

Professor Rebecca Entel
At Cornell: 208 South Hall; x4225; rentel@cornellcollege.edu
Morning classroom: 313 College Hall; afternoon classroom: 200 Stoner House
At Gerace: rooms TBA upon arrival

English 273: Mapping Bahamian Literature

Block 4 2014

This course offers the unique experience of studying the literature of the Bahamas in the Bahamas. We will be reading a broad range of material: the reactions of early visitors to the islands, a nineteenth-century plantation journal, the first national literary anthology, and a contemporary novel about Bahamian politics. We will spend a significant amount of time with the *Bahamian Anthology*, published as the first post-independence national anthology in 1983, and discuss how literary anthologies shape national identity and a sense of place. This anthology claims to be defining a national literature, and we will discuss what such definitions accomplish and what they elide. Our literary texts will be complemented and complicated by the other texts we will study: historical manuscripts documenting colonialism and slavery, secondary sources on historical sites and postcolonial theory, and materials available only in the Gerace Research Centre's library. We will treat the landscape itself as a text, "reading" the natural world and such sites as ruins and monuments to fully understand the environment and its history. We will also do some creative writing to experience how the environment of the Bahamas influences writers. Our final project will be to create a new anthology of Bahamian literature that reflects the knowledge we've gained about the place and its people – and that includes some of our own writing.

As with all English classes, you are expected to engage carefully with the readings, hone your analytical skills in discussion and writing, and think creatively. Because this is an off-campus course, you are also expected to approach new experiences openly and eagerly, treat field trips as substantive course content, and contribute to making this course a once-in-a-lifetime experience for all of us.

Required texts (bring with you to San Salvador):

This syllabus

Relic of Slavery: Farquharson's Journal for 1831-32

Bahamian Anthology

God's Angry Babies by Ian Strachan

A notebook (bring to class and to site visits)

Readings on Moodle (M) should be brought to class while we are on campus. Note: if you are using any devices in class, you may use them *only for accessing the readings!* (In other words, if you're emailing, online, texting, etc. during class, you'll lose your permission to use technology in class.) Also note: there is no wireless on San Salvador, so you may want to download or print Moodle readings before we depart; there is a 24-hour computer lab available but no printers.

Schedule: Readings are listed on the days they are due. While on campus, we will meet in College 313 for morning sessions, and 200 Stoner House for afternoon sessions. On San Salvador: We will check in daily about our upcoming activities, as our schedule is subject to change due to weather, staff/resource availability, and unexpected opportunities for adventure... You should be working on your journal each day on San Salvador; (see specific assignment on pages 7-10).

M 11/24

9:00 Introduction

T 11/25

9:00

- Reread packing list (M) and note any questions
- Dahl, *Literature of the Bahamas, 1724-1992: The March Towards National Identity*: “Some First Words” and “Dialect and Bahamian Literature” (M)
- *Bahamian Anthology*: Foreword, Critical Introduction, “Psychologically Speaking,” “Cocoa Plumming,” “Strands,” “Tools,” “They Tell a Story about a Farawayland”

1:00

- Postcolonial and Race Studies (M)
- Anthology readings, cont.

W 11/26

Due to Moodle by noon: Theory quiz.

Th 11/27 and F 11/28: Thanksgiving break

M 12/1

1:00

Due in class (or email to me): some questions the readings have raised for you that you hope to explore this block.

