

The History of American Protest

Professor John Stauffer

Summer 2021

Course Description

This interdisciplinary course examines the rich tradition of “protest literature” in the United States from the American Revolution to the present. The primary focus is on three enduring strands of protest: civil rights (beginning with antislavery), women’s rights, and workers’ rights. Using a broad definition of protest literature, we pay particular attention to the cultural production and consumption of dissent as a powerful “voice” of both individuals and movements. We examine a wide range of print, visual, and oral forms of dissent, and we explore how various expressions of dissent function as political, ideological, rhetorical, aesthetic, and performative texts within specific contexts. Readings are mostly primary sources, ranging from pamphlets, speeches, essays, and poetry to photographs, music, sociology, and history.

Course Readings

1. Trodd, Zoe, ed. *American Protest Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Course Requirements

- Contribute to nine discussion boards
- Complete five short papers (1–2 pages)
- Participate in at least three Q&As
- Complete a 15-page paper or project of appropriate rigor

Learning Objectives

1. Understand and appreciate the intimate connections between history, protest, and literature—how our interpretations of the past profoundly shape our understandings of the present and hopes for the future.
2. Understand and appreciate the ironies and contingencies of how social changes happens—how individual voices can get transformed into a collective voice that becomes a catalyst of social change.

3. Learn how to analyze primary sources both as literature—with a distinctive voice and formal characteristics—and as historical documents that need to be placed in its specific contexts.

Class Schedule

Week 1: May 27: What Is American Protest Literature?

Readings

- Trodd, preface and introduction, xi–xxix
- John Stauffer, "History Is the Activist's Muse," in *The Future of History*, eds. Conrad Edick Wright and Katheryn P. Viens (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2017), 8–19. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 1 module.)
- Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Stonewall and the Myth of Self-Deliverance," *New York Times*, June 22, 2019. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week One module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board One
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Week 2: June 3: Declaring Independence

Readings

- Trodd
 - Thomas Paine, "From Common Sense," 5–9
 - The Declaration of Independence, 15–18
- Phillis Wheatley, "On Being Brought from Africa to America" (1773) and "To His Excellency George Washington" (1776). (Links to these readings can be found in the Week 2 module.)
- John and Abigail Adams, "2 Letters, March–April 1776" (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 2 module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Two
- Short Paper One due June 9
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Q&A Session One: Thursday, June 3 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 3: June 10: Aftermath of Independence

Readings

- Trodd, *American Protest Literature*
 - David Walker, "From *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens*," 79–84
- Maria Stewart, excerpt from "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality" (1831) (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 3 module.)
- Nat Turner, "The Confessions of Nat Turner" (Baltimore: Thomas R. Gray, 1831), 6–8, highlighted portions of PDF (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 3 module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Three
 - Final Paper/Project Question due June 16
 - In roughly 1–2 pages, outline the question your final paper or project will attempt to answer. This should include a description of the paper or project you are proposing, some background information and historical context on your topic, a brief description of your research plan, and a justification for why your particular paper or project is worth pursuing.
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Week 4: June 17: Declaring Equality

Readings

- Trodd, *American Protest Literature*
 - William Apess, "An Indian's Looking Glass for the White Man"
 - Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments"
 - Frederick Douglass, "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro"
- William Lloyd Garrison, "To the Public" (January 1, 1831) and "Declaration of Sentiments" (1833). (A link to these readings can be found in the Week 4 module.)
- Sojourner Truth, "Arn't I a Woman," Comparison of versions in the *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, June 21, 1851, and the *New York Independent*, April 23, 1863, The Sojourner Truth Project. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 4 module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Four
- Short Paper Two due June 23
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Q&A Session Two: Thursday, June 17 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 5: June 24: Antislavery Poetics**Readings**

- Walt Whitman, "I Sing the Body Electric" (1855) and "A Boston Ballad" (1854). (Links to these readings can be found in the Week 5 module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Five
- Revised Question and Proposed Bibliography due June 30
 1. Revise your initial proposal to incorporate your section professor's feedback, AND
 2. Create an annotated bibliography containing at least five sources. Each of these sources should be followed by a short paragraph describing the source and what it will contribute to your final paper/project.

