

## Dark Penmanship: African Americans and Writing

**Professor: E.L. Gibson, III**  
**FYWS 151-02 (Fall 2014)**  
**Barrett 214: MWF ~ 10:00-10:50am**  
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**Office Hrs: MW ~ 1:00-2:30pm / By Appointment**

### Teaching Philosophy

- Pedagogical Creed: *I am convinced that the act of learning can be likened to that of travel. If the student is in the same position at the end of the semester as where he/she began at the beginning, 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. 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.

### Required and Supplementary Texts

- Douglass: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*
- Dunbar: *The Sport of the Gods*
- Gornick: *The Situation and the Story*
- Johnson: *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*
- Gibaldi: *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (Supplementary)
  - All required texts are available at Rhodes College Bookstore
    - 901.843.3535 --- Rhodes@bkstr.com

## Course Requirements

- **Reading Responses / Writing Exercises:** These writings are critical responses to the readings assigned for that day or assignments built around specific elements of writing. They will be one page in length and should incorporate some elements from the readings or workshops. Additionally, near the end of the semester, the student will be responsible for writing a reflective essay on the enterprise of writing in general. This is not busy work and should be taken seriously. Although not individually graded, they will be regarded as ‘A’ (acceptable) or ‘I’ (incomplete). All responses must be in acceptable format. Reflects **15%** of the student’s overall grade.
- **Thematic Essays:** Three thematic essays (3, 4, and 5 pages in length) engaging each of the major literary texts from the class. These essays serve as measurements of student progress, as well as opportunities for scholarly creativity and exploration. Students are free to engage any topic covered within the course, assuming that such a topic has been directly and identifiably inspired by the reading(s). <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/> Reflects **30%** of the student’s overall grade.
- **Annotated Bibliography/Abstract:** Reflects **10%** of the student’s overall grade.
- **Final Research Paper:** An eight-page paper exploring a central idea, theme, trope, symbol, motif, et cetera. This paper should be inspired by one or more of the readings from the course and should effectively make use of an identifiable critical lens. Additionally, the paper should, in one form or another, directly engage the central theme of this course. Being a research paper, outside sources are required. Paper length is non-negotiable. Reflects **25%** of the student’s overall grade.
- **Drafts and Writing Fellow Workshops:** For each of the thematic essays and the final research paper, student must turn in, on time, an acceptable draft (~75% of paper length). After the writing fellow has reviewed the drafts, student will be responsible for meeting with the fellow for a peer-guided writing workshop. Drafts and workshops aim to familiarize the student with and cultivate a culture of revisionism. Reflects **10%** of the student’s overall grade.
- **Participation/Quizzes:** Although this course is writing intensive, class sessions rely heavily on classroom discussion. The student is expected to show up for class prepared to engage his/her colleagues and professor in a serious dialogue over the text. After one week of absences, one-third letter grade will be dropped; anything in excess of two weeks of absences may result in a withdrawal or failing of the course. <http://www.rhodes.edu/collegehandbook/10372.asp>. Quizzes will

be administered if class appears to not have done the reading. Reflects **10%** of the student's overall grade.

- **Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism:** All work submitted in this course must be original to the student and to the class. There is no tolerance for recycled or plagiarized work. If the student engages in any act of plagiarism or academic dishonesty, he/she will fail the assignment/class and be reported to the honor council. <http://www.rhodes.edu/studenthandbook/2175.asp#DisVio>
- **Late Assignments:** Not accepted without legitimate and verified excuse.
- **Professor retains the right to change this syllabus.**

## Course Schedule

**August 27<sup>th</sup>**

*Introductions, Syllabus and Expectations*

**August 29<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Gornick: Introduction

**Labor Day Recess – September 1<sup>st</sup>**

**September 3<sup>rd</sup>**

✘ Gornick: “The Essay”

**September 5<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Gornick: “The Essay”

**September 8<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Gornick: “The Memoir”

**September 10<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Gornick: “The Memoir”

**September 12<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Gornick: Complete Text

**September 15<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Douglass: Preface

**September 17<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Douglass: Ch.’s 1, 2

**September 19<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Douglass: Ch.'s 3, 4

**September 22<sup>nd</sup>**

✘ Douglass: Ch.'s 5, 6

**September 24<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Douglass: Ch.'s 7, 8

**September 26<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Douglass: Ch. 9

**September 29<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Douglass: Ch. 10

**October 1<sup>st</sup>**

✘ Douglass: Ch. 11

**October 3<sup>rd</sup>**

✘ Thematic Essay Draft Due

**October 6<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Dunbar: Ch.'s 1-4

**October 8<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Dunbar: Ch.'s 5-7

**October 10<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Dunbar: Ch.'s 8-10

**October 13<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Dunbar: Ch.'s 11-12

**October 15<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Dunbar: Ch.'s 13-15

✘ Thematic Essay Due

**October 17<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Dunbar: Ch.'s 16-18

***Fall Break* – October 20<sup>th</sup>**

**October 22<sup>nd</sup>**

✘ Johnson: Ch.'s 1-2

**October 24<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Johnson: Ch.'s 3-4

**October 27<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Johnson: Ch.'s 5-6

**October 29<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Thematic Essay #2 Draft Due

**October 31<sup>st</sup>**

✘ Johnson: Ch.'s 7-8

**November 3<sup>rd</sup>**

✘ Johnson: Ch. 9

**November 5<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Johnson: Ch. 10

**November 7<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Johnson: Ch. 11

**November 10<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Thematic Essay #2 Due

**November 12<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Library Session

**November 14<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Annotated Bibliography/Abstract Discussion

**November 17<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Paper Organization/Peer Planning Exercise

**November 19<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Research

**November 21<sup>st</sup>**

✘ Free Write

**November 24<sup>th</sup>**

✘ Annotated Bibliography/Abstract Due (Abstract Presentation)

***Thanksgiving Break* – November 25<sup>th</sup> – November 30<sup>th</sup>**

**December 1<sup>st</sup>**

- ✘ Research Paper Draft Due

**December 3<sup>rd</sup>**

- ✘ Critical Essay - PDF

**December 5<sup>th</sup>**

- ✘ Reflective Essay on Writing Due

**December 8<sup>th</sup>**

- ✘ Literature Review
- ✘ Evaluations

**December 10<sup>th</sup>**

- ✘ Course Discussion
- ✘ **Final Paper Due**