

African American Literature, ENG 241, Syllabus: Fall 2018

TR 2-3:20, Condon 360

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Office Hours Fall 2018: Monday 2-3, Wednesday 10:30-12:30

Course Description:

This course is a survey of writings by African American authors of the 18th, 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. We will study a range of genres, including fiction, poetry, drama, autobiography, and nonfiction, from the earliest published work by African Americans through to the present day. We will examine the formal connections of this tradition—how authors work and rework certain styles, techniques, genres, and structures. We will also examine how this tradition explores a diverse body of ideas which nonetheless coalesce around the preoccupations of identity, freedom, mobility, and security. These concerns are closely connected to how the writing and culture of African Americans reflected on and helped to shape American history. Slavery and its abolition, the imposition of segregation and Jim Crow, the Great Migration, war, civil rights, and the feminist movement form key moments in this relationship. We will also examine the interconnections between African American writing and various other cultural forms, including music, visual arts, and folklore. As well as giving this overview, the course will help you to practice and sharpen your abilities in critical reading and writing, and will enable you to make better arguments both orally and on the page.

Learning outcomes:

The goal of this course is to help you engage with African American literature, improving your writing, reading, and critical thinking skills in the process.

To that end, by the end of the class, you will

1. Have read significant texts in the African American literary tradition with comprehension and with an understanding of their conventions;
2. Have drawn on relevant information to situate texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts;
3. Have used logic, creativity, and interpretive skills to give cogent aural and written analyses of literature.

Course reading:

You must complete all the essential reading listed for each class, and come prepared to discuss it. This is a discussion-based classroom, and I expect everyone to have something to contribute in **every** session.

Attendance:

At the beginning of each class you should sign the attendance register. You are allowed two unexcused absences. Missing classes beyond this without adequate excuse and documentation (such as a doctor's note) will result in your overall grade being lowered by 1/3 of a letter grade for each absence. **Four such absences results in a failing grade.** Please contact me at the earliest opportunity to discuss any unavoidable absences from class.

Classroom Electronic Communications Policy:

In this class, cell phone use and the use of tablet devices is prohibited. All such devices should be stored in your bags or left at home. Laptop computers are permitted but only for activities related to the content of the class.

Plagiarism:

All written work should be either your own or contain clear references to your sources; one of the hallmarks of good scholarship is being able to use the insights of others while keeping your ideas distinct from theirs. I expect you to abide by university regulations on the proper acknowledgement of source material, and to follow accepted conventions for how to reference scholarship. I advise you to check on the university's student conduct code (<http://policies.uoregon.edu/vol-3-administration-student-affairs/ch-1-conduct/student-conduct-code>), especially section v.1, for the detail of university policy on Academic Integrity. I also recommend MLA style for the presentation of your research papers. Information about how to prepare bibliographies and citations in MLA style can be found at the Purdue Online Writing Lab (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>), and at the Knightcite MLA citation application (<http://www.calvin.edu/library/knightcite/>).

Late papers:

Papers should be submitted in class on the day of the deadline listed. I will deduct 1/3 of a letter grade for each day a paper is late. I will not accept any paper that is more than a week late. Any request for extensions will be carefully considered, but should be made as far in advance of the due date as possible.

Access Policy:

The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoaec@uoregon.edu.

Sexual Violence and Survivor Support Statement:

The UO is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence and gender-based stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences gender-based violence (intimate partner violence, attempted or completed sexual assault, harassment, coercion, stalking, etc.), know that you are not alone. UO has staff members trained to support survivors in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

Please be aware that all UO employees are required reporters. This means that if you tell me about a situation, I may have to report the information to my supervisor or the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity. Although I have to report the situation, you will still have options about how your case will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a formal complaint. Our goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and have access to the resources you need.

If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, you can call 541-346-SAFE, UO's 24-hour hotline, to be connected to a confidential counselor to discuss your options. You can also visit the SAFE website at safe.uoregon.edu.

GRADED WORK

Grading criteria:

I follow the criteria established by the Department of English. Details are available under the Modules section of the Canvas site.

