English 360: African American Writers  
Time, Memory, and Identity: Twentieth-Century Black Women Writers

Instructor: Dr. Brian Gazaille  
Office: PLC 206  
Office Hours: MTW 8:30-9:45, and by appointment  
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CRN: 42252  
Term: Summer 2018  
Location: 107 ESL  
Time: MTWR 10:00-11:50

Course Description
This class investigates how black women writers of the twentieth century have taken up the themes of time, memory, and identity. These writers often conceived of literature as remembering. On the one hand, poems and stories became places in which to recall the silenced sufferings of the enslaved. On the other, literature enabled consideration of the intractable legacies of patriarchy and racism. As Ntozake Shange so succinctly puts it in Sassafrass, Cypress, & Indigo, literature could represent the “the slaves who were ourselves.” Using the short fiction, poetry, and critical work of writers like Frances E. W. Harper, Alice Dunbar Nelson, Zora Neale Hurston, Gwendolyn Brooks, Audre Lorde, Lucille Clifton, and more, we will examine how black women writers adapted literary form to wrestle with the legacies of racial and gender-based oppression.

This course counts toward UO’s Multicultural Requirement (under the Identity, Pluralism, and Tolerance category). It also counts for two upper-division categories in version II of the English major: (1) Literature from 1789 to the Present and (2) Literatures of Race, Ethnicity, and Empire. For students in version I of the major, the class counts for (1) Literature from 1789 to the Present or (2) Folklore, Women’s Literatures, and Ethnic Literatures.

Learning Outcomes
Through our discussions and assignments, we will practice the following skills:

- Reading texts with an understanding of the conventions that shape them
- Using relevant historical, cultural, and biographical information to situate texts in their sociopolitical contexts
- Using logic and creativity to think through an author’s artistic decisions
- Performing critical formal analyses in order to elucidate a text’s strategy and complexity
- Developing a critical vocabulary for discussing the intersecting representations of race, gender, and class

Required Texts and Materials
Their Eyes Were Watching God, by Zora Neale Hurston [ISBN: 9780061120060]

Assignments and Grading
Critical Reading Journal 15%  
Group Presentation 15%  
Poem Kit 15%  
Author Imitation Kit 25%  
Final Examination 30%

Grading Scale
A+ 97.00-100%  B+ 87.00-89.99%  C+ 77.00-79.99%  D+ 67.00-69.99%  F 0.00-59.99%
A 93.00-96.99%  B 83.00-86.99%  C 73.00-76.99%  D 63.00-66.99%
A- 90.00-92.99%  B- 80.00-82.99%  C- 70.00-72.99%  D- 60.00-62.99%

Critical Reading Journal
Over the term, you will keep a critical reading journal in which you will pose and think through questions for class discussion. You will submit 6 entries—two per week for the first three weeks, as listed on the schedule—though I will drop your lowest scoring entry at the term’s end. (*Exception: You must complete all six entries; you cannot drop a zero.) Each entry will run 250-300 words. No late postings are accepted without prior authorization. I will evaluate your entries based on two criteria:

- Engagement:
  - Your entries will demonstrate thoughtful engagement with at least one of the readings scheduled for that day.  
  (Ex: For Tuesday, June 26th, you can write about Toni Morrison and/or Alice Walker.)
Engaging thoughtfully with the reading can mean any number of things: working through an important passage, evaluating one of the text’s key claims or literary features, making comparisons between the day’s texts, drawing out contrasts between those texts, and so on.

That said, your entries should go beyond mere summary or personal response to grapple with important questions and concepts in pursuit of a deeper understanding of the material.

- **Precision:**
  - Posts must be submitted on time and meet minimum length requirements. Note: quoted passages are excluded from word counts. Make sure that you quote and prioritize your voice and analyses.
  - Posts must use MLA style parenthetical citations (page number[s] for novels and short stories, line number[s] for poems) for paraphrased and quoted material.
  - External sources consulted, paraphrased, quoted, or linked also must be documented.
  - Plagiarism of any sort is unacceptable (see Academic Honesty).

