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## ENGL 364-01, Topics in African American Literature: "The Lover's War", Fall 2010

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**Topics in African American Literature: "The Lover's War": The Protest Tradition in Twentieth Century African American Literature**  
**ENG 364-01** **CRN: 11106**

Fall 2010  
Dr. Rychetta Watkins  
Extension: x3445  
Office Hours: MW 10 – 11:30 am; TH 10:45 am – noon and by appt.

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**Course Description**

Over the course of this semester, we will read a range of works that deal with the themes of protest, resistance, and struggle at the heart of the African American literary tradition. We will read selections from Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Lorraine Hansberry, Ann Petry, John A. Williams and other African American writers from the mid-twentieth century. In an effort to identify "a poetics of protest," we will begin with the question, "What is protest literature?" We will develop our aesthetic by considering questions like: "How can artistic productions engage in social action? How do we make distinctions between art that grows out of or participates in acts of protest and works that look back on and remember acts of resistance? What types of figurative language, rhetoric, imagery, characterizations, and narrative strategies are characteristic of protest literature in the African American tradition?" Along the way, we will consider how changes in the social climate and political landscape, as well as literary fashion compel the evolution of form and the limits of protest during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Required Texts**

Baldwin, James, *Going to Meet the Man: Stories* (1965)  
Douglass, Frederick, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845)  
Ellison, Ralph, *Invisible Man* (1952)  
Hansberry, Lorraine, *Raisin in the Sun* (1959)\*\*  
Petry, Ann, *The Street* (1944)  
Reed, Ishmael, *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972)\*\*  
Walker, Alice, *Meridian* (1976)  
Williams, John, *The Man who Cried I Am* (1967)  
Wilson, August, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1988)  
Wright, Richard, *Native Son* (1940)

**Please Bookmark:**

Oxford English Dictionary: [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)  
Oxford African American Studies Center: <http://www.oxfordaasc.com.relay.rhodes.edu:2048/>  
MLA Formatting and Style Guides: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/>  
<http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/DocMLA.html>

**Grade Components**

Participation and attendance	20%
Short essays– 3 @ 4pp pages	30%
Scholarly Review - 6pp	15%
Final Paper Project–12 pages	
Rough Draft – at least 6 pp	5%
Final Draft	30%

N.B.: Please keep a copy of all graded assignments.

## **Course Goals and Objectives**

This course fulfills Humanities F4 and F9 requirements; thus, it is considered part of the broader Foundations liberal arts curriculum, which is designed to lend focus and cohesion to your undergraduate learning experience. The goal of this series of classes, as with any liberal arts curriculum, is to create a well-rounded student, equipped with an array of interpretive, analytical and critical thinking skills. It is hoped that these skills will enable “lifelong learning,” or the ability to adapt and be flexible in order to engage, assimilate and use new information in unique situations. This humanities course fulfills on two aspects of that larger curriculum:

**F4 “Read and interpret literary texts.”** As per the catalog description, the “critical and sensitive reading of significant works refines analytical skills and develops an awareness of the power of language.” In our course, we will use the skills of critical thinking and analysis as employed in literary study to clarify our understandings of texts and tackle problems of interpretation. Likewise, we will practice developing our individual “voice” to responding to texts in written assignments and class discussion.

**F9: “To view the world from more than one cultural perspective.”**

Courses with this designation are designed “to provide [students] with knowledge and skills that will enable them to improve their ability to interact respectfully with people from different cultural backgrounds.” Ultimately, courses with this designation are designed to encourage introspection. “In examining the values, beliefs, and world views found in other cultures, the courses should also provide students with the opportunity to consider the ways in which their own cultural identities have influenced their particular values, beliefs, and world views.”

With these guidelines in mind, I have developed the following course objectives:

- Classify and analyze vernacular forms of protest—spiritual songs, the jeremiad, sermons and drama.
- Classify and analyze elements of protest in various written genres, including slave narratives, novels, essays, the pamphlet and manifestoes.
- Be able to identify, classify and analyze contemporary forms and methods of protest and resistance.
- Further develop the skills of close reading, textual analysis and the use of scholarly sources to formulate, develop and communicate written arguments about literature.
- Further develop the ability to plan, draft and revise essay length writing projects.

