

ENG 660 Contemporary Black Fiction, Fall 2014, CRN 16877

Tuesday 9-11:50am, 253 PLC

Professor Thorsson, thorsson@uoregon.edu

Office Hours: Thursday 10am-1pm, 521 PLC

Course Description:

In this course, we will study a selection of contemporary fiction by authors of African descent in the United States. As we read these works and relevant literary criticism, we will consider the usefulness of the many "post" terms that scholars use to describe contemporary black cultural production (post-Civil Rights, post-racial, postmodern, and post-soul, to offer just a few examples). We'll also work to understand the function of genre in this contemporary period as we read texts we might classify as satire, science fiction, realism, magical realism, and/or hip hop novels. This course requires substantial reading and writing, as well as vigorous participation.

Course Requirements and Policies:

Books on the schedule below are at the UO Bookstore and on reserve at Knight Library. Items with an asterisk are posted on Blackboard.

This course requires regular and vigorous participation in discussion.

We will discuss each assignment in detail as it approaches. Please also 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 (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.

Missing class more than once in the term will result in reduction of your final grade by 1/3 of a letter grade for each absence beyond the one permitted.

If you have a documented disability and 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 (available at conduct.uoregon.edu) defines academic misconduct. Students are prohibited from committing 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.

Please be advised that any UO faculty member who becomes aware of prohibited discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence, or gender-based stalking is required to report that information to her supervisor or the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity (<http://aaeo.uoregon.edu/>). For confidential help, contact

University Health Services (<http://healthcenter.uoregon.edu/>) or Sexual Assault Support Services (<http://sass-lane.org/>).

In this class, we are studying literature of the United State 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%
Presentation	10%
Close Reading (4-5 pages)	15%
Paper Proposal (3-4 pages)	15%
Final Paper (15-20 pages)	50%

Schedule:

Week One - Tuesday, September 30

- Toni Morrison, "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" (1984)*
- Selections from Kenneth Warren, *What Was African American Literature?* (2012) (Chapters 1 and 3, pages 1-43 and 81-117)*
- Marlon Ross, review of *What Was African American Literature?* (2012)*
- Syllabus*
- Assignment Sheet*

Week Two - Tuesday, October 7

- Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952)
- Gayl Jones, "Glossary," *Liberating Voices* (1992) (pages 195-203)*
- Close Reading Handout*

Week Three - Tuesday, October 14

- Fran Ross, *Oreo* (1974)
- Harryette Mullen, "'Apple Pie with Oreo Crust': Fran Ross's Recipe for an Idiosyncratic American Novel" (2002)*

Week Four - Tuesday, October 21

Close Reading (4-5 pages) due

- Gayl Jones, *Corregidora* (1975)
- Selections from Emily Lordi, *Black Resonance: Iconic Women Singers and African American Literature* (2013) (Introduction and Chapter 4, pages 1-25 and 137-172)*

Week Five - Tuesday, October 28

- Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (1977)
- Farah Griffin, "That the Mothers May Soar and the Daughters May Know Their Names: A Retrospective of Black Feminist Literary Criticism" (2007)*

Week Six - Tuesday, November 4

- Ntozake Shange, *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* (1982)
- Selection from Courtney Thorsson, *Women's Work: Nationalism and Contemporary African American Women's Novels* (2013) (Chapter 2, pages 65-85)*

Week Seven - Tuesday, November 11

- Paul Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle* (1996)
- Selections from Erica Edwards, *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership* (2012) (Introduction, part of Chapter 1, and all of Chapter 5; pages ix-xxii, 3-13, 135-166)*

Week Eight - Tuesday, November 18

Paper proposal due (3-4 pages) - bring 2 copies to class

Paper proposal workshop

- Colson Whitehead, *The Intuitionist* (1999)
- Howard Ramsby, "The Rise of Colson Whitehead: Hi-Tech Narratives and Literary Ascent" from *New Essays on the African American Novel* (2008)*

Week Nine - Tuesday, November 25

- Victor LaValle, *Big Machine* (2009)
- Vivee Francis, "Beauty and Fiends: An Interview with Victor LaValle" (2010)*

Week Ten - Tuesday, December 2

- Mat Johnson, *Pym* (2011)
- Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992)

Exam Week - Tuesday December 9

Final paper due (15-20 pages) to Professor Thorsson's office (521 PLC) by 5pm

If you would like your paper back with comments, please attach a self-addressed, stamped envelope when you turn it in.