

ENG 400 Descriptions

Spring 2021

Tuning Video Games for Social Justice **Laquana Cooke**

Can we tune video games for justice? Could the tuning of games lead to a more democratic society? Or would that simply amplify privilege for the well-off? Social justice gaming is certainly a movement, and takes a variety of forms. In this seminar, you will critically analyze three types of social justice gaming movement models, looking specifically at the type of transformations and how they work: The gaming model, the social gaming model, and the institutional model. Your analytic lens will be informed by various methodologies and methods stemming from critical video game studies, critical pedagogy, and science and technology studies.

Love & Theft & Rage: White Cultural Rhetorics **Tim Dougherty**

Using source material and methodologies from cultural studies, rhetorical studies, African American Studies, Indigenous Studies, ethnic studies, & sound studies, this seminar will guide students through an exploration of the constitution of white identity on this continent over time through commonplace cultural performances that have simultaneously appropriated, caricatured, thieved, and distanced themselves from African, African American, and Indigenous life ways. Beginning with the Boston Tea Party and rituals of Blackface minstrelsy, through sustained attention to the evolution of popular musical forms from folk to hip hop, to contemporary investigation of white resentment and the re-turn to white nationalism, students will examine the long tradition of European-descended immigrant inculcation into whiteness and write projects aimed at using scholarly research to resist white supremacy today.

Truth & Authenticity in Contemporary Creative Nonfiction **Kristine Ervin**

This course will explore the slippery nature of the creative nonfiction genre, with its blurred and blurring boundaries; with its swirling questions surrounding Truth/truth, facts, memory, subjectivity, and aesthetics; and with its often-implied contract with its readers. Students will engage with contemporary creative nonfiction texts (memoir and the personal essay) and with current scholarship regarding the central questions of the genre. Additionally, students will investigate the ways in which the postmodern perspective, with its attention to multiplicity and fragmentation, informs the genre's

definitions and complexities. Along with exploring the subject of truth and authenticity through a formal research project, students will also practice in the art of writing creative nonfiction, thereby pushing the line of inquiry through multiple lenses to answer or to complicate the question: “What does truth in nonfiction mean and does it even matter?”

Culture and Authoritarianism

Graham MacPhee

Authoritarianism has traditionally been seen as the opposite pole to democracy, with the implication that the presence of elections guards against authoritarianism. However, contemporary developments across the globe have seen the electoral rise of parties and leaders who flout democratic norms and openly encourage discrimination and the demonization of vulnerable social groups.

To explain the coincidence of democratic forms and authoritarian tendencies, alternative intellectual traditions have looked to the role of culture. Cultural narratives of majority victimhood and minority othering are seen to provide a context that rewrites existing democratic and legal practices, casting the state as an instrument of the “true” national people rather than as a public space for upholding law and negotiating the range of rights and interests in a plural society. On this view, culture plays an important political role by appealing to identity and to emotional and affective response, so bypassing constitutional protections and undermining critical discussion.

This seminar will explore the role of culture in enabling and contesting anti-democratic tendencies. We will examine a range of recent and contemporary texts, from drama and literary prose, to films and popular culture, political speeches and interviews, and social media. And we will look at some important theoretical accounts of authoritarianism and culture. The seminar will develop students’ skills in close reading and critical writing and will provide an advanced foundation in cultural analysis to prepare students as future English teachers, graduate students, or professionals—and also as historically literate citizens.

Philadelphia Literary Cultures and Networks

Joe Navitsky

This seminar focuses on the premier place occupied by the City of Philadelphia in American literary production. Since the drafting of the nation’s foundational documents—the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution—in Old City, Philadelphia has hosted many famed literary and intellectual circles that sustained a level of creative output, not to mention a publishing industry, that became the envy of the New Republic. Of course, the list of writers associated with Philadelphia is impressive in itself: Ben Franklin, Louisa May Alcott, Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Brockden Brown, Robert Montgomery Bird, Walt Whitman,

W.E.B. DeBois, Harriet Jacobs, and more recently William Wharton, Sonia Sanchez, David Bradley, John Edgar Wideman, Quiara Alegría Hudes, and Lorene Cary. But rather than merely reading the “greatest hits” authored by Philadelphia-based writers or studying texts solely because their narratives are set in the city, this course will situate select writers—and editors, collectors, and publishers—within the vast urban and intellectual landscapes of Philadelphia. The incredible cultural history of the city will also be explored through the study of—and, hopefully, visits to—its premier institutions, including the Edgar Allan Poe National Historical Site and the Rosenbach Museum and Library.

Investigating Race

Cherise Pollard

In ENG 400: Investigating Race, we will explore the genre of the passing novel written by Twentieth Century African American authors. We will focus on the plight of mixed-race characters, using an African Americanist critical lens that will be sharpened with Feminist and New Historicist theoretical approaches. In particular, we will analyse the ways that the passing protagonists’s struggle for equality challenges Twentieth Century definitions of race, class and gender and, in doing so, highlights deeply American racial and sexual anxieties. Students will be pursuing these lines of critical inquiry as they write three research papers (two short 5 page research papers and one long final research paper). One of the goals of the course is to give students practice with writing in the genre of the literary research paper, especially the process of finding and incorporating appropriate secondary sources into their analysis of the texts. To this end, the professor has planned for several writing workshops.

Environmentalism in English Studies

Cheryl Wanko

This seminar looks at how “nature” and environmental problems have been constructed in (mainly) Anglo-American writing. By examining a range of types of texts from literature to comedy videos, we will consider questions related to ecocriticism; investigate sustainability; learn about climate justice; perform research related to the intersections of language, literature, science, and culture; and create texts that address environmental questions. We will complete and reflect on a week-long “No Impact” experiment, and, for our final exam activity, we will identify and perform action that puts into practice what we’ve been reading and discussing.