Dr. Tina Barr  
Course # 265, African-American Poetry in the Twentieth Century  
3:00-4:30 Mondays and Wednesdays  

My office is on the 3rd floor of Palmer Hall, number 307. My office phone is 843-3979 and my email is: TinaBarr@rhodes.edu. Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions or concerns. You are free to call me at 725-1443, the most likely number to reach me.


**Structure of the Course:** We will be using the *Vintage* anthology as our primary source for poems. You will also read accompanying background materials in *Before the Mayflower* and from the *Black Poets* text. The background materials will assist us in developing a greater understanding of the cultural climate of the black experience in America. I want this course to be an experience and a forum for sharing experience. In addition to reading, the class will view films and participate in group oral reports. Other recommended films, available at Midtown Video, include the films of Spike Lee, (“Crookland” and “Get on the Bus,”) the work of John Singleton—the film “Hoop Dreams,” a documentary on two high school basketball players, and “To Sleep with Anger.”

**Course Requirements:**  
1. Read all required texts carefully, underlining important sections, writing in the margins, making notes and writing down questions you would like to address in class discussion.  
2. Complete oral report.  
3. Complete 3 essays, one due early in the semester, one at midterm, and one at the end of the semester. These will be analyses or close readings of the poems; as well they will require you to contextualize your analysis with respect to your other reading.

**Conferences:** You should plan to see me in conference during the semester to talk about ideas for papers, questions you may have, as well as any concerns. Feel free to call me and schedule a conference.

**Oral Reports:** The ability to give a good oral report is a real skill. You will work in teams, and you need to rehearse your part ahead of time, based on notes. **Limit your talk to no more than 7 minutes.** I am looking for succinct, well-organized, engaging reports. Do not take up class time with disorganized and lengthy reports. Students will work on presenting reports on literary magazines such as *Obsidian*, *Callaloo*, and *African-American Review*, African-American Religious affiliations, both Christian and African based, music, and food.

**Grading:** essays 1 & 2 will each count for 20% of your grade, essay 3 will count for 30% of your grade, your oral report for 15% and class participation and attitude will count for 15%.
While I always attempt to abide by the syllabus, it is a statement of course goals and we may, at times, run behind schedule.

Week 1:  1/10, paired interviews, orientation, discussion of poems

Assignment for next week:  Read chapter 2 in Before the Mayflower.  (Note: pay close attention to the syllabus, since we will read selected chapters in this text, not always in chronological order.)  Read the introduction to the Vintage anthology.  Read poem on page 7 by Jupitor Hammon, “An Evening Thought: Salvation, etc.”  Always read the biographical intro to each poet.  Read on page 14 “On Being Brought from Africa,” by Phillis Wheatley, as well as “To S.M, etc.”  Read excerpt from Black Poets, pages 16—36, which provides information on Wheatley and more poems by her and by Hammon.

Week 2:  **No class on Monday, MLK day**, class on 1/18.  Discussion of Wheatley and Hammon.


Assignment for next week:  Read chapter 4 in Before the Mayflower.  Read excerpt from chapter 9 in Black Poets, pages 351-361.  Choose a poem for the short essay, due on 2/5.  (See week 4’s assignment.)

Week 4:  1/29 & 1/31  Discuss Johnson’s work.  **No class on 1/31**.  Dr. Barr will be in her office during class period for consultation regarding your essay, due on 2/5.  You can schedule a conference with her ahead of time, or drop by.

Assignment for next week: Write a brief (3-4 page, no longer) technical analysis on some aspect or aspects of a poem by one of the poets in the Vintage—pages 3 through 72.  This will require you to write on an 18th through late 19th century poem.  Do not write on a poem we have discussed in class.  See handout for further information.  Also read chapter 7 on the Civil War, in Before the Mayflower.

Week 5:  2/5 & 2/7  Turn in essay on 2/5.  Showing of film on literacy, “Night John,” directed by Charles Burnett, 1996, in conjunction with the chapters (4 & 7) you read in Before the Mayflower, including “Behind the Cotton Curtain.”  We’ll view most of the film on 2/5 and finish it on 2/7.  Oral report(s) on religion & Frederick Douglass.

Week 6: 2/12 & 2/14 Discussion of Dunbar’s work. Oral report(s) on gospel. Hand out guidelines for 2nd essay.

Assignment for next week: Read poems by Anne Spencer, “Letter to My Sister,” “White Things,” Lines to a Nasturtium,” “Neighbors,” (92) and Georgia Douglas Johnson, “The Heart of a Woman,” (96) and “Old Black Men.” Also read Gwendolyn Bennett’s “To a Dark Girl” on page 140. Read poems by Claude McKay, “If We Must Die,” (99) “The Harlem Dancer,” “Tropics in NY.” Read chapter 5 from *Black Poets*, 149-177 on the Harlem Renaissance. Also read pages 197-204, 225-230, 243-247 on Claude McKay’s poetry. Decide on a poem in the *Vintage*, by any poet, that we have not yet discussed in class that will become the subject of your 2nd essay, due on 2/26.

Week 7: 2/19 & 2/21 Discussion of Spencer, Johnson & Bennett. Discussion of McKay.

Assignment for next week: Complete 2nd essay. See handout.


Week 10: 3/12 & 3/14 Discussion of poems by Toomer and Cullen.

Assignment for next week: Read in *Black Poets* pages 475-482, 486, 489, 493, 499-501 on Sterling Brown and his work. Read in the anthology, beginning on page 116, the following poems: “Frankie and Johnny,” “Ma Rainey,” “Old Lem,” “Slim Greer,” “Slim in Atlanta,” and “Slim in Hell.”


Assignment for next week: Read in *Black Poets* material on Langston Hughes, pages 385-395, 452-455. Read poems in anthology, beginning on page 143, “Cross,” “Dream


Week 13:  4/2 & 4/4  Discussion of Walker, Brooks and Patterson’s work.  **Oral report(s) on literary magazines.** Begin thinking about a topic you would like to write about, for essay due 4/25, the last day of class.  **Handout on final essay.**

Assignment for next week:  Read Walcott’s poems in the anthology, and Etheridge Knight’s poems as well.  Read “Black Art” by Amiri Baraka on page 234.  Choose a topic for final paper.


Assignment for next week:  Read poems by Lucille Clifton on page 244, “miss rosie,” “the lost baby poem,” “white lady,” “slaveship.” Read Toi Derricotte’s poem on page 296 “On the Turning Up, etc.,” Marilyn Nelson’s “Tuskegee Airfield,” (322).  **Work on final paper.**

Week 15:  4/16 Discussion of poems by Clifton, Derricotte, and Nelson.  **No class on 4/18.  Dr. Barr will be attending the Associated Writing Programs conference.**
