Seminar Description: This course considers the overlapping lives and legacies of two revolutionary figures whose influence on the American civil rights movement was profound and far reaching: Malcolm X and James Baldwin. Though the American public rarely imagined them as political bedfellows in their time, a closer inspection of their lives reveals striking autobiographical similarities. Both were born as the sons of Baptist ministers. Both left Christianity behind in favor of spiritual affiliations that they felt were more favorable for black Americans (for X/Shabazz it was Islam, for Baldwin it was agnosticism). Both were legends in New York City’s Harlem community. One lived in France (Baldwin), while the other was publically banned from that same country (X). Both were deemed by the media as angry “spokesmen” for Black America in the 1960s. Moreover, it was an early screenplay on X’s life written by Baldwin that formed the basis of American director Spike Lee’s critically acclaimed 1992 film, “Malcolm X.”

In this interdisciplinary seminar we will closely examine the convergences and confluences of these two men’s political ideologies—and well as the worlds that shaped them. How did Malcolm X’s “version” of America differ from Baldwin’s, and in what ways? In what ways can we imagine Baldwin as X’s literary “brother”? How have the legacies of X and Baldwin shaped contemporary debates about the ethics of black rage, resistance, and/or protest? How did spirituality and faith (or a lack thereof) influence these men’s entry into the black freedom movement? Also, given that both of these men are often thought of as “revolutionaries” (albeit in different registers)—we will move through this course searching for an answer to a deceptively simple question: how did each of their definitions of “revolution” differ from one another? Lastly, what lessons do their writings offer us for considering the continued crisis of American race relations?

Our reading material will include The Autobiography of Malcolm X (Malcolm X); Malcolm X, By Any Means Necessary: The Writings and Speeches of Malcolm X (Malcolm X), The Fire Next Time (James Baldwin), Go Tell It On the Mountain (James Baldwin), Going To Meet the Man (James Baldwin) and James Cone’s Malcolm, Martin, and America: Dream of a Nightmare. Our course will also include at least two field trips—one to the streets of contemporary Harlem, as well as one to the Malcolm X and Betty Shabazz Memorial and Educational Center in New York.

Required Reading:

2. George Breitman, Ed. Malcom X Speaks (1994)
4. James Cone, Malcolm, Martin, and America: Dream or Nightmare (1991)
7. James Baldwin, Go Tell It On the Mountain (1952)

Grading Criteria:

• 50% Attendance and Critical Participation
• 25% One Class Presentation
Our Course Learning Objectives

1. To help students discern and situate the historical, political, and philosophical legacies of American Civil Rights Movement.

2. To help students understand how two important American icons—Malcolm X and James Baldwin—have shaped contemporary debates about race and racism in the United States.

3. To increase student’s abilities to think about, write about, and talk about racial inequality in the United States.

Schedule

9/3 Introduction
Opening Lecture: “Malcolm, Baldwin, and America”

9/10 Malcolm and Baldwin’s Black Prophetic Fire: What It Was and Why It Matters
Reading (Short Essays):
- James Baldwin, “In Search of the Majority” (1960)

9/17 Baldwin and Malcolm’s Harlem (Harlem Walking Tour)
Course meets at 4pm on 125th Street and Lenox Avenue
Reading:
- James Baldwin, Go Tell It on the Mountain (1952) (First Half)

9/24 James Baldwin’s God
- James Baldwin, Go Tell It on the Mountain (Second Half)

10/1 Keeping the Casket Open: Baldwin, Democracy and the Blues
- James Baldwin, Blues for Mister Charlie (1964)

10/8 Baldwin’s Bluesmen
- James Baldwin “Going to Meet the Man,” (Short Story)
- James Baldwin, “Sonny’s Blues” (Short Story) (1965)
- First 50 pages of Another Country (1965)

10/15 Baldwin, Jazz, and the Unexamined Life
- James Baldwin, Another Country (1965)

10/22 James Baldwin and the American Civil Rights Movement
- James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time (1963)

