

**English 204:  
Writing As Social Action  
CRN: 23873, 3 credits  
Spring 2021  
(Mondays, Wednesday, Fridays on Zoom,  
11:30 a.m. to 12:20 p.m., EST)**

***Instructor:***

Dr. Harry Denny

Offices: HEAV 226 (The Writing Lab) or HEAV 122C

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Office hours: 10:30 to 11:30, MWF in our Zoom space

***Course description:***

After a spring and summer of widespread protests following a series of police-involved killings of African Americans and a fall of presidential politics, activism of all stripes seems alive and electric in the US. How people respond to Covid-19 is a signal of their political identity, and social movements, particularly for young people, have now gained exposure through social media (e.g., #metoo, #BLM, #noh8) as much as marching in streets or kneeling at football games. This course introduces students to theories and methods of analyzing collective social action protest, invites students to apply that critical thinking to historical and current activism, and challenges students to develop research into movements to which they have a personal connection.

Students will survey colonial American, slave, early women's, abolition, anti-lynching, post-reconstruction, and contemporary civil rights movements. These social movements reflect the use and power of rhetoric to affect national identity formation, its ideals, and mythology, and these forms of social movement rhetoric pursue change for the place and meaning of people of color, women, the working poor and other minority identity formations. After being introduced to a menu of methods for the analysis of the rhetoric of social movements and applying them to specific common texts, students will develop their own substantive research into activism around social, cultural, or political change, ideally a project that taps activism with unique appeal. Using activist language that's come before and honoring how social justice has been advanced through writing and speaking in the past, we'll take a look at contemporary struggles around reproductive rights, voting rights, affirmative action and marriage equality.

***Course Texts***

All available at open-source materials via Brightspace connections

***Course Objectives***

- Link contemporary assumptions about public citizenship to historical movements around social justice
- Introduce collective action as tangible, accessible, and negotiable
- Foster critical awareness of the shifting nature of identity and place in the U.S
- Place contemporary political debates over citizenship and civic agency and

- participation in a wide historical context
- Highlight historical shifts in the ways by which people come to identify with social movements, their agenda and rhetoric, and the degree to which particular formations have become hegemonic
- Connect writing process and analysis to audience and rhetorical purpose
- Create a collaborative peer-to-peer environment for revising in virtual and “real-time” contexts
- Continue growing students' facility with written and oral communication

### Course Outcomes

- Knowledge of key social movement rhetoric linked to race, sex, class, and nationality
- Capacity to place oneself in dialog with historical movements for social justice
- Awareness of analytic methods for movement rhetoric, and opportunity to combine or riff strategies to foster innovative technique and insight
- Research social movement, study its rhetoric and apply insight to a local context
- Write essays focusing on functional, political, and ideographic elements
- Develop an expertise in a social movement's rhetoric
- Become familiar with the literature review as an academic genre
- Produce a portfolio reflecting intellectual growth around the social movement rhetoric context, argumentation, prose, and composition self-awareness

### Course Assignments

Weekly reading/responding/writing will culminate in essays designed to challenge students to apply functional and critical/interpretive methods of analysis to primary/original social movement and activist texts. Students will upload essay drafts, workshop each other's writing, and then produce meta-texts to guide revision based on peer responses. Students will also produce a portfolio representing a range of criticisms or interpretive techniques. A semester-long project will require students to survey and catalog a movement or activist rhetoric and to produce a “text” that fosters education or awareness of the movement or activism amongst your wider peer group.

Overview:

- In-Class Participation, Online Posting & Responding (30% of course grade)
  - *Reading & Class Responses*  
We'll have some meaty academic theories of social movement rhetoric, or we'll look at some actual primary texts (or do both). To prime our class discussions, I'd like for you to respond on your BrightSpace journals, by 10:00 p.m., the night prior to our Zoom meetings. Sometime, I'll ask you to post examples you've found in our open discussions; most times, we'll have private dialogue through your journals.
  - *Participation*  
Rather than have me talk *at* you, I'd prefer to facilitate a healthy discussion among us about the readings and how you under them and can integrate them into your own experiences as well as the primary texts we'll be analyzing. That said, Zoom is weird, and we'll play around with what works or not.
  - Grading:

- Grades in the “B” range for this element of the course represent substantive peer response and meta-texts.
  - Grades in the “A” range represent “outstanding” peer response and meta-texts. They push peers and self in productive and insightful ways in a consistent basis.
  - Grades at or below the “C” range represent inconsistent postings (missing any weekly postings) or posting that represent facile and minimalist commenting.
- Mid-Term Portfolio (30% of final grade)
  - **Revise any two journal responses** into fully fleshed-out essays directed to an authentic audience of your own choosing. The point is to persuade this potential/actual audience of the insight(s) you’re developing in the journal post. Your argument needs to be presented in a manner that would resonate with that audience while also signaling your understanding of the content as well as your persuasive control. These papers aren’t meant to be the typical 5-paragraph theme, but instead are supposed to be vehicles for your to share insight that’s meaningful and excites you (about doing, about sharing your learning). For consistency, please format your papers according to MLA guidelines. Cite any outside sources or references that contribute to your understanding or analysis of texts (i.e., wikipedia or google). I highly encourage you to also workshop your revisions with a consultant in the Writing Lab (remember, you can do this work through email or “live” chat), but go into being active (what do you want help with, what would you like to learn) as opposed to being a passive blob (yo, look at this and fix it for me).
  - Write a cover-memo addressed to me, reflecting on your writing process and on what guided your choice of essays. Your memo may also consider:
    - How did it go?
    - What problems did you encounter?
    - What do you feel good about?
    - What do you wish you could now change?
    - What did you learn about your own writing that you could share with other students?
  - Due: March 5 in BrightSpace under Assignment link.
  - Grading:
    - Grades in the “B” range for this element of the course represent strong products that represent substantive revision (incorporating classmate and instructor feedback), sound understanding and application of theories and methods, strong argument, and well-edited prose. The meta-text is also insightful.
    - Grades in the “A” range represent “outstanding” revision (incorporating classmate and instructor feedback that transforms drafts), clear understanding and application of theories and methods, cogent argumentation, and generally error-free prose.
    - Grades at or below the “C” range represent inconsistent revision

(failure to incorporate or address instructor feedback), weak or inappropriate understanding and application of theories and methods, flawed argumentation, and weak control of editing. The meta-text is missing or inadequate.

- Final Portfolio (40% of final grade) (Due by the end of our final exam period, TBA)
  - Part 1: Develop into and revise any two journal postings from after Spring Break. Also include a meta-text as outlined in the midterm project.
  - Part 2: Social Movement/Activism Project
    - Pick any social or cultural issue in which you have a personal investment. You will need to propose and commit to the issue early on in the semester, writing an initial introduction to the issue/movement and explaining your motives for studying it.
    - Imagine you've been invited to develop a way to reach your peer group on behalf of your organization/movement/issue to get them involved, perhaps even developing a service-learning project. The trick here is that your choice needs to be meaningful and authentic to you; if you don't care about the activism, it'll shine through. You need win over volunteers or potential activists to your project (based on the lessons you've learned from studying social movements all semester), and you must develop an audience-aware "education document" about your project. The public/student education document will be submitted as part of your portfolio. You may create a multi-media or power-point document so long as you attend to the need the rhetorical needs of the audience. Take a look at current.com as a good example of grassroots multimedia projects.
    - I would prefer some medium that allows your classmates to see your work. We'll talk more as the semester goes on.
    - Production/Process Schedule:
      1. February 15, Project proposal
      2. March 22, Bibliography on activism related to my movement
        1. What groups are out there?
        2. What has been written about them?
        3. What media do they use?
        4. What aspects of our theories/methods do they take up?
        5. What's its agenda?
      3. April 5, Action plan
        1. What do students like me know about this activist group or social movement?
        2. What do I think they need to know or do?
        3. What's a reasonable way of building awareness or action?
        4. Which of our theories might fit with this movement or activism? How so?

- Grading:
  - Grades in the “B” range for this element of the course represent strong essays that represent substantive revision (incorporating classmate and instructor feedback), sound understanding and application of theories and methods, strong argument, and well-edited prose. The meta-text is also insightful. The project will represent audience-awareness, a sound understanding of the movement and its agenda, and have a reasonable action plan to educate.
  - Grades in the “A” range represent essays that have outstanding revision (incorporating classmate and instructor feedback that transforms drafts), clear understanding and application of theories and methods, cogent argumentation, and generally error-free prose. The meta-text is thorough, with key insights and examples. The project will represent sophisticated audience-awareness as well as comprehensive understanding of the connections between activism or movement being studied and the semester’s lessons from theories and histories.
  - Grades at or below the “C” range represent inconsistent revision (failure to incorporate or address instructor feedback), weak or inappropriate understanding and application of theories and methods, flawed argumentation, and weak control of editing. The meta-text is missing or inadequate. Projects will reflect weak or incomplete understanding of movements, applications of our theories, and/or an inadequate/implausible action plan.