Each posting will earn up to 3 points as follows (15 points total for your five best entries):

- 3 points – satisfactory work for both criteria (Engagement and Precision)
- 2 points – satisfactory work for only one criteria (Engagement or Precision)
- 1 point – less than satisfactory work for both criteria
- 0 points – work unsatisfactory, plagiarized, incomplete, or not submitted

**Group Presentation (AKA, The Group Scavenger Hunt)**

You will join forces with three classmates to deliver a 15-20-minute presentation about an author listed on the syllabus. You should think of these presentations as enriching our understanding of that author by investigating something outside our scheduled readings. For instance, if you are presenting on Frances E. W. Harper, your group might introduce the class to one of her many short stories or political speeches, or you might discuss key events from her work in co-founding the National Association for Colored Women, a precursor of the NAACP. Ultimately, you get to decide what we need to know about that author and how we learn that information. I will assess your presentation in terms of how thoroughly you have prepared, how focused your topic and approach are, and how thoroughly you analyze your selected material. More details to follow.

**Poem Kit**

Early in the term, you will complete a Poem Kit on Alice Moore Dunbar Nelson’s “I Sit and Sew”. This assignment requires you to annotate that poem in a comprehensive way, calling attention to its basic formal features, major themes, distinctive word choices, and artistic eccentricities. Using that information, you will pose a critical question about the poem and craft a brief essay (300-500 words) that begins responding to that question. Your essay will need to cite and analyze textual details in support of your thinking. Specific instructions, grading criteria, and tips for this assignment are forthcoming.

**Author Imitation Kit**

Later in the term, you will complete an Author Imitation Kit. Part I of the kit asks you to compose a poem or short story using the formal, stylistic, and thematic concerns of one of the authors on our syllabus. (Ex: you might write a poem like Gwendolyn Brooks.) Part II asks that you analyze your text, calling attention to the artistic decisions you made and how these strategies gesture toward the ones made by your selected author. Note: while creativity is encouraged, the important part of the assignment is your analysis, which should quote amply from your text and from one of your author’s texts. More to follow.

**Final Exam**

The class will conclude with a cumulative final. The exam will consist of short answer questions and one longer essay question. Any material—from readings, class discussions, or group presentations—is fair game for the exam. You must bring a green book to the exam. Except in the direst situations, the exam cannot be rescheduled.

**Course Policies**

**Attendance**

Attendance is mandatory in this course, partly because of the class’s compressed nature, but also because you are vital to our discussions. Come to class on time and ready to discuss. You may miss one class without penalty. But your final course grade will drop 1/3 of a letter—e.g., a B+ drops to a B—for each subsequent absence. In spite of any absence, you are responsible for knowing any material covered in class and for making sure your work is turned in on time. Four absences, regardless of the reason, will automatically result in course failure. If you cannot come to class for any reason, please stay in contact with me.
Assignment Submission and Formatting

Unless you arrange a different submission process with me, you must submit all assignments in via Canvas. With the exception of the Poem Kit, assignments will follow MLA citation and formatting instructions: your document should be double-spaced, with 12-point Times New Roman font and 1-inch margins on all sides. See the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) website for more details about MLA formatting.

Late Work (*Please read this policy carefully*)

All assignments are due by the beginning of class when indicated on the schedule of assignments. Failing to turn in an assignment by the start of class means it is late. An assignment will be marked down a full letter grade for each calendar day it is late (i.e. an A- paper turned in one day late will earn a B-; two days late brings the grade to a C-). If you anticipate difficulty making a deadline, contact me at least 24 hours in advance to see if we can make alternate arrangements to avoid late penalties.

Please note: If you have not contacted me in advance, as stipulated above, I will not excuse late work due to technological problems. Technology can be treacherous, but you should be organized enough to anticipate and work through these issues.

