

The University of Jordan

Faculty of Foreign Languages

Department of English

Postgraduate Program: PhD in English Literature & Criticism

Prepared by: Dr. Tahrir Hamdi

We bear witness here to a protracted argument over the nature of the sign itself, with the black vernacular discourse proffering the critique of the sign as the difference that blackness makes within the larger political culture and its historical conscious.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

Term: Spring 2014/2015

Course Code: 2201952

Course Title: African American Literature

Credits: 3 Credit Hours

Prerequisite: None

Instructor: Dr. Tahrir Hamdi

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Course Description:

This course is an in-depth exploration of the major genres, themes, styles, and traditions of African-American literature. It provides students with greater awareness of the black experience within the majority culture. Using representative works in fiction, non-fiction, prose, poetry, oratory, and criticism, the course critically examines the African American experience from the cultural, historical, and sociopolitical perspectives of the African American writers.

Course Objectives:

- 1.) To introduce students to African American history and culture and allow them to understand what is meant by the black experience.

- 2.) To provide students with a representative selection of African American oratory, poetry, fiction, drama, autobiography and theory.
- 3.) To introduce students to leading figures in African American literature, including poets, novelists and dramatists.
- 4.) To acquaint students with prominent African American leaders, such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King.
- 5.) To explore the strong relationship between history, culture and literature.
- 6.) To consider how literature and the power of the word can help initiate change in society.
- 7.) To explore key thematic topics in African American literature, such as slavery, discrimination and racism, identity, black power, black pride, African roots, segregation, civil rights, revolution and others.
- 8.) To introduce students to important stylistic and rhetorical features of African American literature.
- 9.) To understand how African American literature and culture have influenced the greater American culture.
- 10.) To train students how to write a solid scholarly piece of writing on one of the writers studied in the course.

Learning Outcomes:

- Students will develop in-depth understanding of African American literature in its American and world historical and social context.
- Students will develop an understanding of how those specific contextual details affect literary history.
- Students will develop the ability to apply theoretical argument to the historical conditions that shape the production of literature.
- Students will recognize the implications of different critical and theoretical readings as culturally invested products.
- Students will understand the points of congruence between literature and other disciplines.
- Students will demonstrate in both oral and written work a discipline-specific critical facility through convincing and well-supported analysis of related material.
- Students will demonstrate their command of academic English and the tenets of sound composition by means of thesis-driven analytical prose.
- Students will learn to use discipline-specific computer technologies related to the study of literature such as internet research.

Texts:

The Norton Anthology of African American Literature by Henry Louis Gates JR. and Valerie A. Smith, Third Edition, W.W. Norton & Company, 2014.

Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, HarperCollins, 1937.

Richard Wright, from *Uncle Tom's Children*, Harper & Brothers, 1938.

Ralph Ellison, from *Invisible Man*, Random House, 1952.

Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, S. French, [1959] 1984.

Paule Marshall, *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, The Feminist Press, [1959], 1981.

Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X with the assistance of Alex Haley*, Penguin Books, 1968.

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, A Plume Book, [1987] 1988.

Toni Morrison, *Unspeakable Things Unspoken: the Afro-American Presence in American Literature*, The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Delivered at the University of Michigan, 7 October, 1988.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African- American Literary Criticism*, Oxford University Press, 1988.

Kenneth W. Warren, *What was African American Literature?*, Harvard University Press, 2011.

Supplementary Readings

Deborah Gray White, *Ar'nt I a Woman?*, W.W. Norton, 1985.

Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*, 1987.

John Ernest, *Chaotic Justice: Rethinking African American Literary History*, 2009.

Gene Andrew Jarrett, *Representing the Race: A New Political History of African American Literature*, 2011.

Weekly Course Assignments (Tentative)

Week One:

Introduction: Background information, knowledge of African American culture and history, key concepts, such as slavery, antebellum, Negro Spirituals, signifying, Jim Crow laws and segregation, Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) and separate but equal, Brown v. Board of Education (1954) Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968) , Civil Rights Act of 1964, Black Power (1965-1980), jazz, blues and rap.

Barbara Christian "The Race for Theory" (1987)

Week Two:

Theoretical Framework

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African- American Literary Criticism* (1988)

Kermit E. Campbell: “The *Signifying Monkey* Revisited: Vernacular Discourse and African American Personal Narratives”

Hazel V. Carby: “The Blackness of Theory”

Notes by Steven J. Venturino: “Notes on Gates’s *Signifying Monkey*”

Kenneth W. Warren: *What was African American Literature?* Chapter one (2011)

Melissa Asher Daniels and Gregory Laski: Assessing *What Was African American Literature?*; or, The State of the Field in the New Millennium

Week Three:

Antebellum literature: Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784)

Slave narrative: Frederick Douglass (1818-1895)

