**AMS 1050: American Voices**

Mondays/Thursdays 3:00 PM – 4:15 PM, Brownson 22

Instructor: Dr. Liz W. Faber (she/her/hers)

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Office Hours: Stop by or make an appointment through Starfish.

Tuesdays 2:00 PM – 5:00 PM

Thursdays 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Fridays 2:00 PM – 5:00 PM

**Course Description:**

American Voices is an introductory-level course that examines the quest for soul, character, and personality in American writing, film, and visual art. This is a three credit course with no prerequisites or corequisites. It fulfills part of the elective course requirements for the American Studies major and minor as well as the Liberal Arts, GE09 Humanities, and GE16 Humanistic Reasoning and Oral Communication Competency requirements.

**Course Objectives:**

* Comprehend distinctive American voices, identities, and ideas
* Understand representative texts in American history and culture that are recognized for expressing a salient point of view and/or character
* Apply interdisciplinary methods of study of American society and culture on an introductory level

**Humanistic Reasoning Learning Outcomes:**

* Construct reasoned and persuasive arguments about the distinctive meanings, values, and artifacts of human beings when approached from the point of view of their particular histories, languages, and cultures
* Use reasoning and/or evidence to articulate clear, precise, well-organized thought, arguments, interpretations, and/or conclusions

**Oral Communication Learning Outcomes:**

* Communicate in clear, precise, well-organized speech that engages the audience
* Use language appropriate to the subject and to the context of the communication
* Demonstrate analytical and critical listening and questioning skills

**Required Texts:**

Miller, Arthur. *The Crucible*

Griffith, John Howard. *Black Like Me*.

Plath, Sylvia. *The Bell Jar*

Lorde, Audre. *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*

All other readings, videos, and audio recordings, will be available on Blackboard.

**Required Supplies:**

Audio recording device (digital dictaphone, smartphone, laptop microphone, etc.)

Microsoft OneDrive account (free with Mville e-mail address)

Notebook

Folder

**Online Platforms:**

OneDrive (for audio essay assignment submission)

Blackboard

**Policies and Procedures:**

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Plagiarism is the appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another person and the representation of them as one's own original work. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the definition of plagiarism and the acceptable methods of attribution. You are expected to be aware of, and to conduct yourselves in accordance with the rules regarding academic integrity found in the Manhattanville College Catalog.

All cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported immediately to the Director of Academic Writing and/or the Academic Integrity Committee. Academic dishonesty in this course will result in serious penalties, which may include failure in the assignment and/or the course.

If you have any questions about what might constitute plagiarism, please do hesitate to ask me.

Attendance

You are required to attend all regular class sessions. Although there are no exams, you are still required to arrive on time and prepared for each and every class session, actively listen, take notes, and participate in discussion.

If you cannot come to class or you know you will be arriving late, you must notify the instructor by e-mail or in person before the beginning of the class period. If you do need to miss class, it is your responsibility to notify your instructor, download any missed assignments from Blackboard, and get lecture/discussion notes from a classmate. Missing class does not excuse you from doing the assigned homework.

**Do not come to class if you are sick.**

Failure to attend without notifying your instructor ahead of time will result in an unexcused

absence. You may take up to 3 unexcused absences throughout the semester. For each absence after the third, you will lose 10% of your final grade.

Arriving to class late (after roll has been called) will count as ½ an unexcused absence.

Electronic Devices

*Please turn all cell phones to silent and store them in your bag or pocket at the beginning of each class period!* Texting, e-mailing, Instagramming, Facebooking, taking selfies, or any other activity not related to class is strictly prohibited. If you do need to answer an emergency phone call or text, please quietly step into the hallway to do so and return when you are finished. Any in-class material you miss as a result of attending to your phone is your responsibility to make up.

You may use a laptop or tablet in class *only* for the purposes of note-taking and reviewing assigned electronic readings.

**Course Requirements:**

Readings, Listenings, and Screening

All readings, listenings, and screenings assigned as homework must be completed prior to class on the day listed in the schedule below. Remember: reading, listening, and watching are active processes. It is not enough to simply skim the material; you must take notes, underline important passages, write down important quotes or images, and generally be prepared to analyze each and every text.

It is your responsibility to access the assignments on Blackboard. You are required to bring an electronic or printed copy of each and every reading assignment along with your reading/screening/listening notes to class to help you participate in discussion.