- Columbus Journal (M)
- Strachan, “Paradise and Imperialism” (M)

T 12/2 Travel to San Salvador

Before arrival on San Salvador: read Walcott, “Isla Incognita” (at end of syllabus)

W 12/3

7:30 Breakfast

9:30 Truck leaves for sites on western side of island

Lunch at Grotto Beach

Afternoon at GRC: time to read and start journals

5:30 Dinner

Th 12/4

7:30 Breakfast

9:30 Truck leaves for lighthouse and East Beach

12:00 Lunch at GRC

1:00 Class to discuss readings: “An Eye for an Eye” (*Anthology*), Tiffin (M)

[Presentation on Bahamas Environment]

3:30 Truck leaves for snorkeling at Graham’s Harbour

5:30 Dinner

F 12/5

7:30 Breakfast

9:30 Truck leaves for Monument Bay [Presentation on Columbus monuments]

Lunch at Grotto Beach

Visit to Watling’s Castle [Presentation on ship graffiti]

5:30 Dinner

Sat 12/6

7:30 Breakfast

9:30 Class: *Oral History of San Salvador* (M); poetry by Robert Johnson (69-77) and Marcella Taylor (103-5) (*Anthology*)

12:00 Lunch

3:00 Class: Craton and Saunders chapter (M)

5:30 Dinner

7:30 Film screening

Sun 12/7

Free Day

7:30 "Open Mic" with HIS 260

M 12/8

7:30 Breakfast

9:30 Truck leaves for Farquharson's plantation

12:00 Lunch

3:00 Class: *Relic of Slavery* [Presentation on Out Island Life]

5:30 Dinner

Journal drafts due for tomorrow's check-in

T 12/9

7:30 Breakfast

9:30 Truck leaves for Fortune Hill and Kerr Mount

12:00 Lunch

2:00 Journal check-ins

3:00 Class: *Relic of Slavery*

5:30 Dinner

W 12/10

7:30 Breakfast

9:30 Truck leaves for Farquharson's plantation

Lunch and snorkeling at Pigeon Creek/Ocean House

5:30 Dinner

7:30 Class: *God's Angry Babies* (pages TBA)

Th 12/11

7:30 Breakfast

Time to finish reading *God's Angry Babies*

12:00 Lunch

1:30 Class: *God's Angry Babies* and "Where is it?" "Power" (*Anthology*)

5:30 Dinner

7:30 Film screening

F 12/12

7:30 Breakfast

9:30 Class: anthology project

12:00 Lunch

Afternoon activities TBA

5:30 Dinner

Sat 12/13

Time to work on journals and anthology project

7:30 Open Mic with HIS 260 [Present your “Exploration” journal entries]

Sun 12/14

7:30 Breakfast

9:30 Truck leaves for trip around the island

5:30 Dinner

Journals due

M 12/15 Travel back to Iowa.

TRUCK LEAVES FOR AIRPORT AT _____ A.M.

T 12/16

Work day

W 12/17

1:00 “Editors’ Meeting” in Cole 310: bring notes about the final project from last week and copies of 3 of your favorite journal entries.

Th 12/18

12:00 Presentation of final project with History 260 in Hall-Perrine East

F 12/19

9:00 Due to Moodle: Anthology project and dissenting opinions

Course Policies:

GRADING:

An off-campus course incorporates a broad range of activities and assignments. Please speak with me if at any point you would like to discuss your progress in the course.

Theory quiz: 5%

Presentations: 15%

Participation and Cooperation: 20%

Journal: 30%

Final Project/Presentation: 20%

Editor’s Dissenting Opinion: 10%

COURSE CITIZENSHIP:

By definition, off-campus study is experiential learning. Our experiences will be affected by the actions and attitudes of all. And because this is a small class, your responsibility for participation is heightened.

Participate fully, eagerly, and with an open mind. Be on time and prepared for our travel and activities.

Participation in all activities is required unless announced as optional. You may not skip class sessions. If you are too ill to participate, you need to meet with me before the scheduled activity to discuss medical care.