Negro Spirituals: A selection (1860s)

Week Four:

The Harlem Renaissance or New Negro Movement (1920s)

Poets: Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay

Week Five:

Novelists: Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)

Week Six:

Richard Wright: *Big Boy Leaves Home* from *Uncle Tom’s Children* (1938)

Ralph Ellison from *Invisible Man* (1952)

Week Seven:

Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968) (Most prominent figures: James Baldwin and Alice Walker, not studied here)

Martin Luther King Jr. "I Have a Dream" (1963)

Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959)

Week Eight:

The Black Arts Movement and Black Power (1965-1980):

Malcolm X, from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1925-1965)

Amiri Baraka (Everett Leroi Jones): Selected Poems (1934-2014)

Week Nine:

Midterm Exam:

The midterm exam will cover all the material we studied up to this date.

30 marks

Week Ten:

Renaissance in the 1970s and beyond

Toni Morrison: *Beloved* (1987)

Week Eleven:

Renaissance continued

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* continued

Week Twelve:

Renaissance continued

Either Paule Marshall, Alice Walker or Jamaica Kincaid (to be decided later depending on time constraints).

Week Thirteen:

Theoretical Framework again

Christine MacLeod, "Black American Literature and the Postcolonial Debate" (1997)

Toni Morrison, *Unspeakable Things Unspoken: the Afro-American Presence in American Literature* (1988)

Week Fourteen:

Term papers due. Each student is expected to give a ten minute presentation on her/his paper.

Term papers are worth 30 marks of your grade

Short review for the final exam (40 marks)

Requirements:

Coursework: Required work for the course includes careful reading of all assigned materials and active participation in class discussions. Please come to class with questions and comments about the assigned reading for each day—the success of the course depends on your involvement.

Term Paper: About 4500-6000 words long; please include a title page and a works cited page, double spaced, Times New Roman, font 12. This critical essay develops ideas prompted by our study and discussion of the assigned materials and related scholarship, informed by your perspectives and interests regarding the texts we have considered this semester.

Your topic should:

- tackle one of the authors studied in the course
- focus on historical, social, socio-economic, cultural and aesthetic aspects of the chosen literary text
- include a close reading of a certain part of the chosen literary text
- address theoretical issues discussed in the course in relation to the chosen text
- avoid plagiarism completely and document meticulously

Important Notice:

Your term paper must be submitted at least one week before the final exam. **I will not accept late papers.**

Make-up exams will not be given except on rare occasions when the student has documentation to prove a serious illness or accident.

Attendance:

Regular attendance and participation are requirements to pass the course. Absences of two or more will lower your mark in this course. You are responsible for all work covered during your absence.

Plagiarism:

Simply put, plagiarism is literary theft. Therefore, taking other people's ideas or words with proper documentation will result in a grade of "F" in the course. Feel free to ask me about the mechanics of research documentation.

Grading:

Midterm exam: 30 marks

Term paper: 30 marks

Final exam: 40 marks

References:

Winston Napier, ed. *African American Literary Theory: A Reader*. NYU Press, 2000.

John Cullen Gruesser. *Confluences: Postcolonialism, African American Literary Studies, and the Black Atlantic*. University of Georgia Press, 2005.

Barbara Christian. *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892-1974*. Greenwood Press, 1980.

Baratunde Thurston. *How to be Black*. HarperCollins, 2012.

Joyce Ladner. *Tomorrow's Tomorrow: The Black Woman*. Doubleday & Company. Garden City, 1972.

Isabel Wilkerson. *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*. Random House, 2011.

Genevieve Fabre and Robert O'Meally. *History and Memory in African American Culture*. Oxford University Press, 1994.

Shane White and Graham White. *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit*. Cornell University Press, 1998.

William L. Van Deburg. *Black Camelot: African American Culture Heroes in their Times, 1960-1980*. University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Joel Dinerstein. *Swinging the Machine: Modernity, Technology, and African American Culture between the World Wars*. University of Massachusetts Press, 2003.

Vonnie C. McLoyd, Nancy E. Hill and Kenneth Dodge. *African American Family life: Ecological and Cultural Diversity*. Guilford Press, 2005.

Micheal L. Hecht, Ronald L. Jackson II and Sidney A. Ribeau. *African American Communication: Exploring Identity and Culture*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003.

Gina Philogene. *From Black to African American: A New Social Representation*. Praeger, 1999.

Christopher H. Foreman Jr. *The African-American Predicament*. Brookings Institution Press, 1999.

Clovis E. Semmes. *Cultural Hegemony and African American Development*. Praeger, 1992.

James C. Hall. *Mercy, Mercy Me: African American Culture and the American Sixties*. Oxford University Press, 2001.

Kiese Laymon. *How to Kill Yourself and Others in America*. Agate Bolden, 2013.