

Introduction to African American Literature

English 265

MWF 9-9:50 Buckman Hall 334

Fall 2008
Dr. Rychetta Watkins
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Office: Palmer 311
Extension: x3445
Office Hours: M & W 2-3:30pm;
Tu 10am-noon and by appt.

Course Description

This course will introduce you to the African American literary tradition from its beginnings through the present day. Over the course of the semester, you will read selections from the *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* and several additional novels, including Nella Larsen's *Passing*, Alice Walker's *Meridian*, and Colson Whitehead's *The Intuitionist*. We will pay particular attention to issues of identity, citizenship, belonging, and subjectivity, considering how authors constructed selves and imagined audiences through their stories and the way they told them. This course will also "read" the African American literary tradition in relationship to its social, historical, and cultural contexts, a process that forms the foundation for a methodology of reading texts by and about the black experience in America.

As this is an English course, we will also discuss the practice and process of writing papers about literature. We will attend to issues of mechanics, style, organization, and argument appropriate to literary studies. By the end of the course, you will have gained an appreciation for African American literature, developed a facility with the basic principles of literary studies, and received valuable practice in writing about literature.

Required Texts:

Gates, et al.	<i>The Norton Anthology of African American Literature</i> (NAAL)
Nella Larsen	<i>Passing</i>
Alice Walker	<i>Meridian</i>
Sistah Souljah	<i>The Coldest Winter Ever</i>
Colson Whitehead	<i>The Intuitionist</i>

Please Bookmark:

Oxford English Dictionary: www.oed.edu

University of Virginia Electronic Text Center: etext.virginia.edu/subjects/African-American.html

"Documenting the American South": docsouth.unc.edu/church/

Civil Rights Digital Library crdl.usg.edu/voci/go/crdl/home

Grade Components

Reading Journal	20%
3 Essays – 500-750 words	30%
1 Essay – 1300-1500 words	20%
Midterm	15%

Attendance

Attendance is very important in a discussion-centered classroom. A successful student will strive to attend every class and be ON TIME. Since situations do arise that may cause you to be absent, you will be allowed up to three absences, or "personal days," for the semester. After those three instances, only absences for documented illness, school related travel, and death or serious illness of immediate family members will be considered excused. Foreseeable absences require at least one week's notice; otherwise, they will be counted as unexcused. If your absence is excused, you will be allowed one week to make up any in-class assignments you may have missed. **It is your responsibility to set up and keep appointments to make up missed work. Missing an appointment or deadline for make-up work will result in failure of the assignment.** More than five **unexcused** absences will result in failure of the course.

from the Department of English Expectations and Policies

"All work is assumed to be the student's own and produced exclusively for the course in which it is submitted. Papers written for one course, even if revised, are not to be submitted in another without the instructor's prior approval. Borrowing of ideas or language from other sources (including published material, other student papers, the internet or other electronic sources, etc.) must be carefully documented. Cases of suspected plagiarism will be referred to the Honor Council, and the student if convicted will receive a grade of F in the course in addition to sanctions assigned by the Council. Carelessness in documenting sources, even if technically plagiarism, will be penalized as the instructor deems appropriate. If you are uncertain about how or whether to document sources, consult your teacher."

Every member of the Rhodes community is expected, indeed required, to govern themselves according to the Honor Code which states, "I pledge my full and steadfast support to the Honor System and agree neither to lie, cheat, nor steal, and to report any such violation I may witness."

from Faculty Guidelines for Accommodations of Students with Disabilities

"Students wishing to change an existing accommodation or request additional accommodations for a particular course should be referred to SDS, located in the modular building behind McCoy Theatre, to complete the necessary paperwork. The request must be approved by the Disability Support Committee **before** it is implemented in the classroom." For more information, contact Melissa McCowen at 843-3994.

Communication

Your success is important to me. Please visit my office hours if you have questions or concerns about a reading or assignment. Additionally, I will answer most emails within 24 hours of their receipt (except those sent during the weekend), but do not expect an *immediate* response to *any* email, especially those sent between 8pm and 8am. I am happy to respond orally or in writing to drafts received more than 48 hours before the due date within 24 hours of their receipt. Drafts submitted within 48 hours of the due date will receive oral feedback only.