Participation/Discussion

Participation in class discussions about readings, listenings, screenings, and lecture materials is mandatory. Participation may include answering questions, posing thoughtful questions, providing relevant comments, and listening respectfully to the ideas of others.

Our classroom is a safe space. All perspectives, ideas, and beliefs are welcome, as long as they are respectful, thoughtful, and offered in a sincere spirit of academic exploration. In short, our classroom is not the internet. Disagreements are welcome, but trolling is not.

Participation will be graded holistically based on consistent level of engagement in discussions.

Audio Essays

Each week, you will record and submit a brief (not to exceed 5 minutes) audio essay in response to a given prompt (available on Blackboard). The goal of each essay is to synthesize the central themes of the material at hand, pose questions for further discussion, and link the material to the broader questions of the course.

The audio essays do not need to be studio quality, but they should be clear, audible recordings saved in MP3 format (NOT WAV FORMAT!). You may use any audio recording device you choose (laptop, smartphone, tablet, digital dictaphone, etc.). If you record on your laptop, you are strongly encouraged to use the freeware Audacity software (see web.audacityteam.org) to do so.

Each week’s essay should be uploaded to your shared OneDrive folder no later than 3:00 PM on the dates listed in the schedule below. (Please see the prompt sheet for more information on setting up a shared OneDrive folder.) Because the point of the essays is to help you engage both your own voice and the course material over time, no late assignments will be accepted.

Audio essays will be graded based on clarity of thoughts and thoroughness in engaging the course material.

Midterm Project: Capturing Others’ Voices

For your midterm project, you will interview someone whom you think has a particularly American voice then write a 3-5 page reflective narrative of the interview. Please see the midterm prompt sheet for further details.

The interview essay will be graded based on the truthful capturing of your subject’s voice through writing and your clarity of reflection in linking the interview to the broader concepts of the course.

Final Project: Voicing Your Thoughts

In the final project, you will draw on course material, current events, and your own experiences in order to voice your own thoughts on whether and in what contexts the U.S. needs the First Amendment. You may work in any medium and style *except* traditional academic writing (e.g. an extended audio essay, a series of poems, a song, etc.). Please see the final prompt sheet for further details.

During the Final “Exam” meeting, we will debate this issue as a class. Please be prepared to voice your thoughts.

The final project will be graded based on the clarity, thoroughness, and persuasiveness of your argument and the connections you draw among course material, current events, and personal experiences. Both the media portion and the in-class debate portion will be factored into the Final Project grade. Both parts will be graded holistically using a rubric.

Extra Credit

You may earn up to 10 points towards the Audio Essay grade by submitting an original (made by you, specifically for this class) creative work inspired by one of the texts we’ve read/watched/listened to this semester. You may work in any medium (writing, visual art, video, audio, etc.), and you will be expected to present your project to the class during the “Final Exam” meeting.

Grade Distribution

Participation/Discussion: 10%

Audio Essays: 50%

Midterm Project: 15%

Final Project: 25%

Grading Scale

A 93-100

A- 90-92.9

B+ 87-89.9

B 83-86.9

B- 80-82.9

C+ 77-79.9

C 73-76.9

C- 70-72.9

D 60-69.9

F 0-59.9

**Additional Resources:**

Your Professor:

This class is not easy, so I strongly encourage you to visit my office if you have any questions about the assignments and/or course materials.

The Andrew Bodenrader Center for Academic Writing and Composition:

Writing well is not easy, so students are encouraged to visit their instructors if they are having difficulties with the reading and/or writing assignments. Additionally, students are strongly encouraged to make use of the Writing Center (Library 122). Beginning the third week of the semester, professional and peer tutors will be available on a walk-in basis (Monday-Thursday from 10 AM- 9 PM; Friday 10 AM- 6PM; Sunday 5-9 PM). When visiting the Writing Center, students should bring a copy of the assignment guidelines as well as a copy of the essay. Writing tutors can assist students at any stage of the writing process from brainstorming and organizing to sentence-level concerns. Students are expected to actively engage in the tutoring and revision process; tutors will not edit or rewrite papers.