Week 6: July 1: Antislavery Politics**Readings**

- Abraham Lincoln, "A House Divided" (speech, Springfield, IL, June 16, 1858) and "Address at Cooper Institute" (speech, New York, NY, February 27, 1860). (Links to these readings can be found in the Week 6 module.)
- John Brown, "Address to the Court" (speech, Charles Town, VA, November 2, 1859). (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 6 module.)
- "Correspondence Between Lydia Maria Child and Gov. Wise and Mrs. Mason of Virginia," (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1860), 3-4 and 16. (Links to this reading can be found in the Week 6 module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Six
- Short Paper Three due July 7
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Q&A Session Three: Thursday, July 1 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 7: July 8: Singing for Freedom

Readings

- Trodd, *American Protest Literature*
 - Ralph Chaplin, "Solidarity Forever"
- John Stauffer and Benjamin Soskis, *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 17–28. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 7 module.)
- "Say Brothers Will You Meet Us," in *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, 30–31. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 7 module.)
- C. B. Marsh, *John Brown's Body* (Charleston: C. S. Hall, 1861). (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 7 module.)
- Julia Ward Howe, "Civil War Music: Battle Hymn of the Republic," American Battlefield Trust. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 7 module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Seven
 - Short Paper Four due July 14
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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Week 8: July 15: The Civil War as Living-Room War

Readings

- Vicki Goldberg, *The Power of Photography* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1993), 19–29. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 8 module.)
- John Stauffer, "The Terrible Reality of the First Living-Room Wars," in *War/Photography*, eds. Wilkes Tucker, Will Michels, and Natalie Zelt (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts Houston), 80–89. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 8 module.)

Assignments

- Paper/Project Preview due July 21
 - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first five pages of your final paper.
 - Project: Submissions of the project preview will differ from project to project according to type. Determine an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in with your section professor.

Q&A Session Four: Thursday, July 15 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 9: July 22: Fighting the Counter-Revolution

Readings

- Trodd, *American Protest Literature*
 - Ida B. Wells, "From Southern Horrors," 247–255
- W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), chapters 1, 11, and 14. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 9 module.)
- Adam Fairclough, *Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 1890–2000* (New York: Penguin, 2002), 67–78 (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 9 module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Eight
 - Short Paper Five due July 28
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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Week 10: July 29: Labor against Capital

Readings

- Trodd, *American Protest Literature*
 - Eugene Debs, "Statement to the Court," 232–236
- Mother Jones, "Speech to Striking Coal Miners" (1912). (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 10 module.)
- IWW Songs, "Solidarity Forever" and "The Preacher and the Slave" (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 10 module.)
- Stauffer Soskis, *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, 176–195. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 10 module.)

Assignments

- Rough Draft due August 4
 - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first ten pages (at minimum) of your final paper.
 - Project: Submissions of the project rough draft will differ from project to project according to type. Determine an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in with your section professor.
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Week 11: August 5: Waves of Women's Rights

Readings:

- Trodd, *American Protest Literature*
 - Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "From 'Solitude of Self,'" 149–154
 - Betty Friedan, "From *The Feminine Mystique*," 394–399

- Nineteenth Amendment and Equal Rights Amendment, 185–186
- Shirley Chisholm, "For the Equal Rights Amendment," 411–415
- Gerda Lerner, "Letter to Betty Friedan," 416–417
- Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," (1984) in *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 110–114. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 11 module.)
- Christine Stansell, *The Feminist Promise*, pp. 124–134 and 323–351 (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 11 module.)

Assignments:

- Discussion Board Nine

Q&A Session Five: Thursday, August 5 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 12: August 12: Performing Civil Rights

Readings

- Trodd, *American Protest Literature*
 - Martin Luther King, Jr., "From 'Letter from Birmingham Jail,'" 346–353
 - Malcolm X, "From 'The Ballot or the Bullet,'" 356–363
 - James Baldwin, "My Dungeon Shook," 342–345
- Martin Luther King, Jr., "I Have a Dream" (speech, Washington D.C., August 28, 1963), recording. (A link can be found in the Week 12 module.)
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, "Son," in *Between the World and Me* (New York, Penguin Random House, 2015), 5–12. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 12 module.)
- Philip Klinkner with Rogers Smith, *The Unsteady March* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 1–9. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 12 module.)

Assignments

- Final Draft due August 18