



# AFRICAN-AMERICAN LITERATURE

ENG 2258  
Section 01  
Spring 2006  
TR 3:00 – 4:30

Hill Hall, Room 221

Dr. Timothy K. Nixon  
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Office Hours: MW 1:00 – 2:00, 5:00 – 6:00

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is a study of the African-American literary legacy, which traces its history as a distinct tradition and, simultaneously, an important part of the dominant American literary heritage. With a special emphasis on black minority culture, experience, and perspective, this course explores the intersections of race, gender, and class in America.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course will engage the student in the study of key texts and writers within the African-American literary tradition, from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present. While the course is structured chronologically, and while substantial time will be spent in placing the works in their sociohistorical contexts, the examination of the aesthetics of African-American literature will be equally important. Some of the theoretical concepts that will facilitate this aesthetic enquiry include double consciousness, vernacular language, oral traditions, masking, and signifying.

By the end of the semester, the student should be familiar with key works of prose, poetry, and drama in African-American literature and be able to place them in their appropriate historical context. The student will have been introduced to key theories in the study of African-American literature. The student will further develop his or her critical acumen. And the student will have had ample opportunities to reflect on current issues of race and race relations.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed. New York: Signet, 1995.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr., and Nellie Y. McKay, eds. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Norton, 2004.

Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. New York: Plume, 2000.

Various articles, short stories, and poems on line on Blackboard.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Critical Essay	30%
Theory Critique	20%
Encyclopedia Entry	20%
Oral Presentation	15%
Forum/Listserv Postings	15%

Critical Essay: The critical essay will be a scholarly analysis of some African-American text or author. The student is free to select a topic from among the items to be covered in class, but no one is limited to the course material for this essay. There are many works and authors that

will not be addressed in this class, and students should feel free to write about any of them, as long as they discuss their proposed topic with the instructor first. The paper should be eight to ten pages in length. It should demonstrate the student's skills as a close reader, a careful researcher, and a critical thinker.

The essay must be typed and double-spaced. *Everything* in the paper should be double-spaced, including block quotations and the works cited page! Students should use one-inch margins on all four sides of the page and a legible, fairly standard font when preparing their papers. (Examples of acceptable fonts include Times New Roman 12 pt. or Arial 11 pt.) The student's name, the course title, the instructor's name, and the date should be typed and double-spaced in the upper left corner of the first page of the composition. Students should number all pages and ensure the entire package is stapled together. References to the work(s) under consideration and any secondary sources should be documented parenthetically, and a works cited page, adhering to the MLA style guide, should be included as part of the paper.



Oral Presentation: Throughout the semester students will be called upon to provide the class with information on cultural and historical ancillaries to the literature being discussed. This information sharing will take the form of oral presentations, and its purpose is to provide a broader context to the discussions that will occur on writers and their work. Each student will be required to deliver one presentation to the entire class on a topic she or he has selected from the list of presentations found in the Course Schedule section of this syllabus.

The oral presentation should last about ten to twelve minutes. Students are to provide a brief (single page) handout with significant points or an outline of the presentation to each class member. References to any secondary sources used in the preparation of the presentation should be included in a works cited section, adhering to the MLA style guide, at the bottom of this handout. After receiving a grade and comments on the presentation from the instructor, students will need to upload an electronic version of this handout to Blackboard.

These presentations will be graded on delivery, content, research, and relevance. Concerning relevance, students need to ensure that their presentations conclude by highlighting how the topic contributes to our understanding and appreciation of the literary material under discussion. Also, creativity in the presentation and handouts will be looked upon kindly. Finally, students must ensure that their presentations do not run long, because one letter grade will be deducted from the presenter's grade for each minute she or he runs on beyond the fifteen-minute mark!

Forum/Listserv Postings: Over the course of the semester, each student will post frequent observations to the class discussion forum in Blackboard. These postings should primarily be about the readings being discussed that week in class. (In other words, the posting should appear *before* the discussion occurs.) Postings should be specific and focused in their observations, but raising questions about the readings is appropriate, too. A minority—no more than three—of the student's postings can be about either thoughts he or she has had following class discussions or a response to someone else's posting. Should students choose the latter, they should be civil and respectful in reacting to a

classmate's prior posting! These postings should be a minimum of fifty words. It would be wise to spread these out over the course of the semester—don't leave them all for the last couple of weeks! If the student wants to earn at least a C- on the postings, he or she must do eight. To earn at least a B-, he or she must do nine. To earn at least an A-, he or she must do ten. The postings will be graded largely on the fact that they have been done; distinctions between + and – work will be made for the quality and sophistication of the postings.

