Course Description:

Poetry and poets have been at the epicenter of global political movements for centuries. Aime Cesaire in Martinique and Leopold Sedar Senghor in Senegal, two of the founders of the Negritude Movement in Francophone Africa. Vaclav Havel, the first president of the Czech Republic, wrote and read poems that led a revolution. Miriam Makeba and Dennis Brutus in apartheid South Africa. Audre Lorde, Sonia Sanchez and Nikki Giovanni of the Black Arts Movement in the United States. Liao Yiwu and Liu Xiaobo, both dissident poets in China.

If Walt Whitman is, as widely considered, the father of U.S. poetry, the foundation he provided includes open anti-Civil War sentiment and even more open same sex lovemaking. However, during the 1960’s, the U. S. literary establishment determined politics had no place in poetry. Why? As global politics move to more conservative ideologies, who and where are the poets speaking truth to power today?

Students will read poetry, literary criticism and scholarly historical papers from various eras of social unrest and generate poems, overviews and critical essays. Emphasis will be placed on the connections between the earlier movements and the many protests currently sweeping the nation and the world.