PLEASE NOTE: THIS IS LAST SEMESTER’S SYLLABUS AND IS SUBJECT TO
CHANGE, PARTICULARLY IN THE SCHEDULE OF READINGS BUT ALSO,
PERHAPS, IN TERMS OF ASSIGNMENTS. HOWEVER, IT GIVES YOU A GOOD
SENSE OF THE COURSE’S GOALS, FOCUS AND WORK LOAD.

GESM 120g Section 35347 Seminar in Humanistic Inquiry (GE-B)
Spring 2019 / T/TH 11:00-12:20 in GFS 229
Tell Me A Story: American Novels that Made a Difference
Jessica Wells Cantiello, Ph.D.
jessica.cantiello@usc.edu
Office: JEF 261 / Office Phone: (213) 821-1206 [no messages]
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 2-3 pm and by appointment

Course Description
Legend has it that when Abraham Lincoln met Harriet Beecher Stowe he exclaimed, “So you’re
the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war!” This story about a story has
helped make Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1852) the paradigmatic example of the novel that changed the
world. In this course we will explore this and other novels that had an impact on the world
around them. We will try to determine how to tell if a novel can, did, or will make a difference
and map the relationship between fiction writing and social change. We will also explore if
novels do political work in our era – what historian Robert Darnton has called the fourth great
information age – or if the proliferation of other types of text has rendered them insolvent. In
other words, can (or should) the novel-as-change-agent survive in the face of Twitter?

The course will focus primarily on close reading, a hallmark of reading critically in a college
context. However, we will depend on contemporary reviews to assess the reception of each text
in its historical moment. Because we are exploring how art affects society, we will also move
outside of the humanities into the sciences and social sciences. Scholars in a wide range of fields
are increasingly exploring how fiction has played a role in human development. Researchers are
studying how literary devices, like metaphors and other figurative language, affect the brain, and
psychologists have found that reading fiction makes people more empathetic, an idea with
obvious implications for social movements. Perhaps, as the subtitle of literary scholar Jonathan

Learning Objectives
USC’s Humanistic Inquiry program will introduce you to a broad range of courses and ways of
thinking that will take you beyond the specialization of your major and significantly extend your
ability to understand the human world and your place in it. The program will help you achieve
six principal learning objectives, which are bulleted below. The italicized sentences under each
bullet explain how our specific course will help you to meet these more general objectives.

- Reflect on what it means to be human through close study of human experience
  throughout time and across diverse cultures

In our course this will include studying influential stories and how they reflect and/or shape
human experience in the United States since the mid-nineteenth century.
• Cultivate a critical appreciation for various forms of human expression, including literature, language, philosophy, and the arts, as well as develop an understanding of the contexts from which these forms emerge

In our course we will critically engage with literary texts and their historical contexts in order to explore their influence. There will be opportunities to expand our analyses and hypotheses beyond literature to the visual and performing arts.

• Engage with lasting ideas and values that have animated humanity throughout the centuries for a more purposeful, more ethical, and intellectually richer life

In our course we will discuss the power, privilege, and responsibility of the writer and examine what values, if any, can be translated or taught through fiction.

• Learn to read and interpret actively and analytically, to think critically and creatively, and to write and speak persuasively

You will be encouraged throughout the semester to make and defend arguments about the course texts. All of the blog entries and class discussions will be focused on active and analytic reading and critical and creative thinking. The midterm exam and the final project will all require persuasive responses.

• Learn to evaluate ideas from multiple perspectives and to formulate informed opinions on complex issues of critical importance in today’s global world

This course specifically asks you to begin to think about how social change happens and the role that art has, can, and should play in that change. If you are a producer and/or consumer of art in any form, this should be of interest and importance to you. The multiple perspectives in this course will be from your classmates and from critical responses to texts, both from when they were published and more recently. Your final project will ask you to choose a complex issue of critical importance and develop a hypothesis about fiction’s potential to address it.