Guidelines for the theory critique and the encyclopedia entry will be distributed separately.

## **GRADING SCALE**

The following grading scale will be used in this class:

A+	100-99
A	98-94
A-	93-92
B+	91-90
B	89-85
B-	84-83
C+	82-81
C	80-76
C-	75-74
D+	73-72
D	71-67
D-	66-65
F	64-0

## **CLASS POLICIES**

Students are expected to be present, on time, and prepared for discussion whenever the class is scheduled to meet. However, things conflicting with class attendance invariably arise. At this point, each student should have the maturity and professionalism necessary to monitor his or her own attendance. If there is some extenuating circumstance that prevents the student from attending class, he or she should talk with the instructor before or after class or during his office hours about this matter. For his part, the instructor reserves the right to penalize a student's final grade for excessive absences (more than four) and consistent tardies.

Plagiarism is a serious matter, and the College has set high standards for academic integrity. Therefore, class members should familiarize themselves with the McDaniel College Honor Code and read carefully the sections on academic dishonesty and the repercussions associated with any violations. A set of questions and answers about the Honor Code can be found on the McDaniel College web site at <http://www.mcdaniel.edu/students/honorcode.shtml>.

Out of respect for colleagues and the instructor, students are asked to turn off (or leave at home) cell phones and pagers before coming to class.

If a student wants to discuss a grade on a paper or assignment, he or she should meet with the instructor in his office during office hours or at a mutually agreed upon appointment. The instructor will not discuss grades in the classroom.

It is the policy of the College that classes should, whenever possible, meet as scheduled. However, extreme weather conditions do sometimes arise, especially at the beginning of the spring semester. In the event that the instructor cannot make it to campus, he will notify the class by email and with a Blackboard posting.

#### **SPECIAL NOTE**

Any student who may need an accommodation due to a disability should make an appointment to see the instructor during his office hours or at another mutually agreed upon time. This meeting should occur as early in the semester as is possible so the instructor can make appropriate arrangements. A letter from the Student Academic Support Services office authorizing any such accommodations will be needed.

#### **COURSE SCHEDULE**

Note: Please be aware that the following schedule may change over the course of the semester. Discussions that are vibrant and productive are more important than staying bound to the schedule.

Items marked "(B)" can be found on Blackboard. Items marked "(N)" can be found in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Items marked "(SB)" can be found in *The Souls of Black Folk*.

#### Week 1: Preliminary Matters & Theoretical Foundations

- 1/24 Introductions, review of syllabus, and discussion/exercise.  
1/26 W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Forethought" and "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" (SB 41-53); Arthur Schomburg, "The Negro Digs Up His Past" (N 963-67); Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (N 1311-14); Richard Wright, "Blueprint for Negro Writing" (N 1403-10).

#### Week 2: Theoretical Foundations (Cont'd.)

- 1/31 Houston A. Baker, Jr., "On the Criticism of Black American Literature: One View of the Black Aesthetic" (B); Henry Louis Gates, "Introduction to *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*" (B); W. E. B. Du Bois, "Of the Sorrow Songs" (SB 264-76).  
2/2 Alice Walker, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" (N 2430-37); Barbara Smith, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" (B); Deborah E. McDowell, "New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism" (B)

#### Week 3: Early Voices—Slavery & Insurrection

- 2/7 Venture Smith, "A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, A Native of Africa" (N 170-85); Olaudah Equiano, excerpts from *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (N 189-213). **Presentation: The Atlantic Slave Trade.**  
2/9 **Theory critique due.** Lucy Terry, "Bars Fight" (N 186-87); Phillis Wheatley, poems and related matter (N 216-26). **Presentation: Slavery in America's Northern Colonies and States.**

#### Week 4: Early Voices—Slavery & Insurrection (Cont'd.)

- 2/14 David Walker, excerpts from *David Walker's Appeal in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (N 228-38); Henry Highland Garnet, "An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America" (N 346-52). **Presentation: Nat Turner.**  
2/16 Sojourner Truth, "Ar'n't I a Woman?" (N 246-47) and the excerpt from *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth, 1878* (N 247-49); Harriet Jacobs, excerpts from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (N 280-315). **Presentation: Women's Suffrage Movements in the US. Presentation: Rebecca Cox Jackson.**

Week 5: Early Voices—Slavery & Insurrection (Cont'd.)