Be aware that you are representing Cornell College and act accordingly. As guests of the Gerace Research Centre, you must abide by all of the centre's rules. Although we will not always be conducting our course in a traditional classroom, the professionalism of the classroom is expected. In addition, since we are studying a bit about the dynamics of tourism in the Bahamas, you should be acting as a responsible tourist. Anyone causing problems for the centre or for the class or endangering him/herself or others will be subject to the policies of the Off-Campus Study Office, which include removal from the course.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Cornell College is committed to providing equal educational opportunities to all students. If you have a documented learning disability and will need any accommodation in this course, you must request the accommodation(s) from me as early as possible and no later than the end of the day, Tuesday, November 25th. Because we will be away from other campus academic resources while on San Salvador, it is essential we have a plan in place before we depart. Additional information about the policies and procedures for accommodation of learning disabilities is available at: http://cornellcollege.edu/academic_affairs/disabilities/.

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is the act of taking the work of another and presenting it as one's own, without acknowledgement of the original source. This course assumes utmost academic honesty; plagiarism will not be tolerated. Acts of plagiarism will be reported to the College. If you have any questions about your use of others' work this term, see me about citation guidelines and proper use of sources. Our librarians and Writing Consultants are also wonderful resources for questions about the use of sources.

Assignments:

PRESENTATIONS (Various dates, while on San Salvador.)

Each of you will read a scholarly article about San Salvador and teach the information to the group in a presentation of about 10 minutes; you can also connect the information to other course material and/or pose questions for the class to think about. Through these presentations, we'll be sharing a lot of knowledge that complements our main texts and informs our field trips. You'll sign up for the article before we leave, but these presentations will take place when we're on the island in coordination with our readings and field trips – and sometimes on the site you're discussing. Please let me know if you want to talk to me about your article before your presentation.

Articles (on Moodle):

1. "Opportunities and Limitations in the Fragile Environment of the Bahamas" by Kathy Gerace
2. "Out Island Life in the Nineteenth Century" by John D. Burton and Jane E. Baxter
3. "Monuments in Search of Meaning: Christopher Columbus and Bahamian Nationalism" by John Burton
4. "Creating Community on 19th Century San Salvador: Ship Graffiti and Identity in the Bahamian Past" by Jane Baxter

CLASS ANTHOLOGY PROJECT (Presentation Th 12/18; Final due F 12/19, 9:00 a.m.)

Imagine yourselves as a team of editors for a new anthology of Bahamian literature. As a group, you'll need to make decisions about your anthology's framework: Time period? Media? Thematic focus? Structure? Audience? (The introductions to the *Bahamian Anthology* and Dahl's text should be helpful models, though you may certainly depart from them in any ways you choose. In week four, you'll also have a chance to browse other anthologies to see a range of possibilities for such texts.) Have fun with this

assignment – it's a creative way to bring together what you've all learned over the course of the block. Be thoughtful about how you can offer a comprehensive view of your readings *and* experiences this block.

You will present your anthology as a group. You can choose whether to present a physical object or virtual object, but the anthology should include:

- An editorial introduction introducing the anthology with a theoretical framework informed by course secondary sources. Include a Works Consulted (or Cited) list.
- A table of contents (may include course texts as well as other texts you may come across in your readings/research in the Gerace library). Texts for the anthology may include both primary and secondary sources.
- Texts for the anthology must include at least one piece of writing from each group member (from journal assignments, revised).
- Any additional material you choose to include: maps; photographs; other images; timelines; glossaries; audio material; etc.
- If the anthology is divided into units or sections, brief headnotes for each section.
- An appendix of the 4 editors' dissents (see below).

Although not all the texts listed in your table of contents will be literally included in the anthology you're imagining, your presentation of it should give a sense of the whole – that is, what this anthology would be like if it were actually published. You may “actually” include any texts you choose.

Presentation component (entire class):

You'll be presenting the anthology to me and to History 260. Prepare as a group the most effective way to showcase your work, including both an overview of the anthology's guiding philosophy and some excerpts from texts (yours and others). You may decide as a group whether you want to include the dissenting opinions in your presentation.