Accommodations:

If a student with a documented disability has registered with the Center for Student Accommodations (CSA) and has been approved to receive accommodations, the student will need to pick up copies of their “Approved Accommodations” letter from the Center. If a student is planning on using those accommodations for their classes, the student should provide a copy of their letter to each respective faculty member for each class for which accommodations will be utilized.  Please note, students are *not*required to disclose their disability to any professor, however, faculty members must be notified of student accommodations in order to implement and coordinate approved accommodations with the student and CSA. Accommodations are not retroactive, therefore, letters should be distributed promptly. Students should deliver “Approved Accommodations” Letters during professor office hours or by scheduling an appointment.

**Schedule**

The following schedule is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.

All homework assignments are due on the dates listed.

**Introduction**

**Thursday, January 24 – Defining American Voices**

Homework:

* None.

**Unit 1: Hearing American Voices**

**Monday, January 28 – Early Audio Recordings**

Homework:

* Read excerpts from *The Diary and Sundry Observations of Thomas A. Edison* by Thomas A. Edison (PDF on Blackboard) + listen to “Mary Had a Little Lamb” recording (link on Blackboard)
* Audio Essay 1: Do you think you have an American voice? Why or why not? Provide at least 3 examples to support your points.

**Thursday, January 31—Radio**

Homework:

* Listen to 1938 “War of the Worlds” broadcast (link on Blackboard)

**Monday, February 4—Film (watching *Singin’ in the Rain*)**

Homework:

* Audio Essay 3: In the film *Singin’ in the Rain*, much of the plot revolves around what happens when a celebrity’s voice doesn’t match his/her image. Historically, this was a real problem for silent film stars as more and more studios were producing movies with sound. Why do you think this was such a problem? Why do audiences expect a celebrity’s voice to match his/her image? In today’s world, is it possible for a celebrity to be seen and not heard or vice/versa? Is it possible for a celebrity’s voice to fail to match up to his/her image? Why or why not? Provide at least 3 examples to support your points.

**Thursday, February 7—Film (finish watching *Singin’ in the Rain)***

Homework:

* None

**Unit 2: Freedom of Speech**

**Monday, February 11— Presidential Voices**

Homework:

* Watch inaugural addresses of Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump (video links on blackboard)
* Audio Essay 4: Compare and contrast these four presidents’ speeches. Consider content, tone, and purpose. What qualities do you think make a person’s voice uniquely presidential? Provide at least 3 examples to support your points.

**Thursday, February 14—Presidential Voices (watch debate clipsin class)**

Homework:

* Read “The State of the Presidential Debate” by Jill Lepore

**Monday, February 18—Immigrant Voices**

Homework:

* Read “Mrs. Spring Fragrance” by Edith Maud Eaton, “America and I” by Anzia Yezierska, “Mericans” by Sandra Cisneros
* Audio Essay 5: Although United States government documents are written primarily in English, the country has no official national language. Consider how the authors of today’s readings (Eaton, Yezierska, and Cisneros) use language to express cultural identity. What makes their voices particularly American? Provide at least 3 examples to support your points.

**Thursday, February 21—Immigrant Voices (watch *Patriot Act* *with Hasan Minhaj* in class)**

Homework:

* Read “Bi-lingual” by Andrei Codrescu, “Thanksgiving” by Martín Espada, and “Hijab Scene #7” by Mohja Kahf

**Monday, February 25— HUAC and the Red Scare**

Homework:

* Read *The Crucible*, Acts 1 & 2
* Audio Essay 6: Discuss the role and power of confession (and/or refusal to confess) in *The Crucible* and the real HUAC testimony we discussed in class. In what ways does the voice of an individual affect an entire community? Provide at least 3 examples to support your points.

**Thursday, February 28— HUAC and the Red Scare (cont.)**

Homework:

* Read *The Crucible*, Acts 3 & 4

**Monday, March 4— Freedom of the Press (watching *Good Night, and Good Luck***

Homework:

* None ☺

**Thursday, March 7— Freedom of the Press (finish watching *Good Night, and Good Luck*)**

Homework:

* **Midterm Due**

**Monday, March 11—NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK**

**Thursday, March 14—NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK**

**Unit 3: Voices of Change**

**Monday, March 18—Racism in the 1950s and 1960s**

Homework:

* Read *Black Like Me,* beginning – “November 21” entry
* Audio Essay 7: *Black Like Me* has received polar opposite reviews. On one hand, it’s criticized because John Howard Griffin’s white voice is positioned at the center of black Americans’ stories. On the other hand, it’s praised for amplifying black voices and providing a means for white readers to understand their own privilege in comparison with the struggles of black Americans. Given what we’ve read so far, what do you think? Provide at least 2 or 3 specific examples from the book to back up your claims. Provide at least 3 examples to support your points.

