

English 710: Washington, DC: Literature, Politics, and Culture

Humanities GCR

In ACAD 220, TR 2:30 to 3:45

CRN: 36249

(freshmen only)

Washington, DC, has a rich literary history that reveals much about life in the nation's capital from early in the nineteenth century to the present. While some writings are of local interest and portray the lives of everyday citizens, many others engage large national issues and conflicts-slavery, the Civil War, the corruption of government by money and special interests, black migration, Cold War politics, the imperial state. This course will focus on the work of several prominent American writers who engage these larger national issues, such as Frederick Douglass, Williams Wells Brown, Walt Whitman, Louisa May Alcott, Henry Adams, Willa Cather, Gore Vidal, and Robert Coover-and some who speak more directly about everyday life in the nation's capital-Jean Toomer and Marita Golden. Students will read, discuss, and present reports on these works and related subjects, and complete research projects, using local libraries and historical sites, on the life and writings of other Washington-based writers. The class will also take several field trips to explore the many resources, especially museums and archives, of contemporary Washington having relevance to the course's principal themes.

Christopher Sten teaches American literature, with special interest in the American novel, modernism, ethnicity, the city, and the writings of Herman Melville. His books include *Savage Eye: Melville and the Visual Arts* (1992), *The Weaver-God, He Weaves: Melville and the Poetics of the Novel* (1996), and *Sounding the Whale: Melville's Epic Novel* (1996). He is currently completing a history of American writers' involvement in national politics to be titled *Washington: The Politics of American Writing*. He is a former Chair of the GW English Department and has served as a Senior Fulbright Lecturer in Germany. He currently holds the position of Executive Secretary of the Melville Society.