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
Email: tahrirhamdi@yahoo.com
Mobile No.: 0799608112

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:**


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


**Supplementary Readings**


**Weekly Course Assignments** (Tentative)

**Week One:**


**Week Two:**

Theoretical Framework


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):


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)

**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:


