ENG 360 African American Writers: Black Feminist Literature
CRN 22466, 4 credits, Winter 2022
Tuesday/Thursday 12-1:20pm, 117 Global Scholars Hall
Professor Thorsson thorsson@uoregon.edu
Office Hours: Wednesday 10am-1pm via Zoom at: https://uoregon.zoom.us/j/99185461433

Course Description
In this course, we will study works from the vast body of Black feminist literature. Our texts will be by African American women writers, activists, teachers, and intellectuals and will span the late-nineteenth century to the present. Our readings will be diverse in form and genre, including poetry, fiction, anthologies, manifestos, and scholarly essays from a variety of disciplines. What will unite our readings is their shared investment in Black women's liberation. Authors whose works we may read include Frances Harper, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida Wells-Barnett, Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Cade Bambara, Barbara Christian, Audre Lorde, Michele Wallace, Ntozake Shange, June Jordan, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Angela Davis. We will read these women's works closely, studying the formal and thematic traits of every text we encounter. We will examine implicit and explicit theories in our readings of the role of literature in the work of liberation. This class requires substantial reading and writing and vigorous participation.

This course satisfies the Core Education requirement in U.S. Difference, Inequality, Agency.

This course counts as upper-division coursework in the English Minor and as upper-division coursework for the English Major in these categories: C-Literature 1789-Present, F-Gender/Ability/Queer Studies/Sexuality, and G-Empire/Race/Ethnicity.

Learning Outcomes
The goal of this course is to help you engage with African American literature, improving your writing, reading, and critical thinking skills in the process. To that end, you will:
1. Read literary and cultural texts with comprehension and with an understanding of their conventions.
2. Draw on relevant information to situate texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts.
3. Perform critical, formal analyses of literary or other cultural texts.
4. Write focused, analytical essays in clear prose with correct grammar and correct citation.
5. Employ logic, creativity, and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments.

Required Texts
There are two required books for this course:
- *Zora Neale Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), ISBN: 9780061120060

Both books are available at the UO Duck Store, from online retailers, and via Course Reserves for this class at Knight Library. You can use the ISBN above to search for and make sure you are purchasing the correct edition. Please get a hardcopy of the assigned edition. Having the same physical, print edition of is necessary for the work we will do together in class.
All other assigned readings on the schedule below are in the files section of the Canvas website for our class. If you can, please print these texts, read them in hardcopy, and bring the printed text to class.

The secondary sources folder in the files section of our Canvas site contains scholarly writings relevant to our primary texts. These readings are optional and you may choose to use them in your assignments for this class.

**Reading**
You will spend much of the time you devote to this course actively reading our assigned texts. Active reading means reading with a pen in your hand, taking notes, writing down observations and questions you have about the text, and looking up words you do not know or that the author is using in a surprising way. Have the assigned readings with you at each class meeting and be prepared to discuss them.

**Participation**
You will earn your participation grade by taking part in discussions, group work, in-class writing, reading aloud from a text, and other activities that will take place during our class meetings. I will offer you a variety of ways to contribute to our learning community and am confident that each of you will earn full credit for participation.

**Attendance**
If you miss class for any reason, it is your responsibility to keep up with the readings, get notes for that day from a classmate, and then see me in office hours if you have questions about the material you missed. If you miss more than two class meetings, it will be difficult for you to learn the material or do your best work in this class. If you miss more than half of our class meetings, you will automatically fail the course. This absence policy means that you do not need to contact me to explain absences, you do not need to send me doctor's notes or other documentation, and you do not need to disclose personal circumstances that result in an absence.

**Recording Policy**
Whether we meet in person, online, or both, I will not record our class meetings. You do not have permission from me or from each of your classmates to record our class meetings. Our collaborative task is to make this class a space for rigorous, respectful study and discussion of challenging material. This work is by us and for us, not for recording or sharing.

**Communication**
I am available in office hours weeks one through ten on Wednesdays, 10am-1pm via Zoom at: [https://uoregon.zoom.us/j/99185461433](https://uoregon.zoom.us/j/99185461433) to talk with you about our readings, assignments, or anything else. You may email me to make an appointment in advance or you may drop in during office hours. Please be aware that you will need to wait in the Zoom waiting room if I am with another student.

I am also available via email ([thorsson@uoregon.edu](mailto:thorsson@uoregon.edu)). Please use email rather than Canvas messages to communicate with me. I will usually respond to emails within 24 hours during the
week and will take longer to respond on the weekend. When you email me about any matter, please include your full name and that you are a current ENG 360 student.

I will use Canvas to post course materials, send announcements, collect assignments, comment on assignments, and post grades.

In the case of any emergency that disrupts academic activities, our course requirements, assignments, due dates, and grading percentages are subject to change. I will communicate any changes as soon as possible.

**Class Content and Respectful Discussion**

In this class, we are studying literature of the United States in its historical and political contexts. This means that we will read about and discuss racist 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. Please consider whether the content of the course may be disturbing to a degree that interferes with your learning. We will not use the n-word in this class, even if it appears in our texts. We will not use the f-word in this class, regardless of a person’s perceived sexual orientation or gender expression. When reading aloud from a text, for example, we will simply pause for a beat or say "n" or "n's." We will work together to apply this policy to other slurs and biased language as needed over the course of the term.

