

## African American Literature, ENG 241, Syllabus: Spring 2017

MWF 10-10:50 Lillis 185

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Office Hours Spring 2017: Monday 2:15-3:15, Friday 1-3

### Course Description:

This course is a survey of writings by African American authors of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. We will study a range of genres, including fiction, poetry, drama, autobiography, and nonfiction, from the earliest published work by African Americans through to the present day. We will examine the formal connections of this tradition—how authors work and rework certain styles, techniques, genres, and structures. We will also examine how this tradition explores a diverse body of ideas which nonetheless coalesce around the preoccupations of identity, freedom, mobility, and security. These concerns are closely connected to how the writing and culture of African Americans reflected on and helped to shape American history. Slavery and its abolition, the imposition of segregation and Jim Crow, the Great Migration, war, civil rights, and the feminist movement form key moments in this relationship. We will also examine the interconnections between African American writing and various other cultural forms, including music, visual arts, and folklore. As well as giving this overview, the course will help you to practice and sharpen your abilities in critical reading and writing, and will enable you to make better arguments both orally and on the page.

### Course reading:

You must complete all the essential reading listed for each class, and come prepared to discuss it. This is a discussion-based classroom, and I expect everyone to have something to contribute in **every** session.

### Attendance:

At the beginning of each class you should sign the attendance register. You are allowed two unexcused absences. Missing classes beyond this without adequate excuse and documentation (such as a doctor's note) will result in your overall grade being lowered by 1/3 of a letter grade for each absence. **Five such absences results in a failing grade.** Please contact me at the earliest opportunity to discuss any unavoidable absences from class.

### Classroom Electronic Communications Policy:

In this class, cell phone use and the use of tablet devices is prohibited. All such devices should be stored in your bags or left at home. Laptop computers are permitted but only for activities related to the content of the class.

### Plagiarism:

All written work should be either your own or contain clear references to your sources; one of the hallmarks of good scholarship is being able to use the insights of others while keeping your ideas distinct from theirs. I expect you to abide by university regulations on the proper acknowledgement of source material, and to follow accepted conventions for how to reference scholarship. I advise you to check on the university's student conduct code (<http://policies.uoregon.edu/vol-3-administration-student-affairs/ch-1-conduct/student-conduct-code>), especially section v.1, for the detail of university policy on Academic Integrity. I also recommend MLA style for the presentation of your research papers. Information about how to prepare bibliographies and citations in MLA style can be found at the Purdue Online Writing Lab (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>), and at the Knightcite MLA citation application (<http://www.calvin.edu/library/knightcite/>).

**Late papers:**

Papers should be submitted in class on the day of the deadline listed. I will deduct 1/3 of a letter grade for each day a paper is late. I will not accept any paper that is more than a week late. Any request for extensions will be carefully considered, but should be made as far in advance of the due date as possible.

**Access Policy:**

The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or [uoaec@uoregon.edu](mailto:uoaec@uoregon.edu).

**Sexual Violence and Survivor Support Statement:**

The 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 (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences gender-based violence (intimate partner violence, attempted or completed sexual assault, harassment, coercion, stalking, etc.), know that you are not alone. UO has staff members trained to support survivors in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

Please be aware that all UO employees are required reporters. This means that if you tell me about a situation, I may have to report the information to my supervisor or the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity. Although I have to report the situation, you will still have options about how your case will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a formal complaint. Our goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and 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. You can also visit the SAFE website at [safe.uoregon.edu](http://safe.uoregon.edu).

**GRADED WORK**

This is broken into three types. Preparation assignments (the participation grade and quizzes) assess how well you have thought about the assigned reading, and how collaborative you are in talking about it--both with the whole class and in small groups. Take-home assignments will ask you to do research, work on multiple drafts, and hone a written argument. In-class exams will test your ability to demonstrate a good all-round knowledge of the course. They will also test how well you can respond to the language and style as well as the themes of literary texts, as you analyze excerpts from selected works we've studied.

**Participation 10%**

I will reward students who approach discussion in an enthusiastic, informed, and collegial way. Both I and your fellow students will appreciate informed opinions, critical insight, a willingness to take a few risks, and respect for others. I will occasionally set small in-class activities and presentations which will also count towards this grade.

**Quizzes 10%**

These will be simple questions designed to test your knowledge of the assigned readings for the day.

**Close reading exercise I (3-4 pages) 15%**

This will give you several short sections of writing to analyze. You will choose one and write a short response which carefully considers the style of the piece and the ideas it presents. There will also be a creative option for this assignment. More details will be given in advance of the due date.