10/29 Why Malcolm’s Early Black Life Matters
- Malcolm X/Alex H., The Autobiography of Malcolm X, Chs. 1-10
- Robin Kelley, “The Riddle of the Zoot”
• In-Class Excerpt of first 45 minutes of Malcolm X (Dir. Spike Lee)

11/5 **Becoming Malcolm X: Incarceration and Early Ministry**
  • Malcolm X/Alex H., *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Chs. 11-15
  • Guest Lecture: Zaheer Ali (Columbia University)

11/12 **Malcolm X and the American Civil Rights Movement**
  • George Breitman, ed. *Malcolm X Speaks* (Excerpts)
  • In-Class Excerpt of 45 minutes of *Malcolm X* (Dir. Spike Lee)

11/19 **Malcolm X and the American Civil Rights Movement**
  • James Cone, *Malcolm, Martin, and America: A Dream or Nightmare*
  • In-Class Excerpt Viewing: Baldwin and Malcolm Debate (1963)

12/3 **Becoming El Hajj Malik Shabazz: Malcolm’s Evolution**
  • George Breitman, *Last Year of Malcom X: Evolution of a Revolutionary* (first-half)
  • Course Meets at The Malcolm X and Betty Shabazz Center in Harlem

12/10 **Martyrs**
  • George Breitman, *Last Year of Malcom X: Evolution of a Revolutionary* (continued)
Part II:

Requirements and How You Will Be Graded:

50% Attendance  
25% Response Papers  
25% Presentation

There are three graded requirements for this course, distributed as follows:

A. 50% Critical verbal in-class participation and the weekly submission of two “discussion questions/critical issues” (drawn directly from the issues raised in the readings) that you’d like to discuss in class.

Your guidelines for the discussion questions/critical issues competent are as follows:

- You are required to come to class every week with two short pre-prepared questions/points (i.e.—they must be typed, not handwritten, and submitted via hardcopy). It is never guaranteed that your questions will actually make it into our discussions, nonetheless you are required to come to class with them. Moreover, though you are required to submit written copies of your two questions/issues—your verbal participation in class is not limited to these two aforementioned questions/issues. In addition, it is completely acceptable to regurgitate questions/or points that you raised in your weekly 1 page response paper. In short, your two weekly discussion questions/points should give me a clear idea of what you plan on talking about in class that day.

Your verbal participation grade will be assessed in the following way:

“A” Range Participation:

- You came to class every week with two well thought-out, pre-prepared “questions” or “issues” (drawn directly from the readings) that you kept handy.
- Your contributions to our class discussions indicated that you were reading the assigned material closely, as opposed to simply coming to class and “improvising” on the assigned topic.
- In the moments that you were called on unexpectedly to discuss a particular topic, you articulated your ideas with clarity.
- You spoke at least once in every session.
- The depth of your insights were roughly in the top 30 percentile of the class (which means whether or not you receive an “A” in participation is partially contingent on the quality of your fellow colleagues’ contributions to class. Your participation grade will be curved in relationship to your peers insights. This means: if your peers were consistently making stronger, sharper insights than you in class—you will be receiving a lower grade than them. “Sharp insights” do not necessarily mean insights that share the same view as the professor or the author whose work is under consideration. “Sharp insights” simply refer to your ability to breathe life, depth, nuance and wisdom to our classroom conversations.

“B” Range Participation (inclusive of any one of these scenarios, or all):

- You met all of the criteria listed above; your contributions were valuable and insightful—but your contributions were not consistent enough to be considered within the top 30% of the class.
- Your written weekly questions were often or occasionally vague—thus indicating that you probably did not actually do the assigned reading material; or that you did the readings at the last minute and simply attempted to “throw together” your discussion questions in a disingenuous attempt to fulfil the course requirement.
Your contributions were valuable—but you lacked self-awareness. “Self-awareness” is the ability to discern when it is time to strategically be silent in order to allow your colleagues to speak.

You raised your hand often—but when called upon, your ideas were either: a) too scattered b) simply a regurgitation of comments that someone else had already made c) lacked depth or insight.

