

ENG 241 Introduction to African American Literature, Spring 2015, CRN 32025

T/Th 8:30-9:50am, Lillis 175

Professor Thorsson, thorsson@uoregon.edu

Office Hours: T/Th 10-11:30am, 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 consider whether there are specific 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, we'll ask how 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 music 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 analyses of literature 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.

Required Texts

The readings on the schedule below come from your textbook for this course, *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, third edition, volumes one and two (2014), edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Valerie Smith. Both volumes of this book are available at the UO Bookstore and the Knight Library reserves desk. Handouts marked with an asterisk on the schedule below are on Blackboard site for our class.

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 your work in class including discussion, in-class writing, 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.

We will discuss each assignment in detail as it approaches. Please print and consult the assignment sheet posted on Blackboard. 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, including 1 inch margins, single-side printed, stapled, correct citation and quotation, and 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 late 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 (see conduct.uoregon.edu) defines academic misconduct. Students may not commit or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. Students should acknowledge and document all sources of information. If there is any question about whether an act constitutes academic misconduct, see me.

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 involving harassment, bias, or assault, 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.

In this class, we are studying literature of the United States in its historical and political contexts. This means that we will read about and discuss racial and sexual violence. There are incidents of both in our readings, some of which include explicit language and graphic sexual acts, both consensual and not. If you wish to select another class to take instead of this one, I will be happy to meet with you in office hours to help you select a suitable course.

Grading:

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

Week One

- T 3/31 Introduction
Phillis Wheatley, "On Being Brought from Africa to America" (1773) (Volume 1, p 143-144)
Syllabus*
- Th 4/2 Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, A Slave, Written by Himself* (1845) (Vol 1, p 330-362)
Assignment Sheet*

Week Two

- T 4/7 Douglass, *Narrative* (Vol 1, p 362-393)
Close Reading Handout*
- Th 4/9 Ida B. Wells Barnett, from *A Red Record* (1895) (Vol 1, p 670-679)

Week Three

- T 4/14 Charles Chesnutt, "The Gophered Grapevine" (1899) and "Dave's Neckliss" (1899) (Vol 1, p 582-591, p 610-618)
Passive Voice Handout*
- Th 4/16 Frances Harper, all poems (1853-1900) (Vol 1, p 448-459)
Meter Handout*
Close Reading #1 Due (2-3 pages)

Week Four

- T 4/21 Booker T. Washington, "Chapter XI: The Atlanta Exposition Address," from *Up from Slavery* (1901) (Vol 1, p 572-579)
- Th 4/23 W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Forethought," "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," and "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others" from *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) (Vol 1, p 687-702)

Week Five

- T 4/28 Paul Laurence Dunbar, all poems (1893-1903) (Vol 1, p 896- 915)
- Th 4/30 **Midterm Exam**

Week Six

- T 5/5 Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929) (Vol 1, p 1080-1110)
- Th 5/7 Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929) (Vol 1, p 1080-1110)
Close Reading #2 Due (4-5 pages)

Week Seven

T 5/12 Langston Hughes, all poems and "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1921-1949) (Vol 1, p 1304-1324)

Th 5/14 Langston Hughes, all poems and "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1921-1949) (Vol 1, p 1304-1324) (continued)

Week Eight

T 5/19 Richard Wright, "Blueprint for Negro Writing" (1937) (Vol 2, p 125-132)
Ralph Ellison, "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke" (1958) (Vol 2, p 279-287)

Th 5/21 Gwendolyn Brooks, all poems (1945-1960) (Vol 2, p 326-343)

Week Nine

T 5/26 Larry Neal, from "The Black Arts Movement" (1968) (Vol 2, p 784-787)
Amiri Baraka, "Black Art" (1969) (Vol 2, p 703-704)
Sonia Sanchez, all poems (1969) (Vol 2, p 711-713)
Jayne Cortez, "How Long Has Trane Been Gone?" (1969) (Vol 2, p 771-773)

Th 5/28 Toni Morrison, *Sula* (1973) (Vol 2, p 989-1027)
Event Response Due (2 pages)

Week Ten

T 6/2 Toni Morrison, *Sula* (1973) (Vol 2, p 1027-1067)

Th 6/4 **Final Exam**