## Course Policies

### *Attendance & Deadlines*

- All of class is online, so you need to show up online. Missing these sessions undermines our sense of community that just can’t be duplicated online. Given our odd COVID-reality, adhering to deadlines is crucial. However, life intrudes from time to time, and I understand that reality. You are each experienced, so I assume you’ll know to contact one another and explain/make allowances for missed discussions.
- Please be aware that postings need to be done no later than the deadlines outlined above or in the schedule, so also factor access to technology into your schedule. Assume, as I always do, that when you most need technology, it will fail you. In other words, have a back-up plan to your internet access.
- If you cannot participate or meet a deadline because of a religious observation, please let me know, and we’ll negotiate equitable due dates.
- Late portfolios will be penalized one-third grade for each day past the due date. Late postings will also diminish your grades for the discussion component.

### *Disability and Special Circumstances*

- If you have a learning disability, you are under no obligation to inform me, but knowing that information can help me make your learning experience better. If you suspect you may have undiagnosed issues and want help, I can provide appropriate,

confidential contact information.

### *Plagiarism*

- Plagiarism and academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. However, you'll be doing quite a bit of writing in class and individual enough in nature that such cheating will be really difficult—I'll get really familiar with your voice and natural means of expression. Also, be aware that your prose needs to be in your voice—if someone else edits your work, in certain cases your writing no longer is "yours." Passing it off as yours is still plagiarism. In most cases, plagiarism is unintentional or happens because of anxiety. Rather than get yourself in trouble, talk to me, and we can work through the problems.
- Academic integrity is one of the highest values that Purdue University holds. Individuals are encouraged to alert university officials to potential breaches of this value by either emailing [integrity@purdue.edu](mailto:integrity@purdue.edu) or by calling 765-494-8778. While information may be submitted anonymously, the more information is submitted the greater the opportunity for the university to investigate the concern. More details are available on our course Brightspace table of contents, under University Policies.

### *Essay style and conventions*

- ☐ All class assignments and projects must be word-processed unless otherwise noted. Handwritten or informally produced documents will not be accepted. Please number your pages and follow MLA citation and format guidelines as detailed in the Writer's reference or some other handbook. If MLA is a style that you'll never use in your professional life, talk to me and we'll figure out another that will help you down the road.

### *Conduct*

- ☐ Students are expected to adhere to the university's code of conduct. While I will encourage wide diversity in opinions and talk, everyone must be allowed to have a voice. On the flipside, being a passive, withdrawn presence in our community is not appropriate. Though some courses on campus don't enable students to have much agency, this course will prize everyone's engagement and talk (whether face-to-face or online). Students should not expect me to just transmit what I want or impart knowledge; I'm here to get you to express and hone your thoughts in writing. Students who don't actively participate may pass, but they will likely get a low grade. If you're a quiet and shy person, use our activities on BrightSpace as an outlet.
- ☐ Purdue University is committed to maintaining a community which recognizes and values the inherent worth and dignity of every person; fosters tolerance, sensitivity, understanding, and mutual respect among its members; and encourages each individual to strive to reach his or her potential. In pursuit of its goal of academic excellence, the University seeks to develop and nurture diversity. The University believes that diversity among its many members strengthens the institution, stimulates creativity, promotes the exchange of ideas, and enriches campus life. A hyperlink to Purdue's full Nondiscrimination Policy Statement is included in our course Brightspace under University Policies.
- ☐ Mental Health/Wellness: A link to CAPS is on the Brightspace listing of resources of

Student Services and Resources section. Purdue University is committed to advancing the mental health and well-being of its students. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of mental health support, services are available. For help, such individuals should contact [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) at 765-494-6995 during and after hours, on weekends and holidays, or by going to the CAPS office on the second floor of the Purdue University Student Health Center (PUSH) during business hours.



## Calendar

Mondays	Wednesdays	Fridays
	<p>(Week 1) January 20</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Post a introduction to that thread under discussions (Under the Course Tools menu). Tell us about what kinds of activism and social action you're interested in.</li><li>• Listen to or watch Inauguration on a channel of your choosing.</li><li>• For your "Class Examples" discussion post, think about what issues you're hearing, what protests or activism you're noticing. If we assume no messages are neutral, what frames or perspectives does the media offer for interpreting the speakers.</li></ul>	<p>January 22</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review syllabus</li><li>• Talk about assignments and projects for the semester.</li></ul>