You were occasionally unattentive. “Unattentive” includes: texting your phone during class; using your laptop in class (prohibited); having a “side conversations” during class. If you are observed engaging in any of these activities, even once, you will be incapable of receiving an “A” for participation.

“C” Range Participation (inclusive of any one of these scenarios, or all):

- You rarely participated in class voluntarily.
- When called upon to speak, you refused. (Responding with “I don’t know” or “I don’t have anything to say” constitutes a refusal.)

B. 25% one in-class presentation. All students will present a 20 minute “lecture” on one of the assigned readings. The purpose of this exercise is for you to master the art of lecturing/presenting/“teaching” on a topic. On the day that you present, you are required to submit a copy (emailed electronically: to NYUGALLATINRACE@gmail.com) of your powerpoint presentation and/or an “overview” of your presentation. You are not required to do a response paper on that way.

In order to receive an A, the guidelines are as follows (adhering to these guidelines does not guarantee that you will actually receive an A; however NOT adhering to these guidelines does guarantee that you will NOT receive an A):

- If you are going to be using media material (i.e. youtube clips, videos, music, etc.) your media material cannot take up more than 5 minutes worth of time. You may show multiple clips, but no one clip can be longer than 5 minutes.
- Your entire presentation must not exceed 20 minutes under any circumstances. The instructor will be obligated to stop you at the 20 minute mark, regardless of whether you have finished.
- Your entire presentation must not be shorter than 15 minutes.
- Do not include a “Question & Answer” period.
- Your presentation format can take a variety of forms. You are given complete free reign in coming up with your format. You can use your twenty minutes to “break down” the author’s argument; expound upon one of the theories or concepts that the author engages in order to present your own original essay/lecture (this is called the “applying theory” approach); bring in clips/media material that you think illustrate or contradict the point the author is trying to make; ask the class to get into small groups to discuss a particular issue than have them “report back” on their findings (if you do this, your small group activity segment must NOT exceed 6 minutes). Any of these formats is fine—you may also experiment on a format not listed.
- Ultimately, you are being graded on 1) how well you engage the author’s ideas 2) originality, 3) the quality of how well you “teach” the author’s argument (this includes vehemently disagreeing with what she has to say).

C. 25% 10, 1 to 1.5 response papers. You are required to produce ten, very brief 600 to 800 word “response papers” over the course of the semester. Your response papers will always be due at pm on the Wednesday before class (i.e. the day before class). Your response papers are similar to the presentations in so far as you can use the papers as an opportunity to “break down” the author’s argument; or simply hone in and/or expound upon one of the theories or concepts that the author engages. Your papers will NOT be handed back to you, nor will they be graded individually. At the end of the semester you will compile all of your response papers into one packet—alongside a 1,500 essay where you provide me with an overview of the
key themes, ideas, and theories that have been of interest to you this semester. Your grade for this portion of the course requirements will be determined by the following criteria:

A quality:
- Your response papers were successfully submitted by 6am on the due date to the instructor’s email address (which will be NYUGALLATINRACE@gmail.com).
- Your response papers consisted of 600 to 800 words of your OWN voice. In other words, a 600 word response paper should not include a quotation that was 300 words.
- Your response papers were not riddled with grammatical errors.
- Your response papers were well written and highly engaging.
- Your response papers directly engaged the author’s argument. This means that before you endorse or disagree with the author—you made it clear that you actually understand the author’s argument.
- Your end-of-the-semester 1,500 word essay that provided an “overview/introduction” to your 10 papers was well written.
- Your response papers often brought in original examples (i.e. something going on in current affairs; a historical phenomenon, or a personal antidote) that clarifies the accuracy OR limitations of the author’s argument that is under review. (You are not required to do this every time.)

B quality:
- You deviated from the above criteria.
- You did not successfully submit 10 papers.
- Curve grade caveat: you met the requirements, but the quality of your response papers were inferior to that of the overall quality of your peers.

C quality:
- You deviated from the above criteria in a truly egregious way.
Malcolm X: A Life Timeline
(source: malcolm-x.org)

1925
• (May 19) Born as Malcolm Little in University Hospital, Omaha, Nebraska.