DISSENTING OPINION (Due F 12/19, 9:00 a.m.):

Among any team of editors, there will be a multitude of opinions. Anthologies by their nature represent consensus, but in the process of creating them, texts/authors/ideas are excluded; the overall vision represents a compromise from multiple possible versions that may have been. Our final project as a class should open up the field of Bahamian literature rather than providing closure, since no single anthology can represent an entire national literature. Your group anthology will represent your consensus as a group but each of you will write a “dissenting opinion” representing your individual opinion as an editor: in about 750 words discuss what you would have done differently if you were the sole editor of the anthology, including anything problematic about the anthology – i.e., its limitations and absences (questions/ideas/perspectives that are not addressed). Our course secondary sources should inform the theoretical framework for your dissent; include a list of works cited.

JOURNAL (We will have at least one check-in on the island, so stay up-to-date; due before we depart San Salvador.)

Your journal is a place in which your ideas about the readings, the class activities, and your experience on the island will come together – pushing you to think on your own beyond our group discussions. You should be working on your journal daily, including responding to new prompts as well as returning to drafts of other prompts.

You should have at least 10 entries in your journal. (The versions you turn in to me will be electronic; it's up to you whether earlier drafts are handwritten or typed. Please label your entries so that I know which prompt you're responding to.) You'll also choose some of your writing to include in the class anthology, and those pieces that are included in the anthology will be revised.

Below are various writing prompts: some critical, some creative; some specific to readings and/or sites and some applicable to any phase of our trip. I've noted when a prompt is required; otherwise, you may choose from the options listed. (If you have an idea for another kind of prompt, please speak with me about it.)

Walcott, "Isla Incognita" (one required):

- Write a description of the island with no trace of what you knew about it before. Use, as Walcott calls it, "The opposite method to the explorer's...a great deal of principled doubt" (52) – and reflect on this method. After you've written, reread the paragraph on page 55 about "learned" versions of nature: revise your entry to move away from any descriptions that might reflect these "learned" versions.
- On page 57, Walcott claims that "our only true apprehensions are through metaphor...the old botanical names, the old processes cannot work for us." Write a piece about arriving on the island in which you use a metaphor in every sentence. Go back through your draft and eliminate every metaphor that has been used before in literature (so far as you know). Focus on the new metaphors you've imagined and see where they take you. OR compare what you've created to the descriptions of the island in Columbus's journal. Analyze Columbus's metaphors: what are the assumptions or motives behind them?
- Read Innes's article on Moodle and write a poem that takes up the themes in Walcott's poetry, as discussed by Innes.

Plantation Ruins and *Relic of Slavery* (one required):

- How does the journal teach us about the plantation ruins? How do the ruins teach us about the journal? (Brainstorm and then reshape as a unified argument from your best points.)
- Choose another point of view – other than Farquharson's – for any day in the journal and write an imaginative piece about that day. Use the Craton/Saunders chapter to inform your piece.
- Choose a silence/absence/gap in the journal and analyze why it seems to be in the text (and what evidence suggests so to you); what information might you be able to fill in based on other parts of the text, other information you have from readings or experiencing the place? (Possible choices: missing pages; topics not talked about or mentioned only very briefly; events that happen in Nassau.)

Oral History of San Salvador (one required):

- How does the *Oral History of San Salvador* compare to other readings? What do you learn from the oral history that you wouldn't have learned from other sources?

- After “hearing” the voices in the *Oral History* interviews, think about other texts we’ve read in which you note aspects of Bahamian oral culture – idioms, speech patterns, etc. (You may also want to look through the *Dictionary of Bahamian English* on Moodle.)

Bahamian Anthology (one required):

- How is the environment reflected in a text from the *Bahamian Anthology*?
- Analyze how the landscape functions as a character/major presence in a text from the *Bahamian Anthology*.
- Analyze a poem we haven’t discussed as a class.
- Consider a piece from the anthology through the lens of one of our secondary sources.
- Rewrite one of the pieces from another point of view, then write a short analysis of how the piece changes in significant ways.

