

EN 8333

Literary Mississippi

Fall 2010

Mondays, 5:00-7:30 p.m.

Dr. Ted Atkinson

Yes, we can read.
A few of us can even write.

Thomas Williams Nicolaus Bore Wills Moore J.D. Connor Brown Barry Hannah Beth Moody

Fabius Wily William Faulkner John Graham Margaret Walker Alexander Richard Ford Richard Wright

From Pulitzer Prize winners to revolutionaries who initiated momentous cultural change ... oh, yes, Mississippians can write.

No other state in the country can claim as many honored, awarded and revered writers as Mississippi.

Yes, Mississippi. Where words transcend.

**MISSISSIPPI...
Believe It!**

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Among the reading selections:

Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust* and "Mississippi"

Wright, *Black Boy*

Welty, *The Optimist's Daughter* and "Where is The Voice Coming From?"

Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

Nordan, *Wolf Whistle*

Douglas, *Can't Quit You, Baby*

Brown, *Fay*

Walton, *Mississippi*

Selections from Percy, *Lanterns on the Levee*, Morris, *North Toward Home*, and Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*

Selected poems by Margaret Walker Alexander and
Natasha Trethewey

Mississippi. In surveys, it often ranks as the "worst state," as that consummate anti-southerner H.L. Mencken put it in a scathing 1931 report. In the 1960s, with the Civil Rights Movement reaching a crescendo, Mississippi became shorthand for backwardness, ignorance, and intractable racism exemplified in the stance of vocal and diehard segregationists and in historian James Silver's description of the state as a "closed society." In U.S. culture—especially in popular history, journalism, television, and film—the state has been repeatedly cast as "the South on steroids," as alien, as Other—a benighted place whose contrasting features serve to bring the progressivism and enlightenment of other parts of the country more vividly into relief. This practice is indicative of the integral role that cultural representations of Mississippi have played in perpetuating the idea, or ideology, of "southern exceptionalism"—the traditionally regionalist view of the South as unique, distinctive from the rest of the country, especially regarding racial injustice and other deviations from American democratic ideals. Even within the South, it would seem, the stigmatized Mississippi is, well, exceptional.

In EN 8333, *Literary Mississippi*, we will begin by examining depictions of the state in in the U.S. cultural sphere, thus establishing a critical framework for analyzing how some of Mississippi's many noted writers represent the state in fiction, poetry, drama, essays, and autobiography. Along the way, we will study the texts in depth, as well as placing them in illuminating critical contexts to consider provocative questions: To what extent do the selected texts complicate the notion of a stigmatized Mississippi? How do they perpetuate, refute, resist, or reconstruct perceptions of Mississippi rooted in southern exceptionalism and forms of U.S. nationalism? How do they use Mississippi as a setting to register literary responses to significant historical, social, cultural, political, economic, and environmental developments in the U.S. and the world?

Course requirements: response papers, an oral presentation, and a research paper. Optional excursions (a.k.a. field trips) to sites of interest in *Literary Mississippi* will be part of the mix as well.