an educator, to assist my students to become thoughtful self-educators. I’ll talk more about this idea in class, but do begin to consider that you are the person who has the most at stake in this course. It is your class as much as it is mine. We will share the assessment roles.

*\* Your portfolio will be due after the class is over, on the first day of the exam period.*

## RESOURCES

A NUMBER of resources are available to you as a student at Agnes Scott College, many of which could be very helpful to you in this course.

**McCain Library:** The library is, of course, a significant resource for your studies, as well as for your personal reading pleasure. We will have a visit from one of the librarians so that you have a basic introduction to how the library is organized and works, but you will want to spend time exploring the stacks, the study spaces, the media collections, and the online databases.

Also, the films you will be asked to watch for the course have been placed on reserve. You can check them out at the front desk.

**Technology Production Studio (TPS):** The TPS is located on the ground floor of McCain and houses a number of computers and related equipment that will be useful to you. It is also staffed by students and technologists who can help you with any project that includes an element of technology. This resource will be especially helpful to you when you create your portfolio of assignments to submit at the end of the course.

**The Center for Writing & Speaking:** This center is also located on the ground floor of McCain, very near TPS. We are fortunate to have a designated tutor from the Center who will be in class each day and who will act as your liaison to the Center. This is a resource you should use frequently.

The Center is staffed by upper-level students who have been specifically trained to help you with writing concerns. Every writer benefits from sharing her work with someone else. Take advantage of this excellent campus resource. You will find that you will likely use it throughout your years at ASC.

Early in the semester, I'll ask you to set an appointment to meet with our course tutor to talk about your writing and to learn more about the services provided by the Center.

Our tutor is SuMyat Thu, and her email address is [sththu@agnesscott.edu](mailto:sththu@agnesscott.edu).



*"Cut with the Dada Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany," Hannah Hoch, 1919*