Participation 10%

I will reward students who approach discussion in an enthusiastic, informed, and collegial way. Both I and your fellow students will appreciate informed opinions, critical insight, a willingness to take a few risks, and respect for others. I will occasionally set small in-class activities and presentations which will also count towards this grade.

Quizzes and in-class writing 15%

These will be short questions and exercises designed to test your knowledge and comprehension of the assigned readings for the day. ALSO: in week seven, groups will work together in-class to develop an online forum posting that reflects on the famous Hurston-Wright debate.

Poetry analysis (4-5 pages) 20%

This will give you several poems to analyze. You will choose one and write a short response which carefully considers the style of the piece and the ideas it presents. More details will be given in advance of the due date.

Critical paper (6-7 pages) 30%

This will allow you to write a more complex and lengthy response to one or more texts which you have found particularly interesting, and to use secondary criticism on those texts to sharpen your analysis. You can choose one prompt from several that will be provided two weeks before the due date.

Final 25%

This will give you a series of exam questions to choose from. Sample exam questions will be distributed two weeks ahead of the exam. The exam itself will give you 48 hours to respond to a prompt, and you will be able to submit your paper electronically. There will be no in-class exam.

ESSENTIAL READING: please purchase these texts or arrange access for them for the duration of the course. These texts are available at the Duckstore.

The Norton Anthology of African American Literature, 3rd Ed., Vol. I. Ed. Henry Louis Gates and Valerie A. Smith. New York: Norton, 2014. ISBN 978-0-393-92369-8.

Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. HarperPerennial, 2006. 0061120065

Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*. New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2015. 1925240703

IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT YOU BRING THESE BOOKS—AND PRINTOUTS OF INDIVIDUAL STORIES OR POEMS FROM CANVAS—TO CLASS. You should also get into the habit of marking up your books as you go along: it will help you focus your reactions and ideas for class discussion, and will improve the detail and insight of your written papers.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week One: Introductions and beginnings

T 9/25: Introductions

R 9/27: Phyllis Wheatley, selections from *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp.137-150.

Week Two: The slave narrative

T 10/2: The Literature of Slavery and Freedom, *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp.75-87.

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself*. Chapters 1-9. *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp. 326-362.

R 10/4: Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself*. Chapters 10-appendix. *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp. 362-393.

Week Three: the slave narrative continued and into the nadir

T 10/9: Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp. 221-261.

R 10/11: "Literature of the Reconstruction to the New Negro Renaissance," *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp. 505-520.

Paul Lawrence Dunbar, poems, *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp.894-915.

Week Four: Harlem Renaissance I: Nella Larsen

T 10/16: Nella Larsen, *Passing* parts I and II, *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp. 1079-1122.

R 10/18: Nella Larsen, *Passing* part III, *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp. 1122-1141.

Week Five: Harlem Renaissance II: Langston Hughes

T 10/23: **CLOSE READING EXERCISE DUE**

Langston Hughes, *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp.1302-1320.

R 10/25: Langston Hughes, *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp. 1320-1339.

Week Six: Hurston and the folk novel

T 10/30: Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, chapters 1-6.

R 11/1: Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, chapters 7-14.

Week Seven: the Hurston-Wright debate

T 11/6: Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, chapters 15-20.

R 11/8: Richard Wright, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," "Big Boy Leaves Home," review of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, all on Canvas; Zora Neale Hurston, "How it Feels to be Colored Me," *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I* pp. 1040-1043; review of *Uncle Tom's Children*, on Canvas.

IN-CLASS ASSIGNMENT: THE HURSTON-WRIGHT DEBATE AND DISCUSSION FORUM POSTING

Week Eight: James Baldwin

T 11/13: CRITICAL PAPER WORKSHOP

R 11/15: **CRITICAL PAPER DUE.** James Baldwin, "Notes from a Native Son," "My Dungeon Shook: Letter to my Nephew on the One-Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation," "Sonny's Blues." On Canvas.

Week Nine: *Between the World and Me*

T 11/20: Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, pp.1-99.

R 11/22: THANKSGIVING: NO CLASS

Week Ten: *Between the World and Me*, *Citizen*, and conclusions

T 11/27: F 6/2: *Between the World and Me*, pp.99-152.

R 11/29: from Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*, on Canvas; recap and revision.

T 12/4: TIMED FINAL PAPER DUE