Course Texts and Materials*
Louis Menand, “Books as Bombs.” (The New Yorker, Jan. 24, 2011) [available on Blackboard]
Additional texts determined by you (and perhaps by me based on class discussions)
A notebook and writing utensil for note taking
*Please always bring your texts to class on the days we’ll be discussing them. It makes discussion significantly easier if we are all reading the same edition in a print version, but if that’s not possible it is on you to stay abreast of the conversation with the edition you have.
Course Requirements

- **Blog entries: due every day we have a reading by 9 am (20%)**
  For each class period you will be expected to post on the blog with a substantive response to the reading for that class period. The purpose of these posts is two-fold: to ensure that you’ve done and engaged deeply with the reading for the day, and to spur class discussion. Most of the time you will be able to decide how to use the post to engage with the text. Some options include: asking specific questions about the text, making connections between the texts and other readings or class discussions, evaluating the effectiveness of the text, analyzing your response to the text in the context of the text’s ability to effect social change, indicating a problem you have with the text, identifying a relevant or important passage and interpreting it, or tying the text to its historical context; posts will not receive credit if they simply summarize the reading or if they are too vague to show that you have actually read. Other times I may provide a prompt at the end of the class period before or via email and you’ll respond to that prompt on the blog. Posts will often be used as conversation starters in class; particularly strong posts that occasion a lengthy class discussion will contribute positively toward your participation grade.

  Blog posts should be around 300 words (250-350). You can start your own thread, or you can respond directly to someone else. Either way, you are responsible for adding something to the conversation. Blog posts that mostly repeat what someone else has said will not receive credit. This means you will need to peruse the other entries before posting your own; if someone has already engaged with what you wanted to discuss, you can respond directly to them, adding your own insights or, perhaps, disagreeing.

  You can prepare blog posts as far in advance as you’d like, but please wait until after the class period before the post is due to post them. (This will ensure everyone will see your post and know what class period it’s for.)

  You are not expected to read anything about the readings outside of class; in fact, I prefer you don’t. That said, if you do, please link to it in the post (and it’s ok if it’s not an academic source).

  Blog posts will be graded on 2 point scale: a post that proves you read, isn’t just a summary, and adds something to the blog conversation will receive a 2, a post that does most of these things but isn’t perfect will receive a 1, and a post that doesn’t do those things won’t receive any credit. I do not accept late posts, as I use them to plan for the day’s class session. You are expected to post even if you will be in class. At the end of the semester, I add up the points you’ve earned, divide them by the total number of points you could have earned and convert that percentage into the 20% of your final grade.

  I cannot emphasize enough how important it is that you do the reading for this course; if I find that isn’t happening, I reserve the right to institute pop quizzes on the reading that count toward this 20% of your grade.

- **Participation: 5%**
  This is a first-year SEMINAR, which means your attendance, participation, and preparation are vital components of the success of each class period and the course as a whole, not to mention your success as a student in the course. You should come to each class prepared and ready to actively participate. Active participation includes verbal contributions to discussions, engagement both with what I am saying and your classmates’ comments, focused work in small group and partner activities, and thoughtful completion of in-class writing. We will often be discussing sensitive topics, so please be respectful when voicing your opinions. If you are ever uncomfortable about a class discussion, come and talk to me immediately.
• **Community Engagement/Reflection: 5%**
Because general education is most effective when applied not only in the classroom but also outside it, you will be attending an event on or around campus and reflecting on its connection to our course themes and class discussions. We are lucky that, as we have for the past several springs, this year USC will be hosting the *LA Times Festival of Books* on April 13 and 14. Though the schedule of events has not yet been published, there will a number of panels that will be relevant to this course, and you will be expected to attend at least one of them, write a brief reflection on the event, and discuss it with the class on the following Thursday. Please mark your calendars and let me know now (week 1) if you know you will not be able to attend.

• **Powerful Text Presentation/Discussion Leadership: 20%**
In the middle of the semester, you all will take over assigning the course readings. In small groups you’ll nominate a “powerful text” that you think has or could be influential in some way in the world. Your text doesn’t have to be written, although of course it can be. It could be a photograph, a painting, a film, a tv show, a series of tweets, a tumblr post, a gif…use your imagination. You’ll assign an excerpt of said text (if it’s quite long) to your classmates, or you’ll simply share the entire text ahead of time, and then you’ll lead the class discussion of that text. You should keep this search for powerful texts on your radar throughout the first half of the semester, as it will be much easier to do this if you have some authentic options to share with your group rather than having to scramble at the last minute. More details to be discussed in class on Tuesday, January 29.

• **In-Class Midterm Exam: 15%**
The midterm will consist of short and long answer free response questions with choice for each section. More information to follow on Tuesday, February 12.