**Midterm 20%**

This will ask you to interpret/analyze either a short poem, or an extract from one of the prose texts we've studied.

**Critical paper (6-7 pages) 25%**

This will allow you to write a more complex and lengthy response to one or more texts which you have found particularly interesting, and to use secondary criticism on those texts to sharpen your analysis. You can choose one prompt from several that will be provided two weeks before the due date.

**Final 20%**

This will give you a series of exam questions to choose from. Sample exam questions will be distributed two weeks ahead of the exam.

**ESSENTIAL READING:** please purchase these texts or arrange access for them for the duration of the course. These texts are available at the Duckstore.

*The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, 3rd Ed., Vol. I. Ed. Henry Louis Gates and Valerie A. Smith. New York: Norton, 2014. ISBN 978-0-393-92369-8.

Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. HarperPerennial, 2006. 0061120065

Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*. New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2015. 1925240703

**IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT YOU BRING THESE BOOKS—AND PRINTOUTS OF INDIVIDUAL STORIES OR POEMS FROM CANVAS—TO CLASS.** You should also get into the habit of marking up your books as you go along: it will help you focus your reactions and ideas for class discussion, and will improve the detail and insight of your written papers.

**Week One: Introductions and beginnings**

M 4/3: Introductions

W 4/5: Transport in Early America. Olaudah Equiano, "The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, Written by Himself," *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, 112-137.

F 4/7: Phyllis Wheatley, selections from *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp.137-150.

**Week Two: The slave narrative**

M 4/10: The Literature of Slavery and Freedom, *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp.75-87.

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself*. Chapters 1-6. *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp. 326-352.

W 4/12: Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself*. Chapters 7-10. *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp. 352-380.

F 4/14: Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself*. Chapters 11-appendix. *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp. 381- 393.

### **Week Three: the slave narrative continued and into the nadir**

#### **M 4/17: CLOSE READING EXERCISE DUE**

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp. 221-241.

W 4/19: Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp. 241-261.

F 4/22: "Literature of the Reconstruction to the New Negro Renaissance," *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp. 505-520.

Paul Lawrence Dunbar, poems, *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp.894-915.

### **Week Four: Harlem Renaissance I: Nella Larsen**

M 4/24: Introduction to the Harlem Renaissance, *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp. 929-944.

Nella Larsen, *Passing* part I, *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp. 1079-1103.

W 4/26: Nella Larsen, *Passing* part II, *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp. 1104-1122.

F 4/28: Nella Larsen, *Passing* part III, *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp. 1122-1141.

### **Week Five: Harlem Renaissance II: Langston Hughes**

#### **M 5/1: MIDTERM**

W 5/3: Langston Hughes, *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp.1302-1320.

F 5/5: Langston Hughes, *Norton Anthology of African American Literature Vol. I*, pp. 1320-1337.

## **Week Six: Hurston and the folk novel**

M 5/8: Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, chapters 1-6.

W 5/10: Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, chapters 7-11

F 5/12: Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, chapters 8-14.

## **Week Seven: the Hurston-Wright debate**

M 5/15: Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, chapters 15-20.

W 5/17: Richard Wright, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," "Big Boy Leaves Home." On Canvas.

F 5/19: Richard Wright, review of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; Zora Neale Hurston, review of *Uncle Tom's Children*. On Canvas.

## **Week Eight: Radical imaginations**

M 5/22: James Baldwin, "Notes from a Native Son," "Stranger in the Village," "My Dungeon Shook: Letter to my Nephew on the One-Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation." On Canvas.

W 5/24: Amiri Baraka, "Black Art," "Dutchman." Amiri Baraka on James Baldwin, <https://pen.org/our-man-jimmy-amiri-baraka-on-james-baldwin/>  
Articles on Canvas.

### **F 5/26: CRITICAL PAPER DUE**

James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues," "Everybody's Protest Novel." On Canvas. In-class discussion assignment.

## **Week Nine: *Between the World and Me***

M 5/29: MEMORIAL DAY: NO CLASS

W 5/31: Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, Parts I and II: pp.1-132

F 6/2: *Between the World and Me*, Part III: pp.133-152

## **Week Ten: the contemporary period**

M 6/5: Toni Morrison, "Recitatif," on Canvas.

W 6/7: Contemporary poems. A sheaf of poems by Harryette Mullen, Rita Dove, Lucille Clifton. On Canvas.

F 6/9: Recap and revision.

### **T 6/13: TIMED FINAL PAPER DUE**