

LITERATURE AND SOCIAL CHANGE

EN 6/4990 - Fall 2018 - M/W 12:30-1:45

“I like a little rebellion now and then.”

--Thomas Jefferson to Abigail Adams



Protestors pray-in outside of a segregated public pool in 1962.

Image credit: crmvvet.org

This course will explore social reform as an enduring theme in American literature and culture. Reform, for our class, will be defined as modes of resisting power structures and/or reforming society. In class conversations we will consider, what does it mean to *compose* resistance and reform? What literary and rhetorical genres enable work toward social change, and why? In pursuit of these questions, we will survey a variety of issues that have generated responses from writers and speakers in the U. S. Our survey will include Revolution, Anti-Indian Removal, Abolition, Suffrage, Anti-lynching, and Civil Rights. In reading and considering key texts leveraged in these moments, we will investigate how figures and collectives used memoirs, speeches, essays, petitions, novels, songs, and poetry to initiate, enact, and embody the reforms they sought to create, and in course projects you will analyze the literature of a reform moment of your choosing—contemporary or historical—and also think locally about reform traditions in Mississippi and the South through archival research at the Mitchell Memorial Library. Overall, this course will introduce you to a persistent theme in American literature and culture as it will also offer you opportunities to reflect on the power of language as a tool for social change.

Questions: Contact Professor Elizabeth Miller at cae47@msstate.edu