

Instructor: Stacy Bell

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Office: Humanities Hall 105

Office hours: TTh 1-4, and by appointment

### ***Required Texts***

*Manchild in the Promised Land*, Claude Brown

*Brother, I'm Dying*, Edwidge Danticat

*Father and Son*, Edmund Gosse

*Autobiography of a Face*, Lucy Grealy

*Dress Codes*, Noelle Howey

*Zanzibar Chest*, Aidan Hartley

*Jesusland*, Julia Scheeres

Miscellaneous assigned readings

Films: *51 Birch Street* and *Tarnation*, on reserve in the library

### ***Course Description***

An examination of the importance to contemporary American society of a vaguely-defined literary genre. Students will read modern and contemporary memoirs published between 1901 and 2007. Students will write a nonfiction creative prose piece about an event from their own lives; these short memoirs will be shared and critiqued by other students in the class.

### ***Objectives***

Students will read and discuss the assigned texts and in the process of discussion, using our Blackboard wikki, try to create a unified definition for the memoir genre. In addition to the written texts students will view and discuss two film memoirs. For each text, written or visual, the students will have a set of assigned questions which will be used as the basis for class discussion. Students may also expect reading quizzes. Students will submit short written assignments in response to each book, and over the course of the semester, will submit drafts on a nonfiction creative prose piece about a personal event or experience, to be submitted in full and shared with classmates at the end of the semester.

Memoirs are hot sellers. In spite of its popularity, or perhaps because of it, the genre is very difficult to define. What makes a memoir “good” or

important? Why are so many people eager to share the painful details of their lives? Does the memoirist have an obligation to his subjects and if so what is this obligation? How does one protect privacy and honor one's own [and others'] dignity in the process of truth-telling? And what is truth, anyway? Must a memoir be factual? Are there certain experiences or relationships that trigger the desire to self-disclose? Are there stories that "must" be shared?

### ***Responsibilities***

*Late essays:* Your essays are due at the *beginning* of class on the specified date. I will lower the grade for an unexcused late essay by one full letter grade **for each day it is late**; after one full week the essay will receive a grade of zero. Do NOT print your essays during class. I will not accept unstapled essays.

*Attendance:* As per Oxford College policy, class begins at the designated time. If you are not present when class begins, I will mark you absent. If you are not prepared for class, I will mark you absent. You may miss three days of class without penalty, beyond which I will deduct ten points from your participation grade for each additional unexcused absence. I will excuse absences **ONLY** in the event of a medical emergency requiring hospitalization or a religious observance approved by the chaplain. Finally, I don't teach in your bedroom—don't sleep in my classroom. Of all the mistakes you can make in college, sleeping in class is the very worst because it sends a clear negative message, to the person who decides your final grade, that you are irresponsible, you are disinterested, and you are disrespectful. If you sleep in my class I'll mark you absent, and you can expect such behavior to have a negative impact on your overall grade.

*Plagiarism:* The work you submit for class must be your own. You may not submit an essay more than once. If you use another author's words, sentence structure or original ideas in your writing, you must give credit to the author by using MLA documentation form as it is presented in your handbook. All papers suspected of plagiarism will be turned over to the Honor Council (*Oxford College Handbook* pages 98). If you are uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism, read your handbook and **please see me**.

I am on the Honor Council. Need I say more?

*Behavior:* The instructor and students will display professional and courteous behavior, including but not limited to respect for the opinions of others. What constitutes professional and courteous behavior is at the discretion of the instructor. I will dismiss and mark absent any student who fails to show respect for his or her classmates and/or instructor. Continued disruptions and/or discourtesy will result in automatic dismissal from this class and referral to the Academic Dean. Dismissal from class may negatively impact the final grade.

*Email:* Students must learn appropriate uses of email. The best way to communicate with an instructor is in person, during class or during office hours. I accept email for the following reasons:

- To cancel an appointment
- To notify me of an absence
- To ask a legitimate question about an assignment

I will not respond to email requesting information contained in the syllabus. If you don't know what is in the syllabus, you aren't prepared for class. Finally, I will ***never respond*** to requests for grades or "averages" via email or in person. Your grades and averages will be available to you this semester on our Blackboard site.

- Please note: cell phones, blackberries and iPods are strictly forbidden in my classroom. If you have one with you, it had better be turned off and concealed from my sight. If I hear or see it, I'm going to ask you to remove it from the classroom, and I will mark you absent. Laptops are permitted during the final exam ***only***. Stay off the computers during class unless I have asked you to type a lesson. If I catch you on-line checking email or, heaven help me, *Myfacebook*, I will mark you absent.

*Evaluation:* Seven two-page responses: 5 % each

One fifteen-to-twenty page nonfiction prose essay: 40%

Final Exam: 10%

Participation: 15%

Unless you obtain approval from the Academic Dean, there will be no exceptions to the policies outlined in this syllabus, which represents a contract between student and instructor. The instructor will meet her

responsibilities in regard to instruction and evaluation of the student, and the student will meet his or her responsibilities in regard to completion of all assignments and adherence to all class policies.

**I have read and understand all components of this syllabus. I agree to adhere to all the policies and guidelines outlined in this syllabus.**

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print your name

signature

date

## **JANUARY**

- 14 Introduction and Objectives
- 21 MLK Holiday—Class will not meet today.
- 23 *Father and Son*
- 28 *Father and Son*
- 30 *Father and Son*

## **FEBRUARY**

- 4 *51 Birch Street*
- 6 *Brother, I'm Dying*
- 11 *Brother, I'm Dying*
- 13 *Brother, I'm Dying*
- 18 *Dress Codes*
- 20 *Dress Codes*
- 25 *Dress Codes*
- 27 *Jesusland*

## **MARCH**

- 3 *Jesusland*
- 5 Class will end at 2:30 today.
- 10 Spring Break—Class will not meet today.
- 12 Spring Break—Class will not meet today.

17 *Jesusland*

19 *Tarnation*

24 *Autobiography of a Face*

26 *Autobiography of a Face*

31 *Autobiography of a Face*

## APRIL

2 *The Zanzibar Chest*

7 *The Zanzibar Chest*

9 *The Zanzibar Chest*

14 *Manchild in the Promised Land*

16 *Manchild in the Promised Land*

21 *Manchild in the Promised Land*

23

28 Review

### ***Exam Schedule***

Students will report to exam room during their appointed time:

Time of Exam	Thursday May 1	Friday May 2	Monday May 5	Tuesday May 6	Wednesday May 7
9:00 - 12:00	8:30 MWF	2:30 T/TH	12:50 MWF	10:00 T/TH	11:45 MWF
2:00 - 5:00	1:00 T/TH	9:35 MWF	2:00 MW	11:30 T/TH	10:40 MWF

7:00 - 10:00	3:30 MW		CONFLICT EXAM		
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