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

Instructor: Dr. Brian Gazaille (he/him/his)
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CRN: 31990
Term: Spring 2019
Location: 107 ESL
Time: MWF 10:00-10:50

Course Description
This class investigates how black women writers of the twentieth century have taken up the themes of time, memory, and identity. The writers we will explore—Frances E. W. Harper, Zora Neale Hurston, Gwendolyn Brooks, Audre Lorde, Ntozake Shange, and Lucille Clifton, among others—conceived of literature as remembering. Poems and stories were not just artworks but places in which to recover silenced voices and reflect on the intractable legacies of patriarchy and racism. As Shange so succinctly puts it in her first novel, Sassafras, Cypress, & Indigo, literature can be made to represent the “the slaves who were ourselves.” Using the short fiction, poetry, and critical work of the writers noted above, we will examine how black women writers adapted literary forms to wrestle with past and present forms of race- and gender-based oppression.

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

Learning Outcomes
Through our discussions and assignments, we will practice the following skills:
- Reading poems, stories, plays, and other texts with an understanding of the conventions that shape them
- Using relevant historical, cultural, and biographical information to situate our texts in their sociopolitical contexts
- Using logic and creativity to discover and think through the artistic decisions a writer builds into her text
- Performing critical analyses in order to elucidate a text’s strategy and complexity
- Developing a critical vocabulary for discussing difficult concepts associated with the study of race, gender, class

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

Assignments and Grading
Poetry Kit 20%
Close Reading Essay 20%
Archival Project 20%
Roundtable Discussion 10%
Classroom Engagement 10%
Final Exam 20%

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%

Formal Writing Assignments
This class is designed to help you generate arguments about poetics—about how a text’s features further its artistic, narratological, or political goals. We will compose three different kinds of essays to practice this crucial analytical skill.

Poetry Kit [No Research Required]
Early in the term, you will complete a Poem Kit on Alice Moore Dunbar Nelson’s “I Sit and Sew.” You will annotate the poem, calling attention to its formal features, major themes, distinctive word choices, and eccentricities. Using that information, you will pose a critical question about the poem and craft a brief essay (3-4 double-spaced pages) that explores that question. Your essay will need to cite and analyze textual details in support of your thinking.
Close Reading Essay [No Research Required]
This is a conventional literary analysis. The essay (4-5 pages) will focus on Their Eyes Were Watching God.

Archival Project [Research Required]
Time, memory, and recovery are key themes of the class. In a broader sense, these themes are crucial to the study of African American literature, about which scholars are still collecting and analyzing new texts and contexts. In this project, you will dig through library and web resources to identify and analyze a set of artifacts—correspondence, contemporary reviews, a collection of seldom-read poems—that shed light on one of the writers in our syllabus. Your essay (6-8 pages) will need to explain the (historical, political, biographical, etc.) context of your artifacts and then analyze their contents, explaining what they reveal about your chosen writer and how.

Roundtable Discussion
Once this term, you will join three or four colleagues to conduct a roundtable discussion about the day’s reading. You and your fellow discussants will sit in a semicircle at the front of the room and, for roughly 15 minutes, discuss key aspects of the assigned reading. Your discussion will then transition into a class-wide conversation. This assignment is designed to give you space to work through the ideas you think are most important in the day’s readings. At the same time, it will encourage you to deepen your close reading skills and develop ways to articulate inklings, observations, and questions about a text.

Classroom Engagement
This class thrives on your participation, since literary analysis is not something you “get,” instantly retain, and forever believe; it is a process of inquiry and close analysis that becomes richer through competing interpretations. This part of your grade holistically measures your preparedness and engagement with class materials. Here is how I think about class engagement:

✓ A: You not only come to class prepared but raise the level of our discussions through insightful class comments and active consideration of your peers’ ideas and interpretations
✓ B: You always come to class prepared, sometimes make meaningful contributions to class-wide discussions, and participate actively and respectfully in small-group activities
✓ C: You regularly come to class and participate in small-group work but do not contribute to our larger discussions
✓ D: You are often absent, unprepared, or unwilling to participate in class activities; you sometimes make inappropriate contributions to the class or disrupt the flow of our discussions
✓ F: You are frequently unprepared for class and/or disrupt our discourse community.

If you believe you will have difficulty meeting these expectations, please come see me during the first week of the term so that we can arrange other ways for you to participate in our class, especially in terms of office hours discussions.

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 dire situations or in the case of an AEC accommodation, the exam cannot be rescheduled.

Course Policies
Attendance
Attendance is mandatory because you are vital to our discussions. Come on time and ready to discuss. You may miss three (3) classes without penalty. Your final course grade will drop 1/3 of a letter—e.g., B+ drops to B—for each subsequent absence. But you can make up an absence by attending office hours or scheduling an appointment so that we can discuss missed material. When you are absent, you are ultimately responsible for submitting work on time and knowing any materials covered in class. Nine (9) or more absences, regardless of the reason and even in spite of efforts to make up absences, will mean course failure.

Assignment Submission and Formatting
You must submit all assignments in printed copy, though I reserve the right to ask everyone to submit work on Canvas. Each assignment must be double-spaced, with 12-point Times New Roman font and 1” margins on all sides. Unless you ask to use another apparatus, I expect you to use MLA guidelines. See the Purdue Online Writing Lab for examples.

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
You are welcome to bring a laptop or iPad to class. Do what you need to enhance your learning. But if you do bring a gadget to class, please 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 your classmates. They also signal your unwillingness to add to discussion. I will assess technology-related disruptions in your attendance grade. Three disruptions will equal one absence.

Academic Honesty
Especially in an English course, it is important to understand “authorship” and “ownership” 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 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 uoaec@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
This schedule is subject to change. Please check Canvas for the authoritative schedule. Unless noted, all readings come from the Norton (Nor).

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

M 4/1 Syllabus Overview
Sojourner Truth, “Ain’t I a Woman?” (Canvas; reading done in class)

W 4/3 Morrison, “The Site of Memory” (Nor: 1071-1078)

F 4/5 Walker, “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens” (Nor: 1180-1188)

Week #2: Time, History, and Memory: Contexts

4/8 Harper, Selected Poems (Canvas)
Focal Poems: “Eliza Harris,” “Aunt Chloe’s Politics,” “The Slave Mother”
4/10 Dunbar Nelson, Selected Poems (Canvas)
   Focal Poems: “[I had not thought of violets late],” “Violets” (Canvas)

4/12 Dunbar Nelson, no additional reading
   Focal Poems: “To the Negro Farmers of the United States” “I Sit and Sew”

**Week #3: Zora Neale Hurston’s Modernism**

4/15 Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Ch. 1-4)
   **Poetry Kit Due**

4/17 Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Ch. 5-9)

4/19 Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Ch. 10-13)

**Week #4: Class, Race, Recovery: Hurston as Folklorist**

4/22 Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Ch. 14-18)
   **PURPLE GROUP ROUNTABLE**

4/24 Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (19-20)

4/26 Hurston, no additional reading

**Week #5: Poetry as Chronicle: Gwendolyn Brooks**

4/29 Brooks, Selected Poems (Canvas)
   Focal Poems: “Gay Chaps at the Bar,” “The Ballad of Rudolph Reed”

5/1 Brooks (Nor: 326-343)
   Focal Poems: “the mother,” “The Children of the Poor”
   **BLUE GROUP ROUNTABLE**

5/3 Brooks, no additional reading
   Focal Poems: “The Chicago Defender Sends a Man to Little Rock,” “Riot”

**Week #6: Power and Resistance: Origins of the Black Arts Movement**

5/6 Margaret Walker, “For My People” (Nor: 319), “For Malcolm X” (Nor: 322)
   Brooks, re-read “Malcolm X” (Nor: 339)
   **GREEN GROUP ROUNTABLE**

5/8 Lorde (Nor: 637-652)
   Focal Texts: “New York City 1970,” “Power”

5/10 Lorde, no additional reading
   Focal Poems: “Walking Our Boundaries,” “Inheritance—His”
   **Close Reading Essay Due**

**Week #7: Reclamation: Black Arts Responses**

5/13 Sanchez (Nor: 708-724)
   Focal Poems: “blk/rhetoric,” “Sister Son/ji”

5/15 Rodgers (Nor: 850-858)
   Focal Poems: “Poem for Some Black Women,” “I Have Been Hungry”
   **RED GROUP ROUNTABLE**
5/17    Giovanni (Nor: 879-886)
        Focal Poems: “Nikki-Rosa,” “Ego Tripping (there may be a reason why)”

Week #8: The Geography of Women

5/20    Jordan (Nor: 751-768)
        Focal Poem: “Getting Down to Get Over”

5/22    Jordan, no additional reading
        Focal Poems: “Poem for South African Women,” “Poem about My Rights”

5/24    Shange (Nor: 1290-1296)
        Focal Poems: “Nappy Edges,” “Bocas: A Daughter’s Geography”

Week #9: Legacies of the Civil Rights Era

5/27    Clifton (Nor: 1122-1129)
        Focal Poems: “homage to my hips” (1127), “[the light that came to lucille clifton]” (1128), “study the masters” (1128)

Archival Project Due

5/29    Walker, “Advancing Luna – and Ida B. Wells” (Nor: 1194-1205)
        Wells, Selections from The Red Record (Canvas)

5/31    Catch-Up Day, no additional reading

Week #10: Today and Tomorrow

6/3     Parks, Topdog/Underdog (Nor: 1424-1468)
        Focal Points: Scenes 1-4

6/5     Parks, no additional reading
        Focal Points: Scenes 5-6

6/7     Catch-Up Day, no additional reading

Finals Week

6/12    Exam in 107 ESL from 10:15-12:15