1927
• Malcolm's brother, Reginald, is born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

1931
• Enrolled in Pleasant Grove Elementary School (kindergarten).
• Malcolm's father, Earl Little, is run over by a streetcar and is killed.

1938
• Enrolled in West Junior High School, in Lansing.

1939
• Malcolm's mother, Louise Little, is committed to the State Mental Hospital in Kalamazoo, consequently placing Malcolm in a juvenile home.
• He tells a teacher that his goal is to one day become a lawyer, the teacher recommends becoming a carpenter instead, as being a lawyer is not a realistic goal for a "nigger."
• Enrolls in Mason High School in Mason, Michigan.

1940
• Lives in various foster homes.
• Goes to Boston to visit his half-sister, Ella Collins, notices her strong and independent character.

1941
• Moves to Boston to live with Ella.
• Acquires various jobs, including shoe shining, dishwashing, and soda jerking, also occasionally works for the New Haven Railroad.
• He is now exposed to the criminal world.

1943
• Malcolm moves to New York, specifically Harlem.
• Becomes a waiter at Small's Paradise.
• The U.S. Army finds him unsuitable for the service on account of mental problems (apparently, he behaved in unsuitable manner on purpose, in order to avoid the draft).
  • Known as "Detroit Red.
  • Involved in criminal activities.

1944
• Indicted for larceny, he goes back to Boston, given a three month suspended sentence and one year on probation.

1945
• Returns to Harlem, New York.

1946
• Convicted of larceny, breaking and entering, and carrying a weapon. Malcolm is sentenced to eight to ten years in prison. He starts to serve the term in Charlestown Prison.
• Here he begins reading as many books as possible and educating himself.
1947
• Transferred to Concord Reformatory for fifteen months.
• Influenced by some family members and impressed by letters from Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm converts to the Nation of Islam (not to be confused with actual Islam).

1948
• Transferred to Norfolk Prison Colony, Massachusetts, where there is a great library.

1952
• Malcolm is released from prison after six years (instead of eight to ten) and meets Elijah Muhammad in Chicago. It is here that he receives the legendary 'X' from the Nation of Islam.

1953
• The FBI opens a surveillance file on Malcolm.
• He moves to Chicago to live with Elijah Muhammad.
• Becomes the Minister of the Nation of Islam's Temple Number Eleven, located in Boston.

1954
• Becomes the Minister of Temple Number Seven, located in New York.

1955
• Becomes the Minister of Temple Number Twelve, located in Philadelphia.
  • First hears rumors of Elijah Muhammad's adultery.

1958
• Attracted to Betty Sanders, a nurse, he marries her in January.
  • Their first child, daughter Attallah, is born in November.

1959
• Travels to United Arab Republic, Sudan, and Nigeria.
  • As an ambassador for the Nation of Islam, he travels to the Middle East and Ghana.

1960
• Meets with Fidel Castro for half an hour in Hotel Theresa, Harlem.
  • His second daughter, Qubilah, is born in December.

1962
• Discovers that Elijah Muhammad is an adulterer.
  • His third daughter, Ilyasah, is born.

1963
• Watches the March on Washington critically, unable to understand why black people are excited over a demonstration "run by whites in front of a statue of a president who has been dead for a hundred years and who didn't like us when he was alive."
• Because of his "Chickens Come Home to Roost" speech about the assassination of Kennedy, he is suspended from representing the Nation of Islam.

1964
• Begins collaboration on his autobiography with Alex Haley.
  • Visits Cassius Clay (Muhammad Ali) for a week.
• Meets Martin Luther King, Jr. for the first and only time after a King news conference.
  • Breaks away from the Nation of Islam and forms the Muslim Mosque, Inc.
  • Travels to Makkah and Africa as Malik El-Shabazz.
• In Makkah, seeing the beauty of the unity of humanity, he embraces true Islam.
  • He comes back to the U.S. thinking differently about white people.
    • He forms the Organization for Afro-American Unity.
    • He returns to Africa and meets with African leaders.
    • His fourth daughter, Gamilah, is born in December.