- 2/21 Frederick Douglass, *The Heroic Slave* (B) and excerpt from “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” (N 462-73). **Presentation: Creole Slave Rebellion. Presentation: Dred Scott v. Sanford.**
- 2/23 Victor Séjour, “The Mulatto” (N 353-65); Harriet Wilson, excerpts from *Our Nig* (N 523-40). **Presentation: Miscegenation.**

Week 6: Reconstruction & Renaissance

- 2/28 Booker T. Washington, excerpts from *Up From Slavery* (N 572-602). **Presentation: George Washington Carver. Presentation: Historically Black Colleges.**
- 3/2 W. E. B. Du Bois, “Of the Dawn of Freedom,” “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others,” and “Of the Training of Black Men” (SB 54-95, 121-39). **Presentation: Marcus Garvey. Presentation: The NAACP.**

Week 7: Reconstruction & Renaissance (Cont'd.)

- 3/7 **Encyclopedia entry due.** Paul Laurence Dunbar, *Poems* (N 907-27). **Presentation: Minstrelsy.**
- 3/9 Charles W. Chestnutt, “The Goophered Grapevine” and “The Wife of His Youth” (N 604-12, 624-32); Alice Moore Dunbar Nelson, “The Stones of the Village” (B); W. E. B. Du Bois, “Of the Coming of John” (SB 245-63); Zora Neale Hurston, “Sweat” (N 1022-30). **Presentation: Plessy v. Ferguson.**

Week 8: Reconstruction & Renaissance (Cont'd.)

- 3/14 **Spring Break—no class!**
- 3/16 **Spring Break—no class!**

Week 9: Reconstruction & Renaissance (Cont'd.)

- 3/21 James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (N 803-43). **Presentation: The New Negro Renaissance. Presentation: Passing.**
- 3/23 James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (N 843-83). **Presentation: Lynching. Presentation: Ida B. Wells.**

Week 10: Reconstruction & Renaissance (Cont'd.)

- 3/28 James Weldon Johnson, “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing” (N 794); Alain Locke, “The New Negro” (N 984-93); Claude McKay, “If We Must Die,” “Africa,” and “America” (N 1007-08); Countee Cullen, “Yet Do I Marvel” and “Heritage” (N 1341, 1347-50).
- 3/30 Langston Hughes, poems and excerpts from *The Big Sea* (N 1291-1311, 1325-39). **Presentation: The Blues.**

Week 11: Modern Voices

- 4/4 Richard Wright, “The Ethics of Living Jim Crow, an Autobiographical Sketch,” and excerpts from *Black Boy* (N 1411-19, 1471-87); James Baldwin, essays and “Going to Meet the Man” (N 1699-1727, 1750-61). **Presentation: Jim Crow. Presentation: Brown v. The Board of Education.**
- 4/6 Gwendolyn Brooks, *Maud Martha* (N 1649-96). **Presentation: Jazz.**

Week 12: Modern Voices (Cont'd.)

- 4/11 Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (N 1771-1830). **Presentation: Hansberry v. Lee.**  
4/13 Robert Hayden, "Frederick Douglass," "El-Hajj Malik El-shabazz," and "A Letter from Phillis Wheatley" (N 1528, 1531-34); Margaret Walker, "For My People" and "Poppa Chicken" (N 1619-20); Bob Kaufman, "Jail Poems" (N 1764-68); Amiri Baraka, "A Poem for Black Hearts" (N 1940-41); Michael Harper, "Dear John, Dear Coltrane" (N 2071-72); Nikki Giovanni, "Ego Tripping" (B).  
**Presentation: The Black Arts Movement. Presentation: Black Nationalism. Presentation: Malcolm X.**

Week 13: Contemporary Voices

- 4/18 **Critical essay due.** Samuel R. Delany, excerpt from *Atlantis: Model 1924* (N 2393-2411); Octavia Butler, "Bloodchild" (2516-29).  
4/20 August Wilson, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (N 2459-2504).

Week 14: Contemporary Voices (Cont'd.)

- 4/25 Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1-93). **Presentation: The Great Migration.**  
4/27 Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (97-206).

Week 15: Contemporary Voices (Cont'd.)

- 5/2 Alice Walker, "Women" and "Everyday Use" (N 2427, 2437-42); Rita Dove, Poems (N 2613-23).  
5/4 Randall Kenan, "Clarence and The Dead" and "Let the Dead Bury Their Dead" (B).  
**Presentation: Maroon Societies.**