

HIS 195 WRITING FROM THE MARGINS

GRINNELL COLLEGE FALL 2021

Mon 7:00 – 9:50 p.m. • 8/30/21 – 10/11/21 • HSSC N1118

KELLY MAYNARD

office hours T/R 10-11:00 a.m. and by appt • ARH3244



L: Dave the Potter, storage jar, 1858 (Lewis Miles Pottery, photo Gavin Ashworth)

R: Agnes Richter, the little jacket, 1895 (Prinzhorn Collection, Heidelberg)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Whose lives get preserved in the historical record? How? Why? This short course incorporates autobiography and material culture to explore the stories of people who lived at the very margins of their social contexts. Through the ceramic work of an enslaved person in the U.S. named Dave and the embroidered jackets of a German psychiatric patient named Agnes Richter, we consider how, despite the odds, first-person traces of individual existence survive. Students develop their own low-key research projects on the stubborn, willful interactions of hand, text, and material.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this two-credit short course are:

- to familiarize ourselves with some of the ways that historians – as well as scholars from other disciplines – approach material culture, social positioning, and writing about the self
- to cultivate speaking and listening skills and the clear presentation of our ideas through weekly class discussions
- to become familiar with the work, lives, and contexts of Dave the Potter and Agnes Richter in early-to-mid nineteenth-century South Carolina and late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century Germany, respectively
- to develop research and writing skills to contextualize and analyze individually-selected case studies of “writing from the margins”
- to present case studies at the end of the course clearly, thoughtfully, and engagingly

PRINCIPLES

As we navigate together the weirdnesses of higher education during a global pandemic, please bear in mind the THRIVE principles codified at the College in the spring of 2020. These are:

- Talk to improve transparency,
- Health and safety must remain a top priority for our entire campus community,
- Re-imagine and reconsider what is possible and necessary,
- Inclusion requires flexibility,
- Value all experiences of vulnerability,
- Empathy requires all of us to be aware, sensitive, and responsive.

This means that above all, we are working TOGETHER as a community to learn, to push each other, to respect each other, to empathize with each other, and to be humans together. So I am doubling down here on the necessity for us to embrace mutual support and grace as we move through this first half of the semester. Requirement number one, then, is that we all do our best as humans.

Finally, I want every person in this class to succeed and am deeply committed to creating an environment that helps make that possible. I encourage students with documented disabilities in any form to discuss reasonable accommodations with me. If you have not already done so, please start a conversation about and provide documentation of your disability to Jae Hirschman, Coordinator for Student Disability Resources, at hirschma@grinnell.edu.

REQUIREMENTS & GRADING

Class Meetings

As for the nuts and bolts, please plan to on time to our class meetings and be prepared to stay through the scheduled end of class. **Please come having 1) done the work listed on the syllabus for that day to the best of your ability and 2) collected in advance your thoughts, questions, and comments for discussion.** A fruitful conversation stems from prepared participants who come ready to engage, both by speaking AND by listening and responding to others' ideas.

Attendance

Because of the nature of the C19 pandemic and its effects, I am not implementing a hard and fast penalty for absences from class. However, pandemic or no, I DO value communication with you above all things. If you must miss class for whatever reason, please alert me via email as soon as possible. We can discuss ways to get materials that you missed to you. Similarly, because participation in discussions and discussion boards is such an integral part of the class (see below), your grade may suffer from extended absences from class and boards. Please do your best to keep up at all times.

Projects

In addition to our weekly discussions, there will be small scaffolding research assignments as the course progresses, and I will schedule reasonable and appropriate deadlines for completion for each of these. As with attendance, however, I recognize that there are many things happening in your lives of which this course is but one piece. I am much more interested in you doing your best on an assignment than in you handing it in “on time” per se, as long as we can strike a balance and avoid debilitating procrastination or the triumph of crippling perfectionism. Please try to meet deadlines, communicate with me if you are unable for any reason. We can work together to make arrangements from there.

Grading

Your grade for this course will be calculated according to the following formula:

- class meeting participation 50%
- research project scaffolding assignments 25%
- research project presentation 25%

In addition to the expectations for participation outlined above, details will be forthcoming about research scaffolding assignments and the final presentation.

Class Materials

There are no books required for this course. All materials listed below will be available on PWeb, through the Grinnell College Libraries, or on the internet.

SCHEDULE

weekly classes will be divided between readings and research project scaffolding

Monday

30 Aug 21

Course Introduction

- Rebecca Shrum The Inclusive Historian’s Handbook: Material Culture
<https://inclusivehistorian.com/material-culture/>
- Twenty Years, Twenty Questions to Ask an Object
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPSeQF3OF1Q>
- Smith, Sidonie and Watson, Julia “A Tool Kit: Twenty-four Strategies for Reading Life Narratives” in *Reading Autobiography* (2010): pp. 235-251

6 Sept 21

Readings in autobiography and material culture OR What are we doing and why are we doing it this way?

- Smith and Watson, Introduction to *De/Colonization and the Politics of Discourse in Women’s Autobiographical Practices* (1988), pp. xiii-xxi

- 6 Sept cont**
- Russell, Heather (excerpt) Chapter 2: “The Poetics of Biomythography: The Work of Audre Lorde” in *Legba’s Crossing: Narratology in the African Atlantic* (2009), pp. 59-65
 - AHR Conversation: Historians and the Study of Material Culture in *American Historical Review* (December 2009): 1355-1404
- Project scaffolding: interests and ideas
- 13 Sept 21**
- Case study: Dave the potter I**
- Leonard Todd, “Dave’s Life” http://leonardtodd.com/daves-life_283.html from *Carolina Clay: The Life and Legend of the Slave Potter Dave* (2008)
 - Dave the Potter, Inscriptions (in *Carolina Clay*, pp. 229-252)
 - Babatunde Lawal, “Signifying Jars, Resonating Like a Banjar: Influence, Politics, and Poetics in Dave’s Pottery” in Michael Chaney, ed., *Where Is All My Relation? The Poetics of Dave the Potter* (2018), pp. 86-100
- Project scaffolding: topics
- 20 Sept 21**
- Dave II**
- Ethan Lasser, “Writing in Clay: The Materiality of Dave’s Poetry” in Chaney, ed., *Where Is All My Relations?*, pp. 134-144
 - Michael Bramwell, “Potter’s Field: Trauma and Representation in the Art of David Drake” in Chaney, ed., *Where Is All My Relations?*, pp. 198-208
 - Theater Gates, Opening Night Lecture “To Speculate Darkly”, Milwaukee Art Museum (2010) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2QWXC36fHNc>
- Project scaffolding: initial research
- 27 Sept 21**
- Case study: Agnes Richter I**
- Hornstein, Gail A. C24 “Visions Wrapped in Riddles” and C25 “Written on the Body” in *Agnes’s Jacket: A Psychologist’s Search for the Meanings of Madness* (2009), pp. 245-269
 - Catherine Dollard, “The *alte Jungfer* as New Deviant: Representation, Sex, and the Single Woman in Imperial Germany” *German Studies Review* 29, no. 1 (Feb 2006): 107-126
- Project scaffolding: further research progress
- 4 Oct 21**
- Agnes II**
- Nancy Reagin, “The *Habitus* of Domesticity” in *Sweeping the German Nation: Domesticity and National Identity in Germany, 1870-1945* (2007), pp. 16-48
 - Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892) in Hemmings, ed. *The Textile Reader* (2012), pp. 305-314
- Project scaffolding: presentation shape
- 11 Oct 21**
- Research Project Presentations**