Writing Assignments

Writing is an integral part of the learning process, helping you restate and engage ideas, increasing retention, and providing practice articulating your views in relationship to new material. However, writing itself is also a process. Thus, the assignments this semester are structured to help you focus in on particular aspects of this process, culminating in a final essay that requires you to draw on the array of skills practiced over the course of the semester. Extensions must be arranged PRIOR to the assignment due date. Late assignments will be penalized 1/3 letter grade per day. All major written assignments must be completed and turned in under penalty of failure of the course.

Reading Journal

By the end of the semester, students should have amassed a journal containing at least 12 entries. Entries should be between 200 and 400 words and may consist of responses to discussion questions and in-class writings. The journals are intended to provide a space to practice writing, record your initial responses to the literature, and develop revise your essay ideas. Journals will be checked 4 times over the course of the semester and will be due the final Monday of the semester.

Each entry should begin with an analytical question that frames your response. You may draw on and adapt the weekly discussion questions or develop your own original questions. In at least 200 and no more than 400 words, the ensuing entry should address the issues raised by the question, making frequent use of the texts as grounds for your response, interpretation, and analysis.

Short Essays

The short essays require you to focus on skills vital to literary studies – close reading, analysis, and research. The short essays should be between 500 and 750 words in 12 point, Times or Times New Roman font, with one-inch margins all around. Essays must conform to the rules of MLA citation style. You may submit your essays in paper form at the beginning of class or via email prior to class.

Final Essay

The final essay will bring to bear the skills of close reading, analysis, and research. The paper should be between 1300 and 1500 words and must include a bibliography that contains at least 5 outside sources not including your *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*.

Midterm and Final

The midterm and final exam will focus mainly on terms, dates, locations, and personalities significant to the African American literary tradition. I suggest students keep a journal at the back of their notebooks or use a two columned note-taking system in order to keep track of significant factual information.

Conferences

Before each short paper, I will hold mandatory conferences with approximately 1/3 of the class. Before the final essay, I will also hold voluntary conferences. At conference, you should have a typed draft of the essay that should have been emailed to me at least 24 hours before our

meeting. Missing or being unprepared for a scheduled conference appointment will result in an unexcused absence and 5-point deduction from your paper grade.

Keep in Mind. . .

- All assigned reading should be completed before the scheduled class meeting. In order to be prepared for class discussion, you should: read each selection thoughtfully, jotting down any questions that may arise; read each selection actively, making notes where helpful; and reflect on the discussion questions.
- Additionally, this class will include a lot of discussion. At times, we may not see eye to eye on the political, historical, social, or textual issues under consideration. We do not have to agree, but we will hold ourselves to the *sine qua non* of academic discourse -- considered, reasoned appeal based on evidence. Thus, we will not use or condone homophobic, racist, sexist, or otherwise denigrating language in our discourse community.
- Please listen to all selections followed by this mark, <●>, in the NAAL table of contents on the Audio Companion discs. In addition, please read the corresponding notes in the audio companion guide which begins on page 2745.
- Please refrain from using cell phones, texting, emailing, myspacing, warcrafting, or facebooking during class. These things vex me and detract from the classroom atmosphere, essentially robbing your classmates of the full learning experience and thus violating the Honor Code. Leaving the classroom for repeated cell phone breaks under the guise of bathroom visits also vexes me and will result in the severe curtailment of bathroom privileges for everyone.
- Situations can and do arise that may require adjustments to the schedule of readings, discussion, or assignments. Please know that this syllabus is subject to change at my discretion.

Schedule of Readings

Week 1: Contextualizing African American Literature

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| W | Introduction; review syllabus and policies |
| F | Introduction: "Talking Books" xxxvii; "Timeline of African American Literature," 2695
Du Bois, from <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> : "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others," "Of the Meaning of Progress," "Of the Wings of Atalanta"
Du Bois, from <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> : "Of the Training of Black Men," "Of Alexander Crummell," "Of the Coming of John," "The Sorrow Songs," "The After-thought" |

Week 2: The Vernacular Tradition

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| M | Labor Day Holiday |
| W | Introduction, "The Vernacular Tradition"; "Spirituals" and "Gospel"; "Sermons and Prayers"; excerpt from <i>The Black Church in America</i> |
| F | "Folktales"; Hurston, "Characteristics of Negro Expression" 1041, from <i>Mules and Men</i> 1053, from <i>Dust Tracks on a Road</i> 1071 |

