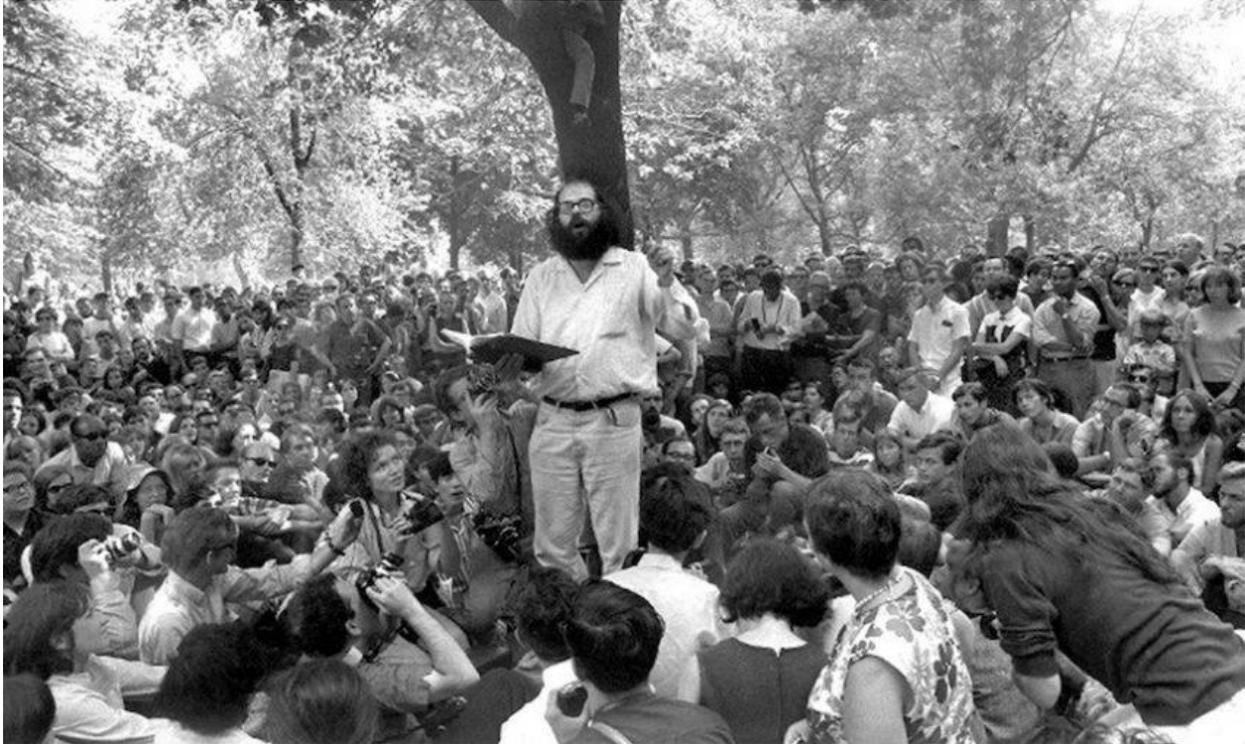


American Literature in the 1960s

Instructor: Kenan Sharpe (behzad.sharpe@boun.edu.tr)

AL 488.01

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday (11:00-12:50 on Zoom)



Allen Ginsberg reading poetry in Washington Square Park (NYC) in August 1966

Course Description

This course investigates a rich and turbulent period in American history, the 1960s, to investigate how historical pressures affect literature's possibilities. We explore literary texts (poetry, fiction, and journalistic writing) that reflect the energies of the social movements of the period. Our focus is on the literature of the Civil Rights Movement, the bohemian and hippie countercultures, the women's movement, and the poetry emerging from various forms of minority nationalism, especially the Black Arts Movement. We explore a number of literary forms and styles that were pivotal during the 1960s: the manifesto, science fiction, the non-fiction novel, and social movement poetry. Studying various examples of 1960s literatures allows us to see what kind of cultural work was performed by these literary forms and the debates that surrounded them. Our goal is to understand why such texts circulated and proliferated amidst the political turmoil of the period and what they reveal about the relationship between literature and social movements.

Assignments

Quiz: At the end of Week 2, there will be a multiple-choice and short-answer quiz on the historical context of the world/US 1960s and key concepts discussed in class.

Creative assignment: After focusing on the manifesto as a key genre of the 1960s and discussing how it is structured, in Week 4 students will write short manifestos for an imaginary cultural or political movement. Students can either work alone or collaborate in groups for this assignment.

Final paper: The final paper will ask students to select 2-3 texts among those we studied this semester to illustrate the ways historical developments and social movements help us to understand and analyze cultural developments. Special attention should be paid to aesthetic/stylistic choices. The paper will require both close reading and the ability to link text to context.

Activities

Debate: In Week 5, we will hold a semi-structured debate on poetry and politics, building on the questions explore in the previous week regarding the aesthetic choices poets made in responding to the war in Vietnam. We will set aside time in previous class sessions so that you can prepare for the debate with your selected teammates.