Functional Method of Analyzing Activist Rhetoric		
(Week 2) January 25 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read: Stewart, Part 1 (49-62)</li> <li>• Read &amp; post under journal: Applying Stewart part 1 to the Declaration of Independence. Do you see the colonists doing anything that Stewart writes about? What do you make of it?</li> <li>• Post under “Class Examples” – a sample of activists you’re interested in challenging perceptions of history or society</li> </ul>	January 27 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read Stewart, Part 2 (62)</li> <li>• Read &amp; post under journal: Applying Stewart part 2 to the Declaration of Independence.</li> <li>• Post under “Class Examples” – a sample of activists you’re interested in prescribing or mobilizing for action.</li> </ul>	January 29 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stewart, Part 3</li> <li>• Post under “Class Examples” – a sample of activists you’re interested in keeping their movement alive.</li> </ul>
Style & Activist Rhetoric		
(Week 3) February 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read Cathcart and post under journal: How does he shift away from Stewart?</li> <li>• Post under “Class Examples” - a sample from current events that illustrates what Cathcart is getting at</li> </ul>	February 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revisit DI: Journal response TBA</li> </ul>	February 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TBA</li> </ul>
(Week 4) February 8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read: Logue and post under journal: How does he complicate Cathcart?</li> </ul>	February 10 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read: Slave Petitions for Freedom</li> <li>• Post under journal: What</li> </ul>	February 12 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read: David Walker’s Appeal</li> </ul>

(Week 5) February 15 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Semester-long project proposal</li> <li>Read McGee on the Ideograph</li> <li>Post in the open discussion list examples of “ideographs” you see from everyday life and activism?</li> </ul>	February 17 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No Class, Reading day</li> </ul>	February 19 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Applying McGee</li> <li>Post in your journal what ideographs you’ve seen in our activist readings to date.</li> </ul>
Early Civil Rights Activism		
(Week 6) February 22 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early legal challenges to inequality</li> <li>Sara Roberts Education case</li> <li>Post in journal – what ideographs do you see Sumner trying to invoke? How does it compare to today?</li> <li></li> </ul>	February 24 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plessy v. Ferguson</li> <li>Brown v. Board of Education</li> <li>For journal: What ideographs does Plessy take up? Which ones do Brown?</li> <li>Points of comparison between the two?</li> </ul>	February 26 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For journal, for class, what do you make of the three cases?</li> <li>How might we compare or contrast them?</li> </ul>
(Week 7) March 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workshopping portfolios</li> </ul>	March 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No class (Harry has a day-long faculty meeting).</li> </ul>	March 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workshopping portfolios</li> </ul>
(Week 8) March 8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Portfolio due, 11:30 EST</li> <li>Selections from <i>Vindication of the Rights of Women</i></li> </ul>	March 10 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stanton, “To be free as man is free”</li> <li>Stanton, “Declaration of Sentiments”</li> <li>Anthony, “On Women’s Right to Vote”</li> </ul>	March 12 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Angela Grimke, “On Voluntary Motherhood”</li> <li>Angela Grimke, “An Appeal to Southern Women”</li> </ul>
(Week 9) March 15 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read and post on Booker T. Washington</li> </ul>	March 17 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read &amp; post on W.E.B. DuBois</li> </ul>	March 19 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read &amp; Post on Marcus Garvey</li> </ul>

(Week 10) March 22 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bibliography on activist movement</li> <li>• Warner on Publics &amp; Counterpublics</li> <li>• This is a hard reading. Post in your journal what you make of it.</li> </ul>	March 24 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voting rights rhetoric               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Overview</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	March 26 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Shelby v Holder</i></li> </ul>
(Week 11) March 29 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affirmative action rhetoric               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Overview</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	March 31 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American Center for Law &amp; Justice amicus brief</li> <li>• UT-Austin Black Students Union</li> </ul>	April 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Fisher v Texas</i></li> </ul>
(Week 12) April 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activist plan</li> <li>• Sexual diversity rhetoric               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Overview</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	April 7 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Windsor &amp; Obergefell</i></li> </ul>	April 9 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Bostock v. Clayton County</i></li> </ul>
(Week 13) April 12 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reproductive Rights               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Overview</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	April 14 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Roe v. Wade</i></li> </ul>	April 16 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Casey v. Planned Parenthood</i></li> </ul>
(Week 14) April 19 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religious freedom rhetoric               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Overview</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	April 21 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liberty Counsel amicus brief</li> <li>• Americans United for Separation of Church and State amicus brief</li> </ul>	April 23 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Masterpiece Cake v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission</i></li> </ul>
(Week 15) April 26 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Semester-long presentations</li> </ul>	April 28 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Semester-long presentations</li> </ul>	April 30 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Semester-long presentations</li> </ul>
May 3-5 Finals week Final Portfolio Due Date TBA		