God’s Angry Babies (one required):

- Analyze how something you learned about politics and/or culture in *God’s Angry Babies* informs your understanding of San Salvador.
- Compare the dialect used in *God’s Angry Babies* to Tertullien’s “Psychologically Speaking.”
- Consider how a main idea from Strachan’s critical work (*Paradise and Plantation*) plays out in the novel.

Tourism (one required):

- Write about your own position as a tourist/observer/outsider. Bring into your discussion critical conversations about tourism.
- Walcott writes: “They [explorers] behold the images of themselves beholding” (57). Choose a place on the island and write about it two ways: as a reflection of your own beholding and then doing everything you can to see it separate from your own beholding.
- Analyze something you’ve observed or experienced since arriving in the Bahamas in the context of Strachan’s argument about tourism in *Paradise and Plantation*.
- Club Med calls this island “Columbus Island.” Analyze why you think this choice was made as well as the act of (re)naming.

Individual Exploration (required):

- Choose a topic or issue from our class material or your experiences on San Salvador and find ways to research it while we are on the island: through speaking to people and/or reading in the GRC library. (I may be able to provide additional sources as well.) Write an informative piece about what you find. *You will be sharing this information with your classmates toward the end of our trip; be prepared to tell me what your topic is in the first few days on the island and to have your journal entry ready to share a few days before we leave. I encourage you to meet with me as you’re exploring...*

Additional Prompts:

- Choose something you observed today that you want to describe to someone who’s never seen it. Be as descriptive as possible, imagining your writing substituting for a photograph.
- Rewrite an entry of Columbus’s journal that corrects his descriptions of flora and fauna.

- Analyze how your understanding of Columbus’s landfall has changed as a result of experiencing San Salvador.
- Invent a story (in prose or poetry) for something you found on East (“Junk”) Beach.
- Analyze how the environment of San Salvador is affected by anthropogenic flotsam.
- On page 56 of “Isla Incognita,” Walcott pretends to discover/name a plant for the first time. Choose a plant on the island you don’t recognize, come up with a name for it, and write a description of it that includes a rationale for the name you’ve chosen. Then do some sleuthing to find out what the name of the plant really is (see resources in the library and/or talk to people on the island).
- Write a creative piece of any genre in which you try to describe what it physically feels like in your present location.
- Write a creative piece of any genre that could be written *only* in this landscape.
- Reflect on environmental issues on San Salvador: do you observe any harm to the environment? Do you observe ways people are trying to preserve the environment? What can you glean from observation about larger environmental issues?
- Reflect on gaps between what you’ve read and what you are experiencing. Or reflect on intersections between what you’ve read and what you are experiencing.
- Write a descriptive piece in which you try to describe a place to someone who’s never been here. Think about ways writers use words to create 5 senses: write a companion piece to your description in which you reflect on how you did this, your successes and shortcomings at re-creating what you’ve experienced in words.
- Write a piece of fiction from the point of view of a character who has never been off the island of San Salvador.
- In *Caribbean Discourse*, the writer Edouard Glissant writes of the function of the landscape in Caribbean literature: “The relationship with the land, one that is even more threatened because the community is alienated from the land, becomes so fundamental in this discourse that landscape in the work stops being merely decorative or supportive and emerges as a full character. Describing the landscape is not enough.” Write a creative piece in which the landscape is not just described – not just decorative or supportive – but actually becomes a character.
- Analyze a discrepancy between myths of paradise (what Strachan calls the “mystification” of the Bahamas) and evidence of labor you’ve either observed on San Salvador or read about in one of our primary texts.
- Reflect on the tension between the beauty of the landscape and the painful history of the Bahamas/Caribbean.
- Write a creative piece inspired by the hand-drawn maps of the plantations in the GRC library.

- Find an additional reading on your presentation topic and reflect on any differences between the two sources. Which is more persuasive and why?
- Reflect on what you know and do not know about the Lacayans; bring into your discussion information gleaned from reading, class discussions, and experiences on San Salvador. (Note: seek sources from the GRC library. There is also an article about Lacayan lifeways on Moodle.)