Why do all of this? The hoped for outcome is that you end up better able to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, concepts, literary elements and each other’s ideas while also developing an understanding of and appreciation for the literature of this period. At the end of the semester, we will all pause to consider whether and how these objectives have been met and consider strategies to better attain these goals.

## **Guidelines for Our Discourse Community**

**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 and the documented death or serious illness of immediate family members will be considered excused. Foreseeable absences for school related travel require documentation and at least one week’s notice; otherwise, the absence will be counted as unexcused. Students who have missed class time should get notes from a classmate, review the notes and consult with me to clear up any questions. **It is your responsibility to get class notes**

**and 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.

**Participation** is determined by more than attendance. Students are expected to contribute regularly and significantly through in-class discussion and responses that are driven by an attentive reading of the materials assigned for each day. We are striving to build a discourse community based on our shared understandings of the texts we encounter, and our community is incomplete without your thoughtful contributions. Everyone begins the semester with 100 participation and attendance points which may be reduced for a number of reasons including, but not limited to: unexcused absences beyond three (-5), chronic lateness (more than three) (-3), lack of participation(-3), and missed conferences(-10).

Class participation will be graded using the follow rubric:

- \*Insightful contributions to class discussions on a daily basis A range (90-100)
- \*Thoughtful contributions to class discussions on most days B range (80-89)
- \*Occasional contributions to class discussions C range (70-79)
- \*Rarely contributes to class discussions or asks questions D range (60-69)
- \*Rarely attends class and seldom contributes to discussions F range (0-59)

Note: Excellent attendance is not enough to earn an A. Students who are consistently present but who rarely contribute to discussion may receive a “C” or lower grade according to the scale above.

**Communication.** Your success is important to me. Please visit my office hours if you have questions or concerns about a reading or assignment, or you just have more questions about something we’ve read or discussed. 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 in conference 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 **only** receive feedback in conference if my schedule permits.

### **Writing Assignments**

Writing is an integral part of the learning process that helps you engage ideas critically, increases retention and helps you understand new material in relationship to what you have already learned. Thus, writing, like learning, is a process and the assignments this semester are sequenced to help you focus in on particular aspects of this process, culminating in a final essay that requires you to draw on all of the skills practiced over the course of the semester.

**Keep in mind:** Extensions must be arranged at least 1 week PRIOR to the assignment due date. Late assignments will be penalized 1 letter grade per day. All major written assignments must be completed and turned in under penalty of failure of the course. **Each assignment will have its own assignment sheet; these short descriptions are included for reference only.**

### **Short Essays**

Short essays require students to focus on skills vital to literary studies – close reading, critical analysis and the use of scholarly research. Papers 2 and 3 must include at least one of the cultural texts. The short essays should be 4 pages 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.

## Scholarly Review

In 6 pages, critically analyze the argument, format, and methods of at least 6 sources critical to your final paper project. In addition summarizing and reviewing the source, each analysis should deal with the following questions: How will the source relate to my argument or focus? What specific aspects of this source will I use to help me develop my argument or focus? What qualifications will I have to make in order to integrate this source into my discussion? You will be assigned groups based on your topics so that you can continue to collaborate as you work on your projects.

## Final Essay Project

The final essay will bring to bear the skills of close reading, analysis and research to offer a coherent interpretation of a text. The paper should be 12 pages and must include a bibliography that contains at least 8 critical and scholarly sources not included in your readings this semester. For this essay, you must identify and define a genre of protest, identify a body of works belonging to this genre, then use those criteria to explicate and analyze your choice of texts.

