

Summer 2019

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## MLAS 6100: What if Alice Were a Refugee in Wonderland?

**Instructor:** Professor Robert Barsky

**Location:** 209 Furman Hall

**Days and Time:** Thursdays, 6:00-9:00 p.m.

**Dates:** June 6-August 8

This course reviews the Great Tradition of Western literature imagining that central characters faced challenges that are similar to those confronted by refugees in the contemporary world. I will discuss everything from the Bible to *Alice in Wonderland*, from Greek tragedies to Las Vegas representations of them, from Dickens' *Christmas Carol* to Aeschylus' *Suppliant Maidens*. Did Scrooge suffer similar anxieties to those experienced by Latin American migrants who trust their fate to coyotes? Do those who try to help people escape war-torn countries face challenges that resemble those facing Moses as he tries to imagine convincing the people of Israel to flee Egypt? The answers and concordances are surprising!

The broad objective of this course is to provide a general overview of the complex dynamics of border crossing, writ large, from a humanistic perspective, and to integrate works from the Great Tradition to help illuminate underlying issues. We will examine admission, adjudication, and integration of migrants, as well as the arrest, incarceration, and deportation of vulnerable migrant populations, particularly refugees and undocumented people in the United States. NO legal training or knowledge of the migration or refugee processes are required.

The legal work will be complemented by constant assessment of the narrative and literary issues that emerge as migrants encounter officials from the host country, with examples from the contemporary era, storytelling, and canonical fictional works. The student will thus acquire a strong understanding of border crossing in regards to such issues as self-representation, narrative, intercultural communication, translation, narrative analysis, and the challenges of representing ourselves in language, with reference to both legal and literary examples.

As the founding editor of the international border-crossing journal *AmeriQuests*, I also encourage students to publish something relating to their work for the course. There are lots of opportunities, including book reviews, notes, or commentaries on border-crossing issues.

No legal/law experience is at all necessary. Click [here](#) for a list of readings and topics.

**Professor Barsky** works at the intersection of language studies, literature, and law, with applications to border crossings, language theory, radical American milieus, and literatures of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in English and French. He is the author or editor of numerous books on narrative and law, including *Undocumented Immigrants in an Era of Arbitrary Law: The Flight and Plight of Peoples*

*Deemed 'Illegal'* (2016); *Arguing and Justifying: Assessing the Convention Refugees' Choice of Moment, Motive and Host Country* (2000); *Constructing a Productive Other: Discourse Theory and the Convention Refugee Hearing* (1994). His works on radical theory and practice include *Zellig Harris: From American Linguistics to Socialist Zionism* (2011); *The Chomsky Effect: A Radical Works beyond the Ivory Tower* (2007); and *Noam Chomsky: A Life of Dissent* (1997). He is the founding editor of the border crossing journal *AmeriQuests*, the founding editor of *Discours social/Social Discourse*, and the co-director, with Daniel Gervais, of the Literature and Law Seminar at Vanderbilt's Robert Penn Warren Center. He has been a visiting professor at a number of universities worldwide, including Yale University; the University of Northampton; the Institute for Advanced Studies, Toulouse, France; the Law School of VU University Amsterdam; and the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the University of Edinburgh. In 2018, he received a Rockefeller award, which provided him with a springtime at the Villa Serbelloni, in Bellagio, where he wrote the first draft of the book that inspired this MLAS course (currently under consideration at Harvard UP).

### MLAS 6100: American Southern Jews in Life, Literature, and Film

**Instructor:** Professor Adam S. Meyer

**Location:** 205 Buttrick Hall

**Days and Time:** Thursdays, 6:00-9:00 p.m.

**Dates:** June 6-August 8

Historical accounts and analyses of Jewish life in America usually focus on the experiences of Jews in large Northern cities, most notably New York, despite the fact that Jews have also been present in the South throughout American history. This course seeks to rectify that imbalance somewhat by examining Jewish life in the South from both a historical and a literary/cultural perspective. Looking at the ways in which Southern Jews have interacted with their non-Jewish neighbors, as well as with Jews from other parts of the country, during such important events as the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement, among many others, helps to provide a more complete view of the Jewish experience in America. Examining works of fiction and films about Southern Jews similarly helps to enhance our understanding of the fullness and complexity of Jewish American culture.

**Professor Meyer** holds degrees from Kenyon College, The University of New Mexico, and Vanderbilt University. He taught at Fisk University for many years, and he currently serves as Associate Professor in the Program in Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt. Meyer is a specialist in twentieth-century American literature and culture, particularly the relations between Blacks and Jews, as seen in his full-length *Black-Jewish Relations in African American and Jewish American Fiction: An Annotated Bibliography* (Scarecrow) and numerous articles. He is currently working on an essay about the late writer-comedian Bill Dana and a longer project about Blacks, Jews, and Passover Seders. In addition to teaching courses on Black-Jewish relations at Vanderbilt, he teaches courses on literature by children of Holocaust survivors and on American Southern Jews.

## MLAS 6300: Democracy and Race in America

**Instructor:** Professor Megan Gallagher

**Location:** 324 Cohen Hall

**Days and Times:** Mondays, 6:00-9:00 p.m.

**Dates:** June 10-August 5

To paraphrase Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart, we all think we know democracy when we see it. But when it comes to defining democracy, we are immediately confronted with a wide array of perplexing questions: *how* should citizens participate? Does representation fulfill the aims of democracy or corrupt them? Should we be concerned that the "tyranny of the majority" may stifle dissenting voices? And how can democratic decisions be reached in a pluralist society, composed of members with irreconcilable beliefs, interests, and values? This course will examine these questions through a sustained engagement with the complex relationship between democracy and race in the United States from the founding to the present.

The academic literatures on democratic theory and race and politics are both enormous. We will read a small but significant selection of works at the intersection of these two concerns, beginning with two foundational texts introducing the seminar's overarching themes and conceptual vocabularies (Danielle Allen, Robert Dahl, and Charles Mills). From there, we will read key texts in the history of political thought (Thomas Jefferson, W.E.B. DuBois, James Baldwin, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X) that grapple with the legacies of racial inequality in a nation nonetheless premised on a belief in universal equality.

In the second half of the class, we will read contemporary works in history, philosophy, and political theory on a variety of thematic concerns, from representation to increased grassroots activism representation (Linda Martín Alcoff, Juliet Hooker, Christopher J. Lebron, Jane Mansbridge, Melvin Rogers, and Iris Marion Young). Throughout the semester, we will pay particular attention to the persistent shadow of slavery and focus on the ways in which American democracy has both combated and sustained racial inequality. In the final weeks, we will broaden our focus to consider the experiences of other racialized groups in the contemporary United States, focusing on identity, immigration, and citizenship (Cristina Beltrán and Mae Ngai).

**Professor Gallagher** is a lecturer in American Studies at Vanderbilt. She received her Ph.D. from the UCLA Department of Political Science, specializing in political theory. She will join the University of Alabama faculty as an assistant professor in the Department of Gender and Race Studies in the fall of 2019.