**UO Resources**

Online tutoring is available through UO's Online Writing Lab (OWL), a free service that allows UO students to submit work via an online portal and receive detailed feedback within 24 hours. Log in at [https://owl.uoregon.edu/](https://owl.uoregon.edu/)

Please let me know about any accommodations that will help make this class accessible to you. If applicable, please request that the Accessible Education Center ([aec.uoregon.edu/](http://aec.uoregon.edu/)) send me a letter outlining your approved accommodations. An AEC letter helps me implement accessible course design, but I do not require documentation to make accommodations.

The University Student Conduct Code ([dos.uoregon.edu/conduct](https://dos.uoregon.edu/conduct)) defines academic misconduct. Students may not commit or attempt 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.

The UO Basic Needs Resource Guide ([https://blogs.uoregon.edu/basicneeds/](https://blogs.uoregon.edu/basicneeds/)) is the place to go for help with basic needs such as food security, housing security, healthcare, and access to technology.

SAFE ([safe.uoregon.edu](https://safe.uoregon.edu)) is a resource for members of the UO community who experience sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, you can call the 24-hour hotline 541-346-SAFE to be connected to a confidential counselor to discuss your options and get support.
The UO Counseling Center (https://counseling.uoregon.edu/) offers support for well-being and mental health of students via telehealth and in-person appointments, drop-in hours, and availability of mental health professionals at any time via phone at 541-346-3227.

**Grading**

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<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Close Reading (3-4 pages)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secondary Source Exercise (3-4 pages)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper Proposal (2-3 pages)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final paper (8-10 pages)</td>
<td>40%</td>
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100 = A+ = 4.3  
97-99 = A = 4.0  
90-92 = A- = 3.7  
87-89 = B+ = 3.3  
83-86 = B = 3.0  
80-82 = B- = 2.7  
77-79 = C+ = 2.3  
73-76 = C = 2.0  
70-72 = C- = 1.7  
67-69 = D+ = 1.3  
65-66 = D = 1.0  
65 or below = F = 0

**Assignments**

We will discuss each assignment in detail as it approaches. We will practice the skills needed for each assignment in class before that assignment is due. Assignments must be submitted via Canvas as a Microsoft Word document or PDF by the beginning of class on the due dates listed below. I will mark late assignments down by 1/3 of a letter grade (B becomes a B-) for each day they are late.

If you have emergency circumstances and need an extension of the due date for an assignment, please contact me at least 24 hours before the assignment is due to request that extension. Assignments for other classes, a job, or other regular, scheduled demands on your time do not constitute appropriate grounds for requesting an extension.

Please format your work according to current MLA guidelines, including 1-inch margins, numbered pages, correct citation and quotation, and a works cited page. For help with correct MLA format, consult the examples on your close reading handout, a research librarian, the *MLA Handbook*, or [Purdue University's Online Writing Lab](https://writinglab.purdue.edu/).

I am happy to meet with you in office hours to talk through your plans for any of our assignments and to recommend readings that pertain to your research interests. I will offer verbal feedback about each assignment to the whole class at the end of a class meeting, usually one week after an assignment is due. This is a chance for us to identify common strengths and areas where you are working to improve as readers, thinkers, and writers. I will also provide brief individual comments and grades via Canvas on each assignment, usually one week after it is due. Please be sure to read my assignment comments on your work in Canvas.

**Close Reading (3-4 pages) Due to Canvas by 12pm on Thursday, January 27th**

Your close reading will analyze a short passage of your choice from any of the texts on our syllabus. Close readings must observe and analyze both the form and content of your chosen
text. Your close reading should include observation and analysis and may or may not include an interpretive argument. The passage you are analyzing should appear in your close reading, either at the top of the assignment or in the body of your text (see examples on close reading handout). I encourage you to use this as opportunity to explore a text you are considering working with for your final paper. As you write your close reading, look at the handout with examples and your notes from our collaborative close reading work in class. Offer your own insights rather than simply rehashing what we have said in class. If you get stuck or find you have little to say about your chosen passage, reread the passage, list new observations, and analyze those observations. If your passage doesn’t give you enough to work with, choose another one. This purpose of this assignment is for you to practice close reading, which is a fundamental skill of literary analysis and a skill you will use in your final paper for this class.

Secondary Source Exercise (3-4 pages) Due to Canvas by 12pm on Thursday, February 17th
Choose a text that is about one or more of our assigned readings or that helps you more deeply understand of one or more of our assigned readings. You may choose one of the works that I have posted in the Secondary Sources folder in the Files section of our Canvas site or you may select a different secondary source as long as you have discussed with me in office hours. You might also choose to use one of our assigned readings as a secondary text to better understand one of our other assigned readings as a primary text. Carefully choose and quote a couple of sentences or one idea from your secondary source. Explain the text you quote. Clearly state your own interpretive argument about the primary text in relationship to the text you quote from your secondary source. You might, for example, fully or partly agree or disagree with the author of your secondary source or you might use a key term and its definition from your secondary source and apply it as part of your interpretive argument about one or more of our readings. Fully explain your interpretive argument and give evidence for your argument from one or more of the readings on our syllabus. This evidence may take the form of close reading. The purpose of this assignment is for you to practice engaging the ideas of other scholars and articulating your own arguments in relation to those ideas. These are fundamental skills of literary analysis and skills you will use in your final paper for this class.