## Keep in Mind. . .

- All assigned reading should be completed before the scheduled class meeting. In order to be prepared for class discussion, please 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 refrain from any technodawdling during class. These things detract from the classroom atmosphere, essentially robbing your classmates of the full learning experience and, thereby, violating the Honor Code. Leaving the classroom for repeated cell phone breaks under the guise of bathroom visits is also problematic and disrupts everyone's classroom experience.
- All written work submitted for evaluation must be unique to the course. No double dipping. If found, all such assignments will receive a failing grade of 0.
- Situations can and do arise that may require adjustments to the schedule of readings, discussion, or assignments; therefore, this syllabus is subject to change at my discretion.

## Tentative Schedule of Readings

### **Week 1: Contextualizing African American Literature**

Th Aug 26 Introduction; review syllabus and policies

### **Week 2: Origins of the Protest Tradition**

T Aug 31 Vernacular forms of protest: Walker "Appeal in Four Articles"; Foreword and Introduction to *American Protest Literature*

Th Sep 2 "Spirituals and Gospel"; T. V. Reed "Reflections on the Cultural Study of Social Movements"

### **Week 3: The Origins of the Protest Tradition**

#### **M Sep 6 Labor Day Holiday**

T Sep 7 Site Tour – Meet in Buckman parking lot at 9:30am. Volunteer drivers are needed!

**Dowd Hall: "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past**  
<<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jah/91.4/hall.html>>

Cha-Jua, Sundiata Keita, and Clarence Lang. "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies."

<http://find.galegroup.com/gtx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC->



**Week 14**

T Nov 23 Alice Walker, *Meridian*, through "Meridian" section  
**Final Paper Introduction and outline due**

W - F Nov 25-27 **Thanksgiving Break**

**Week 15**

T Nov 30 Alice Walker, *Meridian*, through "Truman" section; Hendrickson from "Remembering the Dream: Alice Walker, Meridian and the Civil Rights Movement" [Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/468042>] Read pages: 111-121

Th Dec 2 Alice Walker, *Meridian*, through "Ending"

**Week 16: Conclusion**

T Dec 7 Last Day of Class

**Conferences on Final Paper: Dec. 6, 7, 8 by appt. Rough Draft Due 24 hours before conference appt. Final Paper Due: Wed. Dec. 15 @ 9 am**

Bibliography of Additional Readings

Balfour, Lawrie. "Finding the Words: Baldwin, Race Consciousness, and Democratic Theory." *James Baldwin Now*. Ed. Dwight A. McBride. New York: New York U P, 1999. 75-99.

"Call for Deliverance: The Oral Tradition" and "David Walker." *Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of the African American Literary Tradition*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998. 29, 245-257.

Cha-Jua, Sundiata Keita, and Clarence Lang. "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies." *The Journal of African American History* 92.2 (2007): 265+. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 24 Aug. 2010.

Gates, Jr., Henry Louis. "On 'The Blackness of Blackness.'" *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford U P, 220-238.

Gomez, Jewelle L. "Lorraine Hansberry: Uncommon Warrior." *Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Meridian, 1990. 307-317.

Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd. The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past. The Journal of American History 91.4 (2005): 66 pars. 24 Aug. 2010  
<<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jah/91.4/hall.html>>.

Hendrickson Roberta M. "Remembering the Dream: Alice Walker, Meridian and the Civil Rights

Movement." MELUS 24.3 (1999): 111-128.

Reed, T. V., "Reflections on the Cultural Study of Social Movements." *The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle*. Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 2005. 286-315.

Stauffer, John. Foreword. *American Protest Literature*. Ed. Zoe Trodd. Cambridge, MA: Belknap P, 2006. xi - xviii.

Sundquist, Eric, ed. Introduction. *Cultural Contexts for Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man*. New York: Bedford, 1995. 11-28.

Trodd, Zoe. Introduction. *American Protest Literature*. Ed. Zoe Trodd. Cambridge, MA: Belknap P, 2006. xix - xxix.

"The Vernacular Tradition." "Spirituals" "The Blues" & "Secular Rhymes and Songs, Ballads, and Work Songs" *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Nellie Y. McKay, et al. New York: Norton, 1997. 1- 5, 5-16, 22-36, 37-59.