SYLLABUS

ENGLISH 104: INTRODUCTION TO FICTION
CRN 22772
WINTER 2019
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AMERICAN NOVELS: MORE THAN FICTION

INSTRUCTOR
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**Course Information**

**Course Overview**
Through this course, students develop analytical skills that will allow them to think, write, and speak about fiction. The course addresses basic questions about the nature of prose narrative and the interrelated activities of reading, writing, and interpretation. What is a story, and what role do stories play in our cultural and political lives? Can the act of interpretation be a just act? Weekly readings are substantial in scope and difficulty, and students will be asked to compose critical writing of varying length, as well as work on their own creative storytelling. During this 50th anniversary celebrating the creation of Black Studies programs, we’ll focus primarily on the writings of Black authors throughout the past 150 years or so. Even a cursory immersion into these stories quickly upsets any progressive narrative concerning race, gender, sexuality, and other facets of identity and power in the U.S. Equally important, we will explore the ways in which these stories and authors craft fiction in order to tell the all-too real story of the U.S. itself.

Needless to say, we will do a heavy amount of reading in this class. **Discussions** are crucial to our work and students will be responsible for **thoughtful engagement** (read carefully, identify questions). I will provide important social and historical contexts necessary for thinking about our particular texts. Student assignments will consist of regular, short writing assignments meant to generate thoughtful conversation, a take-home **midterm** exam with short-essay prompts, a similar **final** exam, and a **creative assignment** to be shared with the class at the end of the term.

**English Department Learning Outcomes**

*Upon completion of this course, students should be able to achieve the following outcomes:*
1. The ability to read literary and cultural texts with discernment and comprehension.
2. To draw on current cultural and/or historical information to situate texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts.
3. To perform formal analyses of literary, cinematic, and other cultural texts.
4. To write focused, analytical essays in clear, grammatical prose.
5. To employ logic, creativity, and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments.
6. To employ primary and/or secondary sources, with proper acknowledgment and citation.
READINGS
All readings will be provided as PDFs or links via Canvas. There is simply no way to get around the violence (physical, sexual, psychic) that exists all around us, everyday, whether witnessed or not. Our readings do not avoid the violent truths of life in the United States for too many people, especially when it comes to the violence of America’s color-line. As scholars, as much as we like creating new ideas and practicing them in the world we live in, such things as “safe spaces” are simply illogical constructions that fail to reflect the dynamics of power embedded within the United States, including and especially institutions of (higher) education.

DISCUSSIONS
Our discussions are crucial to this class. Failure to prepare thoroughly for discussion simply means you will not do well on your Final or Mid-term exam; and obviously your short writing grades will take a hit, as well. Words, themselves, can be violent. This is a crucial concept to understand for this class. Let me be clear: we may come across derogatory, demeaning, and dehumanizing language, both historically and contemporarily, that are expressions of anti-black racism and sexism. It is in no way acceptable, or even necessary, to appropriate the use of that language into our class discussions. This does not mean we ignore the violence present in our means of communication, knowledge, and reason (language); rather, this means we must interrogate its place within its specific context, historically, culturally, and socially.

ON READING
YOU MUST get into the habit of reading literature multiple times when engaging in scholarly work!

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<th>GRADING BREAKDOWN</th>
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Course Work & Readings

Short Writing (25%)
Every week, I’d like you to write a short response to what you’ve read for that week (~500 words). Conclude your response with at least one question you’d like to pose to your classmates for discussion; submit via Canvas. Since these responses are meant to generate discussion, there is simply no wiggle-room to turn them in late. More details to follow.

Creative Writing Assignment (25%)
This is not a creative writing class; I will not be judging you on the aesthetic quality of your work. Rather, let’s have some fun and play with our artistic expression as another way to think about the texts and ideas we’ve spent time with this term. I’ll ask you to do a short presentation on what you come up with at the end of the term, as well. Details to follow; the writing portion will be due finals week.

Mid-Term and Final Exam (25% each)
Due by the end of weeks 5 and finals week, respectively, the exam will be a take-home assignment, with 5 prompts, and submitted via Canvas. You choose 3, and write 500 words on each. Details to follow.

Course Policies

Academic Honesty
All work submitted in this course must be your own and be written exclusively for this course, which means you may not submit papers or portions of papers you have written for any other course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly documented. Please consult The Little Duck Handbook for a definition of plagiarism and information on documentation, and refer to the Student Conduct Code on the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards website. In cases where academic misconduct has been clearly established, the award of an F for the final course grade is the standard practice of the Composition Program. Please see me if you have any questions about your use of sources.

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 uoaec@uoregon.edu.
Week 1
Class intro. Morrison and Baldwin

Week 2
Pauline Hopkins

Week 3
W.E.B Du Bois

Week 4
Chester Himes

Week 5
Revisiting Morrison and Baldwin; Mid-term due

Week 6
Ann Petry; introduce creative writing assignment

Week 7
Edward P. Jones

Week 8
The Roots (listen on T; discuss on R)

Week 9
Beyoncé (watch on T; discuss on R)

Week 10
Creative assignment presentations; wrap-up

Finals Week
Final exam and creative writing assignment due