

AMERICAN DISSENT – Extension E-202 – Fall, 2008

1: THE TRADITION OF DISSENT

REVOLUTION: Thomas Jefferson, "Declaration of Independence"

INDIVIDUALISM: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Essays (selections)

ABOLITIONISM: Frederick Douglass, Narrative

2: MOVEMENTS OF DISSENT:

UTOPIA: Edward Bellamy, Looking Backwards

POPULISM/ UNION PROTEST : John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath

THE BEATS: Jack Kerouac, On the Road

VIETNAM/ STUDENT PROTEST: Norman Mailer, The Armies of the Night

CIVIL RIGHTS: Martin Luther King, Testament of Hope

FEMINISM: Adrienne Rich, Poetry and Prose

3.: CONTEMPORARY DISSENT:

ENVIRONMENTALISM/APOCALYPSE: Cormac McCarthy, The Road

REFORM: Michael Moore, Sicko

POLITICS OF CHANGE: Barak Obama, The Audacity of Hope

Required:

2 Class reports (15-20 minutes) – to be submitted as short papers (5-10 pages)
term-paper (15-20 pages, due last day of class)

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“Every young American,” wrote Emerson, “is a natural dissenter.” This seems a premonition of student activism in our time, but it is really an insight into our culture at large. This course explores the deep and abiding tradition of dissent in the USA. For dissent here is not limited to the young; it is basic to our national identity. The “American Way” encourages dissent. Indeed, we are heirs to a long history of dissent, from the revolutionary founders to the rhetoric of change in current politics – from the *Declaration of Independence* to *The Audacity of Hope*. But it is a peculiar history, centered on a paradox that’s inherent in the very meaning of America. As a system of values or as an ideal (the American Dream, the Country of Tomorrow) “America” has served as a summons both to independence and to conformity, to chauvinism and radicalism alike. Dissent in the USA is not just protest. Rather it is a richly ambiguous term, representing a call to resistance and/or an appeal to conservatism. Can there be a patriotism of non-conformity, a nation of rebels? What does it mean to protest (as an individualist, a union organizer, a student radical, a feminist, or a civil rights advocate) in the name of “the American promise”? These will be the sorts of questions raised in this course. We will be examining them from a literary-cultural perspective, though a variety of genres– the declaration, the essay, the memoir, film, the political manifesto, the sermon, and the novel. . By different aesthetic means, and within changing historical contexts, these works speak directly to the process of the country’s development, and to the distinctive, vibrant, complex nature of American dissent.

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1: THE TRADITION OF DISSENT

SEPT. 16: *INTRODUCTION*

SEPT 24: *REVOLUTION:* Thomas Jefferson, “Declaration of Independence” (handout)

SEPT 30: *INDIVIDUALISM:* Ralph Waldo Emerson, Essays (Signet)

OCT 7: *ABOLITIONISM:* Frederick Douglass, Narrative (Signet)

2: MOVEMENTS OF DISSENT:

OCT 14: *UTOPIA:* Edward Bellamy, Looking Backwards (Bantam)

OCT 21: *POPULISM/ UNION PROTEST* : John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath (Penguin)

OCT 28: *ANTINOMIANISM/ THE BEATS*: Jack Kerouac, On the Road (Viking)

NOV 4: *VIETNAM/ STUDENT PROTEST*: Norman Mailer, The Armies of the Night (Signet)

NOV 11: HOLIDAY (VETERANS DAY)

NOV 18: *CIVIL RIGHTS*: Martin Luther King, Testament of Hope (Harper)

NOV 25: *FEMINISM*: Adrienne Rich, Poetry and Prose (Norton)

3: CONTEMPORARY DISSENT:

DEC 2: *ENVIRONMENTALISM/APOCALYPSE*: Cormac McCarthy, The Road (Vintage)

DEC 9: *SOCIAL REFORM*: Michael Moore, Sicko

DEC 16: *POLITICS OF CHANGE*: Barak Obama, The Audacity of Hope (Vintage)

JAN 6: *VARIETIES OF DISSENT (REVOLUTION, PROTEST, SUBVERSION, REFORM)*

Required:

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term-paper (15-20 pages, due Jan 13)