1965
• House is firebombed in the early morning of the 14th day of February.
  • (February 21) Right after beginning an address at the Audubon Ballroom, at 3:10 pm, he is shot several times...he is pronounced dead on arrival at Vanderbilt Clinic, Columbia Presbyterian Hospital....
  • Body moved to Bishop Alvin A. Child's Faith Temple Church of God in Christ for funeral services, eulogy by actor/playwright Ossie Davis, over 20,000 people attend. (Bishop Childs and his family face constant threats at their home and church for agreeing to conduct the funeral.)
  • Twin daughters, Malaak and Malikah are born.

James Baldwin: A Life
(source: PBS)

1924: Born August 2nd in New York’s Harlem Hospital.
1927: Emma Berdis Jones (Jimmy’s mother) married Reverend David Baldwin (Jimmy’s stepfather). Eight more children followed.
1930’s: Read avidly and began writing. Won numerous prizes from school, church and city for his early efforts.
1938: Began preaching at Fireside Pentecostal Assembly.
1942: Graduated from DeWitt Clinton High School. Renounced the ministry.
1943: His stepfather, Reverend David Baldwin, died.
1952: Finished writing first novel, GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN, in Loèche-les-Bains, Switzerland.
1957: Made first of many trips through the South (participating in the civil rights struggle, a major preoccupation for the rest of his life). Met Martin Luther King for the first time. Began working with Elia Kazan as a playwright-in-training.
1958: Second novel, GIOVANNI’S ROOM, produced as a play by the Actor’s Studio, with Turkish actor Engin Cezzar in the role of Giovanni.
1959: Won a Ford Foundation grant.
1963: Best-selling essay, THE FIRE NEXT TIME, published first by the New Yorker, then by Dial (this was the first essay in history to spend forty-one weeks among the top five of the N.Y. Times’ Bestseller List). Won the George Polk Memorial Award. Historic meeting with Robert Kennedy, May 25th. Led civil rights demonstration in Paris, August 19th. Participated in March on Washington, August 28th. Made second trip to Africa.
1964: Finished writing second play, BLUES FOR MR. CHARLIE, in Istanbul. BLUES FOR MR. CHARLIE
published by Dial and produced in the Anta Theater by the Actor’s Studio. Won the Foreign Drama Critics Award. NOTHING PERSONAL, a collaboration with photographer Richard Avedon, published by Atheneum.

1965: First collection of short stories, GOING TO MEET THE MAN, published by Dial. Debated William F. Buckley Jr. at Cambridge University, received a two-minute standing ovation. Made first trip to Israel, with European production of THE AMEN CORNER.

1966: Finished writing TELL ME HOW LONG THE TRAIN’S BEEN GONE in Rumeli Hisari, Turkey. 1968: First play, THE AMEN CORNER, finally published by Doubleday. Fourth novel, TELL ME HOW LONG THE TRAIN’S BEEN GONE, published by Dial. Agreed to write screenplay of “The Autobiography of Malcolm X” for Columbia Pictures; moved first to Los Angeles, then to Palm Springs while working on the script. Worked closely with Martin Luther King, Jr., raising funds for the SCLC. Martin Luther King assassinated, April 4th. Not long after King’s death, resigned the Malcolm X screenplay assignment and moved to St. Paul de Vence, France.


1979: Sixth novel, JUST ABOVE MY HEAD, published by Dial. Conducted a month-long lecture series and writing workshop at the University of California in Berkeley. Made first trip to Russia, to participate in a symposium of prominent American and Soviet writers.

1983: Accepted Professorship of Literature and Afro-American Studies at the Five College Network in Amherst, Massachusetts (Amherst, Smith, Mount Holyoke, Hampshire and the University of Massachusetts).


1986: Awarded France’s highest honor, La Légion D’Honneur, by President François Mitterand. Made second trip to Russia with group of prominent writers, to meet with Gorbachev and discuss world peace.