Week 3: The Beginnings of African American Literature

- M Jupiter Hammond; Lucy Terry; Phillis Wheatley; James Whitefield
W David Walker; George Horton; Martin R. Delany; Henry Garnet
F ***Paper 1 Due*** Sojourner Truth; Maria Stewart; Frances E. W. Harper

Week 4: The Slave Narrative

- M Frederick Douglass, from *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*
W Olaudah Equiano; William Wells Brown, from *Narrative of William W. Brown*
315
F Harriet Jacobs; Harriet Wilson

Week 5: The Literature of Reconstruction

- M Introduction, "Literature of Reconstruction"; Booker T. Washington
W Anna Julia Cooper; Pauline Hopkins; Ida B. Wells- Barnett; Charles Chesnutt,
"The Wife of His Youth," 624
F James W. Johnson, poetry 791-802; Paul L. Dunbar

Week 6: Dawn of the Twentieth Century

- M James W. Johnson, *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, Parts 1-6
W James W. Johnson, *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, Parts 7-11
F ***Paper 2 Due***

Week 7: The Harlem Renaissance/ New Negro Movement

- M Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art" 777; J. W. Johnson, preface to "The Book of
American Negro Poetry" 883; Alain Locke, "The New Negro" 983; Arthur
Schomburg "The Negro Digs Up His Past" 962; Hughes, "The Negro Artist and
the Racial Mountain" 1311
W Introduction, "Harlem Renaissance"; Sterling Brown; Countee Cullen; Claude
McKay 1003-1010; Rudolph Fisher, "City of Refuge" 1225
F Nella Larsen, *Passing*, Part 1: Encounter and Part 2: Re-Encounter
(Please read the headnote for Larsen in the *NAAL*, 1085)

Week 8: The Harlem Renaissance/ New Negro Movement

- M Nella Larsen, *Passing*, Part 3: Finale; From the Casebook: Rhinelander/Jones
Case 129; Child, "The Quadroons" 171; Hughes, "Passing for White, Passing for
Black, Passing for Negroes Plus" 332
W *NAAL* "The Blues" 22; "Jazz" 55
F **Midterm Exam**

Week 9: The Blues

- M **Fall Break**
W Langston Hughes
F Writing the Blues

Week 10: 1940-1960

- M Introduction, "Realism, Naturalism, Modernism"; Richard Wright, "Blueprint for Negro Writing"; "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow"; "The Man Who Lived Underground"
- W Gwendolyn Brooks, *Maud Martha*
- F Lorraine Hansberry

Week 11: The Power Moment/ The Black Arts Era

- M *NAAL*, "Rhythm and Blues" 69; Introduction, "The Black Arts Era"; Larry Neal; Maulana Karenga; Hoyt Fuller; Addison Gayle
- W John A. Williams; Amiri Baraka, 1937-1946; Eldridge Cleaver
- F Mari Evans; Audre Lorde, "Poetry Is Not a Luxury" 1924; Sonia Sanchez; Nikki Giovanni; Carolyn Rodgers, "For Sistahs Wearin' Straight Hair" 2126
- Paper 3 Due**

Week 12: Response to the Black Arts Movement

- M *NAAL*, Introduction, "Literature since 1975"; Alice Walker, *Meridian* (Please read headnote for Walker in the *NAAL*, 2425)
- W Alice Walker, *Meridian*
- F Alice Walker, *Meridian*

Week 13: The Future of African American Literature

- M *NAAL*, "Hip Hop" 78; Sistah Souljah, *The Coldest Winter Ever*, Chapters 1-7
- W Sistah Souljah, *The Coldest Winter Ever*, Chapters 8-12
- F Sistah Souljah, *The Coldest Winter Ever*, Chapters 13-20
- Paper 4 Draft Due**

Week 14: The Future of African American Literature

- M excerpts from Spike Lee's *Bamboozled*
- W & F **Thanksgiving Break**

Week 15: The Future of African American Literature

- M excerpts from Spike Lee's *Bamboozled*
- W Colson Whitehead, *The Intuitionist*, "Down," Pt. 1 (Please read headnote for Whitehead in the *NAAL*, 2677)
- F Colson Whitehead, *The Intuitionist*, "Down," Pt. 2
- Paper 4 Due**

Week 16: The Future of African American Literature

- M Colson Whitehead, *The Intuitionist*, "Up"
- W Summary and Wrap-up
- Last Day of Classes

Merry Christmas! Bountiful Kwanzaa! Happy New Year!