

Literary Journalism
Prof. David Greenberg

Class Time: Mon. 9:30am - 11:30am

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Office Hours: TBD

Course No.: 04:567:413:01 + 01:359:316:01

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Syllabus
Fall 2024

Description. Most newspaper and internet journalism is composed on deadline to meet demands of the moment. But there's another tradition of journalism that values deep research and reporting, care in composition, personal voice, and literary style. In this course we read and analyze great examples non-fiction writing to appreciate what makes for enduring non-fiction writing—journalism that rises to the level of literature. The course explores not just the form but the content of these books and articles, on the assumption that the best journalism conveys ideas and thus represents a contribution to intellectual and cultural history. Accordingly, we will seek to put these works in their historical and cultural contexts.

Course Requirements.

- 1) Weekly readings. Each week there will be assigned readings, usually by one author—either a single book or a set of articles. Some of the reading may be hard-going but it should also be fun, and reading 200 pages for this class should be easier than reading 50 pages of dense academic writing for another class.
- 2) Oral Presentation and Paper. Each week, one student will research the book and the author under discussion and lead off that week's discussion with a ten-minute presentation.

For this paper, you will have to read at least two other books, not on the syllabus. They may be books by your author; a biography or critical study of the author; or books in the same vein as the assigned work.

The presentation should not summarize the principal book, which everyone will have read. Instead, think of the presentation as the distillation of a ten-page paper, in which you present an overview of your paper and then segue into a discussion of key ideas or aspects of the book. You don't have to submit the paper on the day of the presentation. You will have one additional week to complete the paper. But the paper and presentation will require original research. You won't be able to complete them solely on the basis of the assigned reading. In conducting your research, you'll want to go beyond Google. Use the Rutgers library's databases to find reviews, profiles, and essays about the author and the book. You may want to read a biography of the author.

The presentation and paper should address two things:

- a) The author's biography and career. Give a brief biographical sketch of the author, including his or her intellectual and professional trajectory. Think about the relationship of the book to the author's other works, as well as the author's reputation and legacy. Why do we read this author? What is he or she known for? How has his or her work evolved? What are common themes or literary aspects to the writer's work?
- b) The book's historical significance. When and how was the book was written? How was it received? How was it reviewed? Did it provoke controversies or criticisms, and if so, for what reason? Why has it been considered an important book, at the time of its publication and now?

There is no single way to do this assignment. I have posted some examples on our Canvas site of published essays that look back on a given book to assess its importance. These may help to give you a sense of what you should be doing. Please consult with me the week before you present.

Papers should follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*. You should purchase either the [Chicago Manual of Style](#) or Kate L. Turabian, [A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations](#).

- 3) Exams. There will be two at-home exams, due on the weeks specified below. They will consist of short essays. You must complete these by yourself, without consulting anyone else.

In addition, there are a number of other things you should know.

1. Regular attendance is required. This course meets only once a week. Arriving on time and staying for the duration is essential. Students who miss more than one class—or substantial parts of more than one class—will be penalized one third of a letter grade for each class missed, *even if you notify me*. So if you're on pace to earn an A and you have two unexcused absences, you will earn a B+. In case of severe illness or extraordinary events, you should provide documentation. "Severe illness" does not refer to a bad cold. It refers to something like meningitis or a car accident.
2. Active participation is required. One purpose of a seminar like this is to teach students to form their own ideas and share them with their peers. The very work of the course consists of engaging in a discussion of ideas. Students who abstain from discussion are missing the course's whole purpose. *A class in which you don't contribute to discussion is equivalent to a missed class*. In other words, if you miss one class because of illness and are completely silent through a second class, you will be penalized. I am sympathetic to all students, and I know that some people are just naturally more soft-spoken or shy than others. *If you are truly fearful about talking in class, you probably shouldn't take this course*. I am more than happy to talk to individual students about the challenges of speaking in class.
3. We will be using Canvas. Log in with your Rutgers ID and password. On the site I will post announcements, assignments, readings, etc.
4. Phones, tablets, and laptops are not permitted. It's human nature to be distracted by these devices and use them for pursuits others than classwork. I've found that when we all put away our devices, the conversation and level of engagement is much higher.
5. Students must show up on time and stay for the duration of the class. Do not get up in the middle of class.
6. I will return all emails. Don't assume that I've received your email. Sometimes messages get stuck in a spam folder or lost in cyberspace. If I don't reply within 48 hours, please follow up with a phone call.
7. Academic Integrity. Plagiarism and cheating are, of course, forbidden, according to Rutgers University policy. You may not consult other people in doing your assignments or use AI programs. You are responsible for reviewing and obeying these policies. A lengthy statement of the policy is at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-at-rutgers>.

Reading List.

Besides the readings below, articles will be posted on Sakai. The books are available at the Rutgers University Barnes & Noble bookstore and on reserve at Alexander Library. If you're buying the books online, please do so ASAP because delivery may take time.

1. George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London*. Mariner Books. ISBN: 978-0156262248.
2. H. L. Mencken, *A Religious Orgy in Tennessee*. Melville House, 2006. ISBN: 978-1933633176.
3. John Hersey, *Hiroshima*. Vintage Books, 1989 (© 1946). ISBN: 0679721037.
4. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*. Vintage Books, 1992. (© 1963) ISBN: 067974472X.
5. Tom Wolfe, *Radical Chic & Mau-Mauing the Flak-Catchers*. Picador, 2009. (© 1970) ISBN: 0312429134.
6. Joan Didion. *Slouching Toward Bethlehem*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. ISBN-13: 978-0374531386.
7. Leon Dash, *Rosa Lee*. Basic Books. ISBN: 0465070922.

8. Nellie Bowles, *Morning After the Revolution*. Thesis. ISBN: 0593420144.
9. Janet Malcolm, *The Journalist and the Murderer*. Vintage Books, 2000. (© 1990) ISBN: 9780679731832

Weekly Assignments.

Mon., Sep. 9 Norman Sims, "The Art of Literary Journalism," from *Literary Journalism: A New Collection of the Best American Nonfiction* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995), 3-21.
Tom Wolfe, "The New Journalism," in *The New Journalism*. Tom Wolfe and E.W. Johnson, eds. (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 3-52.
Ben Yagoda, "Preface," in *The Art of Fact: A Historical Anthology of Literary Journalism* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 13-16; and Kevin Kerrane, "Making Facts Dance," in op. cit., 17-20.

Mon., Sep. 16 H. L. Mencken, *A Religious Orgy in Tennessee*

Mon., Sep. 23 George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London*

Mon., Sep. 30 John Hersey, *Hiroshima*

Mon., Oct. 7 James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

Mon., Oct. 14 **Columbus Day**

Mon., Oct. 21 Tom Wolfe, *Radical Chic & Mau-Mauing the Flak-Catchers*

Mon., Oct. 28 Joan Didion, *Slouching Toward Bethlehem*

Take-Home Exam – to be completed between Nov. 4 and Nov. 14 (tentative)

Mon., Nov. 4 Leon Dash, *Rosa Lee*

Mon., Nov. 11 Thomas Chatterton Williams, selected articles

Mon., Nov. 18 Sarah Stillman, *New Yorker* articles

Mon., Nov. 25 David Grann, *New Yorker* articles

Mon., Dec. 2 Nellie Bowles, *Morning After the Revolution*

Mon., Dec. 9 Janet Malcolm, *The Journalist and the Murderer*

Take-Home Exam – to be completed between Dec. 9 and Dec. 18.