• **Final Project (8-10 pages total): 35%**
  - Proposal: 5%
  - Final Paper (6-8 pages): 15%
  - Reflection on Course Content: 15% (in lieu of final exam)
In preparation for the final project, which will be due at the end of the semester, you will select a contemporary movement for social change (or social issue that you feel needs a movement to address it) and investigate the role fiction has or could play in its origins or development. Proposals will lay out your rationale for choosing this movement/issue, your research plan, and a preliminary bibliography. Final projects will draw from the discoveries of the research; you may write an analytical paper describing your findings or you can propose an alternate creative or critical project. For example, you could create or plan a work of art you think would be a productive addition to the contemporary social movement you researched. Creative final projects must be accompanied by critical commentary and analysis. Students can also move away from literature for this final project and apply some of the driving questions of the course to other forms of art, asking how visual, dramatic, public, musical or other arts have or might also make a difference (or not).

**Expectations and Policies**

• **Attendance**
Although I expect you to be in every class, if necessary, you can miss two class periods over the course of the semester with no penalty. There is no distinction between excused and unexcused absences, so plan accordingly. This means that it doesn’t matter to me if you miss class because you are sick, overslept, had to travel, etc., but after two missed classes your grade will suffer. So
if you oversleep a couple of times at the beginning of the semester, and then get legitimately sick at the end, you will still be penalized for the days you missed because of illness. As per university policy, you will not be penalized for absences for religious holidays and university-sponsored events with proper documentation.

For every class period you miss beyond these two, two percentage points will be deducted from your final grade. More than six absences may result in failure of the course.

If you need to miss a class, please email me in advance and make sure you get in touch with a classmate and ask about what you missed and also check Blackboard for any handouts or materials. It’s also very good practice, not just for this course, but for others, to come to office hours and discuss what you’ve missed.

If you post on the blog and/or email me whatever is due on the day that you are absent before class that day, you can still receive credit for that work. If you don’t, you will not receive credit. Because we are reading sections of novels over the course of several class periods, you need to keep up with the reading even if you miss class.

Late, no matter if it’s one minute or ten minutes, is distracting and disruptive to the entire class. Please don’t be late. Three lates will count as an absence.

- Email
  I will answer every email I receive within 24 hours (Monday-Friday) or 48 hours (Saturday-Sunday), often much sooner. If you do not receive an email response from me within those parameters, it means I did not receive your email. Please use your USC email address to correspond with me; mail from non-USC addresses often winds up in my spam folder. Make sure you are checking your USC email frequently, since that’s how I will communicate with you, and read any emails from me carefully – they will contain important course information.

- Office Hours
  Come to them to discuss readings, ideas, your writing, etc. In addition to my formal office hours, I am usually on campus on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, and sometimes on Wednesdays (although these times aren’t guaranteed, so you should email me if you want to meet then) and I am sometimes available other times if you email me to make an appointment. I prefer to meet in person, but if that can’t happen I am available via Skype, FaceTime and Google Hangout.

- Laptops/Cell Phones
  Laptops are not allowed in class unless I specifically request that you bring them for an in-class activity. Recent studies have shown that laptop use in lecture settings is often distracting not just for the person with the screen but for people around them as well. In our smaller class setting, having screens in front of you creates a barrier, both physical and mental, that can impede discussion. Studies have also found that you learn and retain more when you take notes by hand rather than by typing; I strongly encourage you to take notes by hand during our class.

  Please keep phones off/silent and away at all times during class. Your engagement during our classes necessitates that you refrain from texting and/or looking at your phone during class.

- Plagiarism and Academic Integrity
  USC highly values academic integrity and plagiarism undermines this integrity. A plagiarized assignment will receive an “F” and may result in failure of the course. We will discuss in class what constitutes plagiarism, but just remember: if you’re not sure, cite it or ask me.

- Mandated Reporting
  As per university policy, I am a mandated reporter, which means if I suspect that a student who is under 18 is experiencing abuse or neglect, including sexual abuse, I am mandated by law to report it to USC’s Department of Public Safety and the Los Angeles Department of Children and
Family Services. I am also a responsible employee under Title IX, which means I must immediately report all known information about suspected prohibited conduct to the Title IX Office. Prohibited conduct encompasses harassment and discrimination, and is defined in more detail here: https://policy.usc.edu/student-misconduct/.

Additional Support

- **The Writing Center**
The Writing Center (located in THH 216) offers writing workshops and half-hour, one-on-one appointments with trained consultants. The staff is there to help you at any stage of the writing process, including the beginning – you don’t need a full draft to utilize their support. You can make appointments via their website: http://dornsife.usc.edu/writingcenter/

- **Students with Disabilities:**
Any student requesting accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification can be obtained from DSP; please make sure that this letter is delivered to me as soon as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and can be contacted at (213) 740-0776.

