

Fall 2020 Course Description

Instructor: Bedford Clark

Course: ENGL 481

Title: T.S. Eliot & The American South

Description: The twentieth-century was a period of unprecedented change and unprecedented barbarity. In reaction to the spirit of the age, authors like Wallace Stevens wrote in praise of the “blessed rage for order,” the redemptive capacity of the human imagination to derive structure out of chaos and articulate meaning and value in the context of a post-Cartesian universe given over to materialism, religious skepticism, and the politics of naked power. No one grasped the dehumanizing trends of modernity more fully than T.S. Eliot, and nowhere was his legacy more fruitfully realized than in the American South, a “colonized” region where traditional communities were suddenly forced to confront the challenge of rapid, incremental change. This seminar will examine the continued vitality of the traditionalist impulse in American letters against the backdrop of significant cultural and political developments and will foster the close reading of canonical texts by Eliot, William Faulkner, and Robert Penn Warren.

Proposed Readings: