

Dark Penmanship: African Americans and the Daring to Write

Professor: E.L. Gibson III
ENGL 151 - 04 (Fall 2012)
Palmer Hall 211: MWF ~ 11:00-11:50am
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Office Hrs: MW ~ 1:30-2:45 / By Appointment

Teaching Philosophy

- Pedagogical Creed: *I am convinced that the act of learning can be likened to that of travel. And if the student is in the same position at the end of the semester as where he/she began at the beginning, then either the professor has failed to lead, the student has failed to follow or the material has failed them both.*
- Student Objective: *To become **CRITICAL WRITERS** of text, culture and experience! To Read, Write and Think – Critically!*

Course Description

- This is a **WRITING INTENSIVE** course that approaches the act and art of writing from a nuanced survey of the African American literary tradition from Phillis Wheatley through the New Negro Renaissance. This course will survey the perverse relationship(s) African Americans maintained with the act of writing and how, despite varying degrees/types of education, they were forced to approach the discipline of writing in very different ways. *Dark Penmanship* is a course designed to expose the first-year student to the intricacies of critical writing and reading through a creative surveying of African American writers and the ways in which they *composed* themselves and their narratives for a larger American readership. By examining authors from Phillis Wheatley and Frederick Douglass to Anna Julia Cooper and W.E.B. Du Bois, students will explore a variety of rhetorical/compositional strategies beneficial for humanistic, scientific, political and artistic writing.

Required and Supplementary Texts

- Gates: *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley*
- Douglass: *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*
- Du Bois: *The Souls of Black Folk*

- Locke, editor: The New Negro
- Course PDF: Access electronically
 - All required texts are available at Rhodes College Bookstore
 - 901.843.3535
 - Rhodes@bkstr.com

Course Requirements

- **Reading Responses:** These writings are critical responses to the readings assigned for that day. They should be approximately one page in length and should incorporate some elements from the readings. This is not busy work and should be taken seriously as it aids in the development of writing and voice. They will not be graded; however, will be regarded as ‘A’ acceptable, or ‘I’ incomplete. All essays must be in acceptable format. Reflects **15%** of the student’s overall grade.

- **Annotated Bibliography/Abstract:** Reflects **10%** of the student’s overall grade.

- **Thematic Essays/Papers:** Each student is required to produce four topic papers of varying lengths. These papers serve as measurements of student progress. Students are free to engage any topic covered within the course (up to the due date) assuming that such a topic has been directly and identifiably inspired by the reading(s). Topic papers should reflect the themes outlined by the guide to writing and should display a greater sophistication than the reading responses written for each day. <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/>
 - Thematic Essay/Paper 1 (Principles): A paper (**3 pages** excluding works cited) engaging a specific element covered within the first quarter of the course. This paper should be a close reading and thematic treatment of a piece or multiple pieces of literature that explores the ways in which African Americans wrestled with the act or art of writing within pre-Civil War America. This paper will be evaluated on, in addition to coherence of content and argument, the paper’s engagement with the *principles* outlined by the writing guide. Paper length is non-negotiable. Reflects **10%** of the student’s overall grade.

 - Thematic Essay/Paper 2 (Methods): A paper (**5 pages** excluding works cited) engaging a specific element covered within the first half of the course. This paper should be a close reading and thematic treatment of a piece or multiple pieces of literature that explores the ways in which the literature fits into the larger American narrative post-Civil War and pre-20th century. This paper will be evaluated on, in addition to coherence of content and argument, the paper’s engagement with the *methods* outlined by the writing guide. Paper length is non-negotiable. Reflects **15%** of the student’s overall grade.

- Thematic Essay/Paper 3 (Forms): A paper (**7 pages** excluding works cited) engaging a specific element covered within the first three quarters of the course. This paper should be a close reading and thematic treatment of a piece or multiple pieces of literature that explores the ways in which the literature critiques, resists or submits to the logos of American writing(s) during the early part of the 20th century and before the advent of the New Negro Renaissance. This paper will be evaluated on, in addition to coherence of content and argument, the paper's engagement with the *forms* outlined by the writing guide. Paper length is non-negotiable. Reflects **15%** of the student's overall grade.
- Thematic Essay/Paper 4 (Attitudes): A paper (**10 pages** excluding works cited) exploring a piece of writing or movement within the African American literary tradition. This paper should be inspired by one or more of the readings on the New Negro Renaissance and should effectively make use of an identifiable critical lens. This paper should be a critical thematic engagement of the literature that explores the ways in which the literature racializes the act or art of writing and should incorporate the student's theoretical understanding of the Movement. Outside sources are required and originality is demanded. This paper will be evaluated on, in addition to coherence of content and argument, the paper's engagement with the *attitudes* outlined by the writing guide. Paper length is non-negotiable. Reflects **20%** of the student's overall grade.
- **Participation:** Although this course is reading intensive, class sessions rely heavily on classroom discussion. The student is expected to show up for class prepared to engage their colleagues and professor in a serious dialogue over the text. After one week of unexcused absences, a letter grade will be dropped; anything in excess of two weeks of unexcused absences may result in a withdrawal from or failing of the course. Reflects **15%** of the student's overall grade. <http://www.rhodes.edu/collegehandbook/10372.asp>
- **Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism:** All work submitted in this course should be original to the student and to the class. There is no tolerance of recycled or plagiarized work, and such an act will subject the student to sanction, failure and possible expulsion. <http://www.rhodes.edu/studenthandbook/2175.asp#DisVio>
- **Late Assignments:** Not accepted.
- **Grading:** A (90 -100%), B (80-89%), C (70-79%), D (60-69%)
- **Professor retains the right to change this syllabus.**

Course Schedule

- ❖ Reading Responses (Submitted each class period, unless otherwise noted)
- ❖ Thematic Essay/Paper (TEP) 1 due September 14th
 - TEP 2 due October 19th
 - TEP 3 due November 16th
 - TEP 4 due December 10th
- ❖ Annotated Bibliography/Abstract due December 3rd

August 22nd

Introductions, Syllabus and Expectations

August 24th – No Reading Response Due

- ✘ Zinsser: Part 1

August 27th

- ✘ PDF: Wheatley
- ✘ Gates: pgs. 1-42

August 29th

- ✘ Gates: Finish *Trials*

August 31st

- ✘ PDF: Banneker, Hall, Jones, Marrant, Allen

September 3rd ~ Labor Day Recess

September 5th

- ✘ PDF: Walker, Truth, Garnet

September 7th (TE)

- ✘ Douglass: “Introduction,” “A Note on the Text”

September 10th

- ✘ Douglass: Chapters 1-7

September 12th

- ✘ Douglass: Chapters 8-10

September 14th ~ TEP 1 Due

- ✘ Douglass: Finish *Narrative*, plus Appendix

September 17th – No Reading Response Due

- ✘ Zinsser: Part 2

September 19th

✘ PDF: Delany

September 21st

✘ Library Instruction

September 24th

✘ PDF: Cooper

September 26th

✘ PDF: Washington

September 28th

✘ Du Bois: "The Forethought," Chapter 1

October 1st

✘ Du Bois: Chapters 2-3

October 3rd

✘ Du Bois: Chapters 4-6

October 5th

✘ Du Bois: Chapters 7-8

October 8th

✘ Du Bois: Chapters 9-10

October 10th

✘ Free Write

October 12th

✘ Du Bois: Chapters 11-12

October 13th-16th ~ Fall Recess

October 17th

✘ Du Bois: Chapter 13

October 19th ~ TEP 2 Due

✘ Du Bois: Chapter 14, "The Afterthought"

October 22nd ~ No Reading Response Due

✘ Zinsser: Part 3

October 24th

✘ PDF: Wells-Barnett

October 26th

✘ **Locke:** Locke, Barnes, Braithwaite (pgs. 3-44)

October 29th

✘ **Locke:** Fisher (pgs. 57-84)

October 31st

✘ **Locke:** Toomer, Hurston (pgs. 96-111)

November 2nd

✘ **Locke:** Cullen, McKay (pgs. 129-135); Johnson, Hughes (138-145)

November 5th

✘ **Locke:** Locke, McKay, Rogers, Bennett (pgs. 199-225)

November 7th

✘ **Locke:** Johnson, Johnson (pgs. 278-298)

November 9th

✘ Free Write

November 12th

✘ **Locke:** Johnson, Miller, Moton, Frazier, Domingo (pgs. 301-349)

November 14th

✘ **Locke:** Herskovits, White, McDougald (pgs. 353-382)

November 16th ~ TEP 3 Due

✘ **Locke:** Du Bois (pgs. 385-414)

November 19th

✘ Final Paper Discussion

November 20th-25th ~ Thanksgiving Recess

November 26th ~ No Reading Response Due

✘ **Zinsser:** Part 4

November 28th

✘ Final Topic Discussion / Research Planning

November 30th

✘ Focused Writing

December 3rd ~ Annotated Bibliography/Abstract Due

✘ Peer Review and Workshopping

December 5th ~ Last Day of Class

✘ Course Review

December 10th ~ Final TEP Due