Support Systems:

- **Student Counseling Services (SCS)** – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** – 1 (800) 273-8255
Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. www_suicidepreventionlifeline.org

- **Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP)** – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

- **Sexual Assault Resource Center**
For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: sarc.usc.edu

- **Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance** – (213) 740-5086
Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. equity.usc.edu

- **Bias Assessment Response and Support**
Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

- **Student Support and Advocacy** – (213) 821-4710
Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

- **Diversity at USC**
Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. diversity.usc.edu

- **USC Emergency Information**
Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. emergency.usc.edu

- **USC Department of Public Safety** – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.
Provides overall safety to USC community. dps.usc.edu
Schedule of Readings and Assignments
Readings are due on the day that they listed below.
If there is a reading or viewing due, there is also a blog post due for that day by 9 am.

Week 1
Tues. Jan. 8: Course Overview
Thurs. Jan. 10: Diagnostic/Preview Uncle Tom's Cabin
Due before class: email me the answers to the following questions/prompts:
  Why did you sign up for this specific GE seminar?
  What do you hope to get out of this course?
  Tell me something interesting about yourself.
  Do you have any questions for me? If so, ask away.

Week 2
Due Tues. Jan. 15: Uncle Tom’s Cabin, Vol. I, chapters 1-10 (pages 1-93)

Week 3

Week 4
Debrief UTC/Preview The Jungle
Discuss Powerful Text assignment/rubric
Due Thurs. Jan. 31: The Jungle, chapters 1-8 (pages 5-89)

Week 5
Due Tues. Feb. 5: The Jungle chapters 9-17 (pages 90-165)
Powerful Text nominations / group determinations
Due Thurs. Feb. 7: The Jungle, chapters 18-25 (pages 166-250)

Week 6
Due Tues. Feb. 12: The Jungle, chapters 26-31 (pages 251-328)
Assign debate teams / Review for Midterm
Due Thurs. Feb. 14: Debate prep due (in lieu of a blog post)
Debate: The Jungle vs. UTC

Week 7
Tues. Feb. 19: Midterm
Toni Morrison, “Recitatif” (1983)

Week 8
Due Tues. Feb. 26: Read or watch nominated powerful text from Group 1 (blog post due for everyone except group 1)
Due Thurs. Feb. 28: Read or watch nominated powerful text from Group 2 (blog post due for everyone except group 2)

Week 9
Due Tues. Mar. 5: Read or watch nominated powerful text from Group 3 (blog post due for everyone except group 3)
Due Thurs. Mar. 7: Read or watch nominated powerful text from Group 4 (blog post due for everyone except group 4)
Due Fri. Mar. 8 by noon: post-presentation reflection due (uploaded to Blackboard)

We do not have class on Mar. 12 and 14 because of spring break.

Week 10
Due Tues. Mar. 19: *On the Road* Part One (pages 1-108)
Discuss Final Project Assignment/Rubric
Post-presentation reflection due for groups 3 and 4
Due Thurs. Mar. 21: *On the Road* Part Two (pages 109-178)

Week 11
Due Tues. Mar. 26: *On the Road* Parts Three, Four and Five (pages 179-307)
Due Thurs. Mar. 28: Final Project Proposal Due (bring two paper copies); in-class peer review

Week 12
Due Tues. Apr. 2: *Fear of Flying*, chapters 1-9 (pages 1-155)
Due Thurs. Apr. 4: *Fear of Flying*, chapters 10-19 (pages 156-299)

Week 13
Due Tues. Apr. 9: *Vox*, chapters 1-21 (pages 1-98)
Thurs. Apr. 11: *Vox*, chapters 22-48 (pages 99-207)
Weekend of Apr. 13-14: Attend Festival of Books on campus

Week 14
Due Tues. Apr. 16: *Vox*, chapters 49-80 (pages 208-362)
Due Thurs. Apr. 18: LA Times Festival of Books Reflection (bring a paper copy and upload to Blackboard via Turnitin link)
Discuss Festival of Books
Assign debate teams

Week 15
Due Tues. Apr. 23: Debate prep due (in lieu of a blog post)
Debate: The power of text in the 21st century
Due Thurs. Apr. 25: Final Project Update – be ready to summarize your final project and discuss any challenges or questions you have encountered
Farewell thoughts, reflection on diagnostics, course evaluations, final project check-in

Due Tues. May 7 by 1:00 pm: Final Project via Turnitin on Blackboard