Paper Proposal (2-3 pages) Due to Canvas by 12pm on Tuesday, March 1st
Bring a copy of your proposal to class for use in workshop.
The proposal for your final paper should include a draft introduction, a detailed outline, a preliminary works cited page in MLA format with both primary and secondary sources, and a passage or passages from one or more of our readings that you intend to close read in support of your argument. Your detailed outline should show how you plan to use each of your close readings and each of your secondary sources to support your argument, make a transition, define a term, raise a counter argument, or otherwise do work to make your paper persuasive. The purpose of this assignment is for you to develop a plan for your final paper and to make it possible for your classmates and I to offer feedback on that plan.

Final Paper (8-10 pages) – Due Tuesday, March 15th to Canvas by 12pm
Your final paper will make an argument about one or more of the primary texts on our syllabus and support that argument using close reading as evidence. You must use at least one secondary source in your final paper. This is not an occasion to make broad, general claims about the state
of the world, all literature, or all people of a given time period, race, class, or gender. Rather, your goal is to make an argument about a specific text or texts, literary strategy, formal device, genre, form, character, and/or idea. The more specific you are, the more persuasive your paper will be. Make an argument and offer evidence from your chosen text(s) to support that argument. This means that you will quote from the text(s), observe and analyze both formal and thematic aspects of those quotations, and use your analysis to support a concrete argument in dialogue with the argument(s) of other scholars. You may choose to revise your close reading and/or your secondary source exercise from earlier in the term as part of your final paper. The purpose of this assignment is for you to bring together the skills and content you have learned in this class to make an argument you care about in a way that deepens our understanding of a text or texts that you think deserves our attention.

**Schedule**

**Week One**
Tuesday 1/4
Introduction
Syllabus

Thursday 1/6
Frances E. W. Harper, "Woman's Political Future" (1893)
Frances E. W. Harper, "The Slave Mother" (1854), "Vashti" (1857), "A Double Standard" (1895)

**Week Two**
Tuesday 1/11
Ida Wells-Barnett, "Lynch Law in America" (1900)
Close Reading Handout

Thursday 1/13
Alice Dunbar Nelson, "I Sit and I Sew" (1927); Mae V. Cowdery, "A Brown Aesthete Speaks" (1928); Angelina Weld Grimke’, "The Black Finger" (1923)

**Week Three**
Tuesday 1/18
Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), pages 1-76
Passive Voice Handout

Thursday 1/20
Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), pages 77-138

**Week Four**
Tuesday 1/25
Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), pages 139-193

Thursday 1/27
Gwendolyn Brooks, "A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon" (1960)
Close Reading (3-4 pages) Due
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<tr>
<th><strong>Week Five</strong></th>
<th>Wednesday 2/1</th>
<th>The Black Woman: An Anthology (1970), pages xi-73</th>
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<tr>
<td>Monday 2/3</td>
<td>The Black Woman: An Anthology (1970), pages 74-133</td>
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<td><strong>Week Six</strong></td>
<td>Wednesday 2/8</td>
<td>The Black Woman: An Anthology (1970), pages 134-202</td>
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<td><strong>Week Seven</strong></td>
<td>Wednesday 2/15</td>
<td>The Black Woman: An Anthology (1970), pages 268-327</td>
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<td>Monday 2/17</td>
<td>Combahee River Collective, &quot;Black Feminist Statement&quot; (1977)</td>
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<td><strong>Secondary Source Exercise (3-4 pages) Due</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Week Eight</strong></td>
<td>Wednesday 2/22</td>
<td>Barbara Smith, &quot;Toward a Black Feminist Criticism&quot; (1978)</td>
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<td><strong>Week Nine</strong></td>
<td>Wednesday 2/22</td>
<td>Barbara Christian, &quot;Diminishing Returns: Can Black Feminism(s) Survive the Academy? (1994)</td>
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<td>Monday 2/24</td>
<td>Mary Helen Washington, &quot;Disturbing the Peace: What Happens to American Studies If You Put African American Studies at the Center?&quot; Presidential Address to the American Studies Association (1997)</td>
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<td><strong>Week Ten</strong></td>
<td>Wednesday 2/22</td>
<td>Paper Proposal Workshop</td>
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<td>Monday 2/24</td>
<td>Paper Proposal (2-3 pages) Due</td>
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<td><strong>Exam Week</strong></td>
<td>Wednesday 2/22</td>
<td>Danielle Evans, &quot;Robert E. Lee is Dead&quot; (2010)</td>
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<td>Monday 2/24</td>
<td>Evie Shockley, &quot;dependencies&quot; (2011)</td>
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<td>Monday 2/24</td>
<td>Evie Shockley, &quot;what's not to liken?&quot; (2017)</td>
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