Technology in the Classroom

Because so much of the course material is available electronically, you are welcome to bring a laptop or iPad to class. But if you do, or if you have any other mobile device handy, refrain from surfing the Web, texting, working on papers for other classes, chatting with friends, or otherwise getting off-task. Activities like those are distracting to me and to people who want to get the most out of our class time. They also signal your unwillingness to add to class discussion. I will assess technology-related disruptions in your attendance grade. Three disruptions will equal one absence.

Outside Research

None of our assignments require outside research. In fact, I strongly discourage research because I want to hear your thoughts about our texts. If you need to do research, you must document that research using MLA guidelines; moreover, you must get approval from me in advance of the assignment deadline. Assignments using unauthorized research will receive failing grades (50%). Papers plagiarized in part or whole are subject to the Academic Honest policy (below).

Academic Honesty

It is important to understand “authorship” and “ownership of ideas and words” in academic writing. These concepts help us to credit other writers and thinkers for their words and ideas. When you use someone else’s words or ideas without telling your reader where they come from, you are PLAGIARIZING. Common examples of plagiarism include incorrect academic citation and copying and pasting parts of an essay from the internet or other students. Getting too much help from someone editing your writing is also a form of academic dishonesty. I am looking to help you improve and gain important experience in analytic writing. I am not expecting perfect writing. If you have a question about using ideas and words from others in your essays, please ask!

All work submitted in this course must be your own and written exclusively for this course. Unacknowledged borrowing of others’ words or ideas constitutes plagiarism, a serious academic crime that results in disciplinary action. If you use someone else’s words or ideas, you must quote and cite them. If you have any questions about plagiarism or the University’s policy on it, talk with me or refer to the Code of Student Conduct on the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards website. In cases where academic dishonesty has been clearly established, awarding an F for the final course grade is the standard practice of the English Department, so it is imperative that you speak with me about any questions regarding outside sources.

Observance of Religious Holidays

Students who observe their religious holidays at times when academic requirements conflict with those observances must inform instructors in advance of the holiday. Students are responsible for making up missed work according to a schedule determined with the teacher.

Access

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

Incompletes

A request for the grade “Incomplete” must be placed in advance of the end of the quarter. Such approval will be granted only in cases when some minor but essential aspect of the course cannot be completed by a student through unforeseen circumstances beyond their control.
Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Note: This schedule is subject to change. Please check Canvas for the authoritative version of this schedule.

Week #1: Time, History, and Memory: Contexts

1.1 Truth, “Ain’t I a Woman?” (*reading done in class*)
   Critical Journal Post Due to Canvas
1.3 Lorde, “Poetry is Not a Luxury” (643-646) Harper, “Eliza Harris,” “Aunt Chloe’s Politics,” “Learning to Read” (*see Canvas link for these texts*)
1.4 Dunbar Nelson, “I Sit and Sew,” “April Is on the Way,” “Violets” (*see Canvas link for these texts*)
   Critical Journal Post Due to Canvas

Week #2: Zora Neale Hurston: Folklore, Race Memory, and the Muck

2.1 Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Ch. 1-5)
   Poem Kit Due to Canvas
2.2 Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Ch. 6-11)
   Critical Journal Post Due to Canvas
2.3 Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Ch. 12-17)
2.4 Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Ch. 17-end)
   Critical Journal Post Due to Canvas

Week #3: Demise, Resistance, and Power

3.1 Childress, *Trouble in Mind* (182-225)
   Critical Journal Post Due to Canvas
3.4 Giovanni, “Nikki-Rosa” (882), “Ego Tripping (there may be a reason why)” (885) Clifton, “homage to my hips” (1127), “[the light that came to lucille clifton]” (1128), “study the masters” (1128)
   Critical Journal Post Due to Canvas

Week #4: Legacies

4.1 Walker, “Advancing Luna – and Ida B. Wells” (1194) Wells, *A Red Record* (selections) (*see Canvas link*)
   Author Imitation Due to Canvas
4.3 Parks, *Topdog/Underdog* (1424-1468)
4.4 Final Examination