**Thursday, March 21—Racism in the 1950s and 1960s**

Homework:

* Read *Black Like Me*, “November 24” entry – end

**Monday, March 25—The Civil Rights Movement(s)**

Homework:

* Listen to “Give Us the Ballot” by Martin Luther King, Jr. and “The Ballot or the Bullet” by Malcolm X
* Audio Essay 8: Compare and contrast the two speeches by Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. Consider content, tone, and purpose. What problem do they identify? What solutions do they offer? Which of the two do you find to be most persuasive? Why? Provide at least 3 examples to support your points.

**Thursday, March 28—#BlackLivesMatter (watch *13th*)**

Homework:

* None ☺

**Monday, April 1—#BlackLivesMatter (finish watching *13th*)**

Homework:

* Audio Essay 9: Thus far in the documentary *13th*, what types of voices has Duvernay included? What types of perspectives do they provide? Do you find their points to be persuasive? Why or why not? To what extent do you think media makers like documentarians and journalists should include a variety of voices and perspectives, even when some may say things that are highly offensive or even factually inaccurate? Why or why not? Provide at least 3 examples to support your points.

**Thursday, April 4—The Feminist Movement(s)**

Homework:

* Read excerpt from *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan and “Coming Apart” by Alice Walker

**Monday, April 8—Fractured Voices**

Homework:

* Read *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath, chapters 1-7
* Audio Essay 10: Esther describes herself sitting in a fig tree, with lots of different branches. What does the fig tree represent? How might we understand it in relationship to *The Feminine Mystique* and “Coming Apart”? Provide at least 3 examples to support your points.

**Thursday, April 11— Fractured Voices**

Homework:

* Read *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath, chapters 8-13

**Monday, April 15— Fractured Voices**

Homework:

* Read *The Bell Jar* chapters 14-end
* Audio Essay 11: To what extent can we trust Esther’s voice in the *Bell Jar*? Is she a reliable narrator? Why or why not? In what ways does her relative reliability reflect and/or critique cultural attitudes about women, mental health, etc? Provide at least 3 examples to support your points.

**Thursday, April 18—NO CLASS—DR. FABER IS AT A CONFERENCE**

Homework:

* Watch “Stonewall Uprising” at home (link posted on Blackboard)
* Audio Essay 12: Explain what you learned while watching the “Stonewall Uprising” documentary. Based on what you’ve learned, to what extent do you think things have changed for people in the LGBTQIA+ community since Stonewall?

**Monday, April 22—LGBTQIA+ Voices**

Homework:

* Read “Gay Liberation Front Manifesto,” “Queers Read This: I Hate Straights” by anonymous, “Manifesto Destiny” by Kiki Mason
* Audio Essay 13: A manifesto is a document that declares the political beliefs of a group or individual and describes intended actions to create political change. Compare and contrast the 3 LGBTQIA+ rights manifestos you’ve now read: “Gay Liberation Front Manifesto,” “Queers Read This,” and “Manifesto Destiny.” What beliefs does each one describe and what actions does each advocate for? What is the tone of each one? Why do you think each has that tone? Are they writing to straight communities, queer communities, or both? How do you know? Which of the 3 do you think is most effective in using the written voice to advocate for change? Why? Provide at least 3 examples to support your points.

**Thursday, April 25—An American Biomythography**

Homework:

* Read *Zami* by Audre Lorde, beginning-chapter 12

**Monday, April 29— An American Biomythography**

Homework:

* Read *Zami* chapters 13-22
* Audio Essay 14: Compare and contrast the narrator’s voice in *Zami* with at least one other American voice we’ve encountered this semester. Who are they? How do they define themselves through the use of voice, both written and spoken? In what ways do they exemplify and/or critique American values, culture, activism? Provide at least 3 examples to support your points.

**Thursday, May 2— An American Biomythography**

Homework:

* Read *Zami* chapters 23-end
* **Final Project Due**

**Conclusion: The First Amendment**

**FINALS WEEKS—Final “Exam” Day/Time TBA: First Amendment Debate**

Homework:

* Audio Essay 15: Return to your original audio essay. At the start of the semester, did you think you had an American voice? Why or why not? Now that you’ve experienced this class, how has your understanding of your own voice and American voices in general changed? Provide at least 3 examples to support your points.
* Extra Credit