

ENG 241 Introduction to African American Literature, Spring 2014, CRN 39278

10-10:50am MWF, Chapman 204

Professor Thorsson, thorsson@uoregon.edu

Office Hours: 11:30am-12:30pm and by appointment, 521 PLC

Course Description

This course is a survey of writings by African American authors. Studying fiction, essays, and poetry, we will close read representative texts to identify formal and thematic elements that characterize the African American literary tradition. We will consider how these works exemplify and complicate lived and literary identities. In other words, how do these texts fit into or defy ideas about race, gender, and class on the one hand and classifications of genre, period, and literary style on the other. We'll study relationships among these works to uncover how they reflect on, depend on, or revise one another. We will also look for relationships between these works and other art forms, such as blues, jazz, folklore, and visual arts.

Goals:

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, you will:

1. read literary and cultural texts with comprehension and with an understanding of their conventions;
2. draw on relevant cultural and/or historical information to situate texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts;
3. perform critical, formal analyses of literary and other cultural texts;
4. write focused, analytical essays in clear, grammatical prose;
5. employ logic, creativity, and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments;
6. employ primary and/or secondary sources, with proper acknowledgment and citation, as they contribute to a critical essay's thesis.

Required Texts

Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, Eds. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature, second edition*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2004 - available at the UO Bookstore and the Knight Library reserves desk

Handouts - posted on Blackboard.

Course Requirements and Policies

Reading, participation, and attendance are mandatory. Bring the assigned readings to class and be prepared to discuss them. Your participation grade is based on class discussion, in-class writing and reading, and group work.

Missing class more than twice in the term will result in reduction of your final grade by 1/3 of a letter grade (B becomes B-) for each absence beyond the two permitted. There is no distinction between excused and unexcused absences. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get notes for that day from a classmate and otherwise catch up on any material you have missed.

Assignments must be submitted in hard copy at the beginning of class on the due dates listed below and formatted according to current MLA guidelines (1 inch margins, single-side printed,

stapled, with correct citation and quotation including a works cited page). Consult the *MLA Handbook* if you are uncertain of correct format. I will mark late assignments down by 1/3 of a letter grade (B becomes a B-) for each day they are late. I will not accept assignments more than one week after the due date.

If you anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please meet with me soon. Please request that the Accessible Education Center (<http://aec.uoregon.edu/>) send me a letter outlining your approved accommodations.

The University Student Conduct Code (conduct.uoregon.edu) defines academic misconduct. Students should not commit or attempt to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. Students should acknowledge and document all sources of information (e.g. quotations, paraphrases, ideas). If there is any question about whether an act constitutes academic misconduct, it is the students' obligation to clarify the question with the professor before committing or attempting to commit the act.

Please print and consult the assignment sheet posted on Blackboard. We will discuss each assignment in detail as it approaches.

Grading:

Participation	10%
Close Reading #1 (2-3 pages)	15%
Film Response (2 pages)	10%
Midterm Exam	20%
Close Reading #2 (4-5 pages)	25%
Final Exam	20%

Week One

M 3/31	Introduction Phillis Wheatley, "On Being Brought from Africa to America" (1773) (p 219-220)
W 4/2	Frederick Douglass, <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, A Slave, Written by Himself</i> (1845) (p 387-421) Assignment Sheet (Blackboard)
F 4/4	Douglass, <i>Narrative</i> (p 421-440) Close Reading Handout (Blackboard)

Week Two

M 4/7	Douglass, <i>Narrative</i> (p 440-452)
W 4/9	Harriet Jacobs, from <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> (1861) (p 280-297)

F 4/11 Jacobs, from *Incidents* (p 297-315)
Passive Voice Handout (Blackboard)

Week Three

M 4/14 Anna Julia Cooper, "Womanhood a Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of a Race" (1892) (p 635-650)

W 4/16 Booker T. Washington, "Chapter XI: The Atlanta Exposition Address," from *Up from Slavery* (1901) (p 594-597)

F 4/18 W.E.B. Du Bois, "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others" from *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) (p 699-708)
Close Reading #1 Due (2-3 pages)

Week Four

M 4/21 Frances Harper, all poems (1853-1900) (p 494-505)
Meter Handout (Blackboard)

W 4/23 Paul Laurence Dunbar, all poems (1893-1903) (p 907- 918)

T 4/24 4-6:30pm Knight Library Browsing Room
Screening of *Reflections Unheard: Black Women in Civil Rights* and discussion with filmmaker Nevline Nnaji

F 4/25 Paul Laurence Dunbar, all poems (1893-1903) (p 907- 918) (continued)

Week Five

M 4/28 James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) (p 803-841)
Film Response Due (2 pages)

W 4/30 Johnson, *Autobiography* (p 841-883)

F 5/2 **Midterm Exam**

Week Six

M 5/5 Sterling Brown, all poems (1927-1980) (p 1248-1266)

W 5/7 Sterling Brown, all poems (1927-1980) (p 1248-1266) (continued)

F 5/9 Zora Neale Hurston, "Characteristics of Negro Expression" (1934) (p 1041-1053)

Week Seven

- M 5/12 Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1926)
Langston Hughes, all poems (1921-1965) (p 1291-1311)
- W 5/14 Langston Hughes, all poems (1921-1965) (p 1291-1311) (continued)
- F 5/16 Gwendolyn Brooks, all poems (1945-1981) (p 1623-1649)

Week Eight

- M 5/19 Ann Petry, from *The Street* (1946) (p 1504-1516)
Close Reading #2 Due (4-5 pages)
- W 5/21 James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues" (1957) (p 1728-1749)
- F 5/23 Amiri Baraka, "SOS" (1969), "Black Art" (1969), and "Wailers" (1982) (p 1942-1945)
Sonia Sanchez, "for our lady" (1969) (p 1964-1965)
Jayne Cortez, "How Long Has Trane Been Gone?" (1969) (2036-2038)

Week Nine

- M 4/26 No class, Memorial Day
- W 5/28 Toni Cade Bambara, "Raymond's Run" (1972) (p 2077-2082)
- F 5/30 Lucille Clifton, all poems (1972-1993) (p 2031-2035)

Week Ten

- M 6/2 Toni Morrison, "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" (1984) (p 2286-2290)
- W 6/4 Colson Whitehead, from *John Henry Days* (2001) (p 2677-2694)
- F 6/6 **Final Exam**