

**Rel 19-354-01
Hist 16-304-01
A Novel Approach to American Religious History
Spring 2012**

“Narrators, and the tales they tell, never stand nowhere in particular or everywhere at once: they always are situated. Narratives, then are ‘sightings’ from particular sites” --Thomas A. Tweed



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Professor: Dr. Molly Jensen
Class Meetings: Mondays and Wednesdays 11:00 AM-12:15PM
in KEW115

Course Texts:

Olive Gilbert. *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*. Salem, New Hampshire: Ayer Company, 1992.

Anzia Yezierska. *Bread Givers*. New York: Persea Books, 1925

James Baldwin. *Go Tell it on the Mountain*. New York: Bantam Dell, 1952.

N. Scott Momaday. *House Made of Dawn*. New York: Harper & Row, 1966

Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*. New York: Harcourt, 1982.

Wendell Berry. *Jayber Crow*. New York: Counterpoint, 2000.

Edwidge Danticat. *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. New York: Random House, 1994.

Pat Mora. *House of Houses*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997.

Course Description:

This American religious history course is novel in a number of ways. Most obviously, the course is novel in that our readings consist of eight American novels rather than a history textbook. Another novel aspect of the class is that we will not necessarily follow or chart a linear progression or development of American religions. Instead, we will take a novel path by considering distinctive religious expressions of geographically- and culturally-diverse communities. We will attend to local particularities and regional discontinuities, giving close consideration to the relation of religious forms and the landscapes in which they are rooted. In the campus garden, we will also become more aware of the landscape in which we are rooted and learn about sustainable practices for local ecological care.

Details of Course Assignments:

1. **Class Attendance and Participation (10% of course grade)**
2. **Land-Based Learning Exercises in Campus Garden (30% of course grade)**

Exercise A- Sensory Awareness-Square Foot Observation

Students will select a square foot patch in the campus garden and visually observe the chosen patch for ten minutes. We will gather after the ten-minute observation period and discuss what you notice. After a second observation period, students will record a reflection in their course notebooks.

Exercise B- Sensory Awareness-Who is Sharing Your Space?

Students will spend ten minutes observing, with as many senses as possible, the community interactions in the garden. We will gather after the ten-minute observation period and discuss the interactions you observed. After a second observation period, students will record a reflection in their course notebooks.

Exercise C- Delicate Process of Transplanting in the Garden

Bread Givers is a narrative of transition and struggle in a new country. Geographic transitions often entail cultural and religious renegotiation and are delicate and often tense periods. The class will participate in a short workshop on careful and effective garden transplanting and then will select planted vegetable starts from greenhouse and plant those starts in outside garden beds. Students will monitor the transplants and record observations in the month following planting.

Exercise D- Experimenting with Light and Darkness (or at least shade) in the Garden

Contrasts of light and darkness are used both to characterize religious beliefs in Baldwin's novel and to mark spaces in the narrative's urban

setting. Over the course of a week, students will make four visits to the campus garden at different times of the day (morning, mid-day, afternoon and evening) to observe the light on a chosen portion of the garden. When we gather in the garden as a class, we will discuss appropriate plants for each portion of the garden based on amount of sunlight. Students will also experiment with types of agricultural shading that are becoming prevalent in Central Texas farming.

Exercise E- Water Conservation

Students will repair irrigation tubing in the garden beds; hand-water beds from the rain-water collection barrels; and install ceramic Ollas in several beds.

Exercise F- Colors, Companion Planting and Pollination

In addition to the vibrant purple of Walker's novel, other colors are important in sustainable gardening. A guest student speaker will present her recent project on pollinator plants in the garden and discuss the role of color in attracting pollinating insects and birds. Each student will create a color map of a garden bed and recommend two additional flowering plants for pollinators.

Exercise G- Preventing Soil Erosion

The "Nest Egg" in *Jayber Crow* is a large forested area near agricultural fields. The roots of trees and plants help to prevent soil erosion. On bare areas of the hillside in the garden, soil is eroding. Working in groups, students will assess areas of erosion and make recommendations for trees or other plantings.

Exercise H- Identifying Native Plants and Their Uses

Each student will receive a list of plants that appear in *House of Houses*, locate those plants in the campus garden and detail their uses according in the novel.

3. **Paper #1 (10% of course grade)** The religious symbolism of John's family (in Baldwin's *Go Tell it on the Mountain*) is reflected throughout his urban landscape. Detail at least two examples of religious symbolism narratively inscribed upon John's home geography.
4. **Paper #2 (10% of course grade)** The narrative of Abel (from *House Made of Dawn*) is not ordered chronologically. How do the seasonal rhythms of *Walatowa* anchor the structure of the novel and Abel's religious journey.
5. **Paper #3 (10% of course grade)** The story of Jayber Crow's deepening connection to the land and people of his community unfolds across a backdrop of increasing urbanization, industrialization and commodification of American society. How does this narrative juxtaposition question assumptions about historical progress?

6. **Final Paper (30% of course grade)** Compare the spiritual geographies of Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, and Memory* to Mora’s *House of Houses*. How are these living landscapes formative of the adult identities of the two female protagonists.

Schedule of Assignments

Week	Dates of Class	Reading	Other Assignments and Information
1	1/9 and 1/11	Handout: “Introduction: Narrating U.S. Religious History” by Thomas A. Tweed	Land-Based Learning Exercise A- Square Food Observation
2	1/18 (NO CLASS on 1/16- MLK Day)	Preface and Narrative, Sojourner Truth	Land-Based Learning Exercise B- “Who is Sharing Your Space” Observation
3	1/23 and 1/25	Part Second “Book of Life,” Sojourner Truth	
4	1/30 and 2/1	Book I, <i>Bread Givers</i>	Land Based Learning Exercise C- The Delicate Process of Transplanting in the Garden
5	2/6 and 2/8	Books II & III, <i>Bread Givers</i>	
6	2/13 and 2/15	Part I and Florence’s Prayer from Part II, <i>Go Tell it on the Mountain</i>	Land Based Learning Exercise D- Shade and Light in the Garden
7	2/20 and 2/22	Rest of Part II and Part III, <i>Go Tell it on the Mountain</i>	Paper 1 Due
8	2/27 and 2/29	Prologue, 1 & 2, <i>House Made of Dawn</i>	Land-Based Learning Exercise E – Water Conservation
9	3/5 and 3/7	3 & 4, <i>House Made of Dawn</i>	Paper 2 Due
10	(NO CLASS- Spring Break)		

			Land-Based Learning Exercise F- Colors, Companion Planting and Pollination
11	3/19 and 3/21	<i>The Color Purple</i>	
12	3/26 and 3/28	Chapters 1-16, <i>Jayber Crow</i>	
13	4/2 and 4/4	Chapters 17-32, <i>Jayber Crow</i>	Land-Based Learning Exercise G- Preventing Soil Erosion Paper 3 Due
14	4/9 and 4/11	<i>Breath, Eyes, Memory</i>	
15	4/16 and 4/18	House of Houses-Junio, <i>House of Houses</i>	Land-Based Learning Exercise H- Identifying Native Texas Plants and Their Uses
16	4/23 and 4/26	Julio-Dichos, <i>House of Houses</i>	Final Paper Due