

ENG 660 Contemporary Black Fiction, Winter 2018, CRN 26860

Monday 12-2:50pm, 448 PLC

Professor Thorsson (thorsson@uoregon.edu)

Office Hours: Monday 10-11:30am and by appointment, 521 PLC

Course Description:

In this course, we will study contemporary works of African American and Black Diasporic fiction in their historical, political, and literary contexts. As we read these works and relevant scholarly texts, we will consider questions of periodization, genre, and literary tradition. We will study the function of genres such as satire, contemporary narratives of slavery, science fiction, realism, gothic fiction, and horror in our readings. We will think through the utility of periodizing terms such as modernism, realism, postmodernism, post-soul, and hip hop generation for understanding these works. We will investigate whether there are formal and thematic characteristics that define contemporary African American fiction and whether and how those characteristics appear in works from the Diaspora. Throughout the term, we will consider how these contemporary works participate in, reflect on, complicate, or otherwise engage a broader tradition of African American literature that spans the 18th century to the present. This course requires substantial reading and writing and vigorous participation. The goal of this course is to help you engage with African American and Black Diasporic literature, improving your writing, reading, and critical thinking skills in the process.

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 in the files section of the Canvas website for our class.

We will discuss each assignment in detail as it approaches. Please print and consult the assignment sheet in the files section of the Canvas website for our class. 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. 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.

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 anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please meet with me soon. Please ask the Accessible Education Center (aec.uoregon.edu/) to 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.

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 have experienced or experienced gender-based violence (intimate partner violence, attempted or completed sexual assault, harassment, coercion, stalking, etc.), know that you are not alone. UO has staff trained to support survivors in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, getting academic and housing accommodations, getting legal protective orders, and accessing other help. If you tell me about harassment or assault, I am not required to report this information to anyone unless you request that I do so. I am required to consult with a confidential UO employee (someone with legal confidentiality, such as a counseling professional or a crisis center advocate) to ensure that you are supported. If you decide to make a report, I and other UO employees will help you to do so. My goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available and that you 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 or visit the SAFE website at safe.uoregon.edu.

In this class, we are studying literature 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 am 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 – Monday, January 8

- Toni Morrison, "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" (1984)*
- Erica Edwards, "Recapitulating the Yam: The Promise of African-American Literary Studies at History's End: A Response to Frances Smith Foster" (2010)*
- Kenneth Warren, "Does African American Literature Exist?" (2011)*
- Marlon Ross, review of *What Was African American Literature?* (2012)*
- Syllabus*
- Assignment Sheet*

Week Two - Monday, January 15 – No Class, MLK Day

Week Three – Monday, January 22

- Toni Morrison, *Paradise* (1997)
- Close Reading Handout*

Week Four – Monday, January 29

- Colson Whitehead, *The Intuitionist* (1999)

Week Five – Monday, February 5

- Mat Johnson, *Pym* (2011)
- **Close Reading (4-5 pages) due**

Week Six – Monday, February 12

- ZZ Packer, *Drinking Coffee Elsewhere* (2004)

Week Seven – Monday, February 19

- Danielle Evans, *Before You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self* (2011)

Week Eight – Monday, February 26

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

Week Nine – Monday, March 5

- Danzy Senna, *New People* (2017)

Week Ten – Monday, March 12

- Victor LaValle, *The Changeling* (2017)

Exam Week – Monday, March 19**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.

Recommended secondary sources

These works are not required. I offer them because they may prove useful in your study of our texts and in your work on assignments for this course. These are meant to prompt your thinking about the works we are reading, the field of African American literary studies, and your research. Items with an asterisk are in the files section of the Canvas website for our class. I am always happy to meet with you in office hours to recommend readings that pertain to your specific research interests.

Print:

American Literary History 29.4 (Winter 2017) special issue "What is Twenty-First-Century African American Literature?"

Simone Brown, "Introduction," *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (2015)*

Phillip Brian Harper, "Introduction," *Abstractionist Aesthetics* (2015)*

Emily Lordi, "[B]lack and Going On Women!: Lucille Clifton, Elizabeth Alexander, and the Poetry of Grief," *Palimpsest* 6.1 (2017)*

Courtney Thorsson, "Inscribing Community: Toni Morrison's *Paradise*," *Women's Work: Nationalism and Contemporary African American Women's Novels* (2013)*

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

Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992)

Colson Whitehead, "A Psychotronic Childhood: Learning from B-movies," *The New Yorker* (2012)*

Audio:

Kevin Quashie in conversation about his book *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture* (2012):

<http://newbooksnetwork.com/kevin-quashie-the-sovereignty-of-quiet-beyond-resistance-in-black-culture-rutgers-up-2012/>

Audio Tour of Blue Black curated by Glenn Ligon (2017):

<https://pulitzerarts.org/exhibition/blue-black-curated-by-glenn-ligon/>

Video:

Marlon Riggs, *Black Is ... Black Ain't* (1995):

<https://uoregon.kanopystreaming.com/video/black-isblack-aint>

GerShun Avilez in conversation with Mark Anthony Neal on *Left of Black* about his book *Radical Aesthetics and Modern Black Nationalism* (2016):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24XOQWLR264>