

African American Literature, ENG 241, Syllabus

TR 2-3:20, Condon 360

Dr. Mark Whalan, PLC 207 whalan@uoregon.edu Office Hours Fall 2013: Wednesday 10-1

Course Description:

This course is a survey of writings by African American authors of the 18th, 19th, and 20th 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 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 to make better arguments both orally and on the page.

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. **Five such absences results in a failing grade.**

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://uodos.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/StudentConductCode/tabid/69/Default.aspx>) for information about this; I 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.

Disability:

If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please make arrangements to discuss this with me as soon as possible. Also please request that an AEC Advisor send a letter outlining your approved accommodations. [Accessible Education Center : uoaec@uoregon.edu, 346-1155; <http://aec.uoregon.edu/>].

GRADED WORK

This is broken into three types. Preparation assignments (the participation grade and quizzes) assess how well you have thought about the assigned reading, and how collaborative you are in talking about it--both with the whole class and in small groups. Take-home assignments will ask you to do research, work on multiple drafts, and hone a written argument. In-class exams will test your ability to demonstrate a good all-round knowledge of the course. They will also test how well you can respond to the language and style as well as the themes of literary texts, as you analyze excerpts from selected works we've studied.

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 10%

These will be simple questions designed to test your knowledge of the assigned readings for the day.

Close reading exercise I (3-4 pages) 15%

This will give you several short sections of writing to analyze. You will choose one and write a short response which carefully considers the style of the piece and the ideas it presents. There will also be a creative option for this assignment. More details will be given in advance of the due date.

Midterm 20%

This will involve a poetry analysis from a selection of poems; you will be given a "poetry kit" the week beforehand to help you with the exam.

Critical paper (6-7 pages) 25%

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

Final 20%

This will give you a series of exam questions to choose from. Sample exam questions will be distributed two weeks ahead of the 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, 2nd. Ed. Ed. Henry Louis Gates and Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Norton, 2003. ISBN 978-0-393-97778-3.

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

IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT YOU BRING THESE BOOKS—AND PRINTOUTS OF INDIVIDUAL STORIES OR POEMS FROM BLACKBOARD—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.

Week One: Introductions and beginnings

10/1: Introductions

10/3: Transport in Early America. Olaudah Equiano and Phyllis Wheatley, selections from *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, pp.187-226.

Week Two: The slave narrative

10/8: The Literature of Slavery and Freedom, *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, pp.151-162.

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself*. Chapters 1-9. *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, pp. 387-421.

10/10: Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself*. Chapters 9-Appendix. *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, pp. 421-452.

Week Three: the slave narrative continued and into the nadir

10/15: **CLOSE READING EXERCISE DUE**

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, pp. 279-315.

10/17: "Literature of the Reconstruction to the New Negro Renaissance," *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, pp. 541-554.

Paul Lawrence Dunbar, poems, *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, pp. 905-927.

Week Four: Harlem Renaissance I: Nella Larsen

10/22: Nella Larsen, *Quicksand*, chapters 1-13, pp.1085-1129, *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*.

10/24: Nella Larsen, *Quicksand*, Chapters 14-25, pp.1129-1167, *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*.

Week Five: Harlem Renaissance II: Langston Hughes

10/29: MIDTERM

10/31: "Harlem Renaissance, 1919-1940," *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* pp. 953-962.

Langston Hughes, poetry and "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, pp.1288-1314

Week Six: Hurston and the folk novel

11/5: Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, chapters 1-6.

11/7: Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, chapters 7-13.

Week Seven: the Hurston-Wright debate

11/12: Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, chapters. 14-20.

11/14: Richard Wright, "Long Black Song," "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," in *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, p.1399-1402, 1411-1436; "The Man Who Was Almost a Man," [On Blackboard]; Wright reviews Hurston and Hurston reviews Wright (pdf on Blackboard)

Week Eight: Midcentury figures

11/19: Gwendolyn Brooks, poems pp.1623-1649, *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*

11/21: James Baldwin, "Notes from a Native Son," "Sonny's Blues," *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* pp. 1713-1749.

Week Nine: 1960s radicalism and the Black Arts movement

11/26: **CRITICAL PAPER DUE**

"The Black Arts Movement," *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, pp.1831-1850.

Amiri Baraka, "Black Art," "Dutchman," in *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, pp.1943, 1946-60; Nikki Giovanni, poems, in *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* pp. 2096-2101.

11/28: No class: Thanksgiving

Week Ten: the contemporary period

12/3: Alice Walker "Everyday Use," in *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, pp.2437-2442; "1955," on Blackboard; Toni Morrison, "Recitatif," on Blackboard.

12/5: Recap and revision

Exam week:

12/10: FINAL EXAM