Forums: Depending on the level of participation during class time, we might occasionally make use of forums where students can respond to each other in a conversation thread.

Playlists: After we discuss 1960s rock in Week 3, we will open a class playlist on YouTube or Spotify where we can all share discoveries related to 1960s music and media.

Extra credit mini-presentations: The 1960s is packed with more events, personas, and texts than we can possibly cover in 6 weeks. Those who would like to can give a short, 5-minute presentation on an aspect of the 1960s that we are not discussing at length. Please let me know one week in advance if you would like to do this.

Grading

Quiz – 10%

Activities (debate, forums, playlist, etc.) – 25%

Creative assignment – 30%

Final Paper – 35%

Course Readings (on Moodle)*

*note: these are subject to slight change before the class begins

Week 1: Beginnings

Tuesday: Introduction to the American 1960s

Wednesday: Civil Rights Movement and Decolonization

- ❖ Richard Wright, *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference* (pages 1-9) (pages 10-27 are optional)
- ❖ James Baldwin, “Notes of a Native Son”
- ❖ Watch Martin Luther King, “I Had a Dream”
<https://freedomring.stanford.edu/?view=Speech>

Thursday: Periodization and the World 60s

- ❖ Fredric Jameson, “Periodizing the ’60s” (first half)

Week 2: Cultural Revolution

Tuesday: Periodization (continued)

- ❖ Second half of Fredric Jameson, “Periodizing the ’60s”
- ❖ Allen Ginsberg (selected poems)

Wednesday: From Beats to Flower Children

- ❖ Allen Ginsberg (selected poems)
- ❖ Gary Snyder (selected poems)
- ❖ Diane di Prima, *Revolutionary Letters* (selected poems)

Thursday: Gender and Poetry, Second-Wave Feminism

➤ [Quiz](#)

- ❖ Sylvia Plath (selected poems)
- ❖ Anne Sexton (selected poems)
- ❖ Betty Friedan, “The Problem That Has No Name”

Week 3: 1960s Genres

Tuesday: The New Journalism, Literary Nonfiction, and the Counterculture

- ❖ Joan Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem: Essays* (selections)
- ❖ Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (selections)
- ❖ Susan Sontag, “What’s Happening in America”

Wednesday: Manifestos

- ❖ Pick 3 of the following to read

- Students for a Democratic Society, “Port Huron Statement” (1962) *
- Malcolm X, “The Ballet or the Bullet” (1964)
- SNCC, “The Basis of Black Power” (1966)
- Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, “The Black Panther Platform” (1966)
- Valerie Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto* (1967)
- “No More Miss America” (1968)
- “The Digger Papers” (1968)
- “Yippie Manifesto” (1968)
- The Weather Underground, “Bring the War Home” (1969)
- Frances M. Beal, “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female” (1969)
- Armendo B. Rendon, “El Plan de Aztlán” (1969)
- “Redstockings Manifesto” (1969)
- Robin Morgan, “Goodbye to All That” (1970)
- Third World Gay Liberation, “What We Want, What We Believe” (1971)

Thursday: Rock and Roll

- ❖ John Sinclair, “Rock and Roll Is a Weapon of Cultural Revolution”
- ❖ Listen to selected songs by Chubby Checker, Sister Rosetta Thorpe, Bob Dylan, Jimmy Hendrix, Jefferson Airplane, MC5

Week 4: Poetry and the Vietnam War

Tuesday: The New American Poetry

➤ **Manifesto assignment due**

- ❖ Denise Levertov (selected poems)

Wednesday: Responding to the War

- ❖ Denise Levertov, *To Stay Alive* (selected poems)
- ❖ Robert Duncan *Groundwork* (selected poems)
- ❖ Levertov and Duncan (selected correspondence)

Thursday: Poets and Social Responsibility

- ❖ Selected anti-war poetry

Week 5: Movement Poetry

Tuesday: Black Arts Movement

➤ **In-class group debate on poetry and politics**

- ❖ Larry Neal, “Black Arts and Black Liberation”
- ❖ Sonia Sanchez, *We a baddDDD people* (selected poems)
- ❖ Amiri Baraka [LeRoi Jones], *Black Magic* (selected poems)
- ❖ Gwendolyn Brooks (selected poems)
- ❖ Watch *The Black Panthers* (dir. Agnes Varda, 1968)

Wednesday: Feminist and Chicano Movements

- ❖ Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, “I am Joaquin /Yo Soy Joaquin”
- ❖ Robin Morgan, *Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement* (selections)

Thursday: Open day

Readings and topic for the open day to be decided together based on issues the students want to be covered

Week 6: Science Fiction, Feminism, and Environmentalism

Tuesday: Sci-Fi

- ❖ Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Word for World Is Forest* (chapters 1-4)

Wednesday: Other Worlds

- ❖ Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Word for World Is Forest* (4-8)

Friday: The End(s) of the 1960s

Finals Week

- Final papers due