

SURVEY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Course: 4380/5380 African American Literature
Class Meetings: MW 2:00 – 3:15 in 304 Irby Hall
Instructor: Dr. Isiah Lavender, III
Office: 401 Irby Hall
Office Hours: MW 8 a.m. – 12 p.m., TTh 2:30 – 3:30 p.m., and by appointment
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BOOKS: Available at UCA Bookstore:

African American Literature: A Concise Anthology... Ed. Magedah E. Shabo
The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man. James Weldon Johnson
Clotel: or, The President's Daughter. William Wells Brown
The Color Purple. Alice Walker
The Fire Next Time. James Baldwin
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. Maya Angelou's
Joe Turner's Come and Gone. August Wilson
Of Love and Dust. Ernest J. Gaines
The Narrows. Ann Petry
Topdog/underdog. Suzan-Lori Parks

Recommended:

The Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature. Eds. Andrews, Foster, and Harris

Course Description: This survey of the African American literary canon will consider themes such as black identity in crisis, the tragic mulatto, interracial love, and family as well as race relations in general. All major periods from the era of slavery up to the present will be covered. My goal is to ensure that we establish historical, cultural, and interpretive frameworks which will enable students to continue to teach themselves about African American literature and culture after taking this class.

Expectations: My expectations are very high, and you should demand the same from me, and especially from one another: if you come to class prepared to fully engage with the material, you should expect the same from everyone in the room. Every absence or withheld participation is palpable; I therefore expect regular attendance, consistent preparation, and active participation. Finally, I expect all of us to have fun because learning should be and can be fun. For my part, I will try to cultivate a lively discussion for each class.

Responsibilities and Behavior: Remember that you only have time for the activity that you put first, and by signing up for this course you are agreeing to put this class first during the specified time period. While I am always willing to work with a student in the event of a legitimate emergency such as the death of an immediate family member or a student's own emergency hospitalization, you should schedule dental appointments, elective surgery, court appearances, family celebrations, work, and any other non-emergency activity outside of class time. Keep a written record of your absences/tardies so that you know your precise status as I will be doing so.

It is your responsibility either to resolve potential conflicts well in advance of an exam in the exam's favor or to drop the course; never presume upon me to solve your conflict for you. Each absence after **four** absences lowers your final grade for the class by ten points. Absences are not excused or unexcused, so use your absences wisely. Any rare exceptions to this policy will be determined on a case-by-case basis; it is your responsibility to contact me immediately to inquire about an exception if such a situation occurs. If you have **four** consecutive absences, you will be dropped from the class. You paid your money to take your chances. If you miss class, you will get behind as well as miss important discussions which further understanding of the works being examined. You need to be here. Arriving to class late—after the official start time or after me—means you will have to work *twice as hard to receive half a point for the day's discussion.*

As we are all adults here, and this is a university campus, it should be understood that respect for the instructor, fellow students, and the material itself is required. This means, **DO NOT COME TO CLASS LATE. DO NOT LEAVE CLASS EARLY. TURN ALL CELL PHONES OR ANY OTHER GADGETS THAT MAKE NOISE ‘OFF’ AT THE DOOR.** Do not work on other assignments for other classes. Do not converse with others randomly during the lecture. Do not sleep (this is not nap-time). Do not **CHEAT. ANY BEHAVIOR** that inhibits the ability of students to learn **WILL NOT BE TOLERATED** and could result in **BEING DISMISSED FROM THE CLASS—PERMANENTLY.** Disruptive Behavior should not be a part of the classroom environment. You will get a warning for the first infraction of this rule. The first warning will be penalized as an absence; in addition to forfeiting all credit on any graded assignment that day. The second instance will result in your being dropped from the class.

Academic Misconduct (page 36 in your student handbook): Avoid even the appearance of possible impropriety during an exam or quiz; leave books and notebooks closed and out of sight; do not let your eyes stray to another’s paper; do not leave the room while the exam is in progress; speak only to the instructor or the exam proctor. A grade of zero will be assigned to any quiz or exam the integrity of which has been opened to question in any way.

Late work: Outside work is due at the start of the specified period; **I DO NOT ACCEPT** late work with two exceptions—a death in the family accompanied by an obituary or funeral program and emergency hospitalization supplemented by admittance papers.

GRADING: Course requirements include active participation in discussion, weekly reaction questions, 4 reader responses, a bibliographic project, a research paper, and a final exam. All formal writing assignments must be typed in a **12 point Times New Roman font and also be double-spaced with 1-inch margins.** In addition, **all essays and responses must have titles.** Any assignment that does not meet these specific requirements **in addition to length obligations** will receive an X grade and no feedback; an X grade garners zero credit at the end of the semester unless you redo it to my satisfaction. You and you alone are responsible for the condition and submission of your assignments. **DO NOT** rely on spell check alone. **PROOFREAD** your papers and save them. However, I encourage you to seek me out and discuss your ideas or lack thereof and to bring drafts to me. Keep all graded assignments easily available for consultation until after the final grade has been recorded, both so that you may compute your average at any point in the semester, and so that any dispute over the final grade’s computation may be efficiently resolved. There are **100 points** for the semester.

Graduate students will also do independent reading from selections on the MA Reading List (Hurstons’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, Wright’s *Native Son*, and Morrison’s *Beloved*), meet with me as a group to discuss these novels, and then write reader responses to each one.

Participation –This class is discussion oriented which makes your energetic participation essential in having a successful and productive semester. Thus, it is your obligation to read and prepare the assigned readings for class. I strongly encourage you to express your pleasure in as well as your frustration with the readings because this will stimulate and inspire discussion in the classroom. Attendance is crucial. Another avenue of earning participation points for students who are afraid of speaking in class is by making your opinion known to me via email exchange where you and I will have an electronic exchange of ideas and thoughts. Silent people receive zero points for each class that they are silent (live or internet). **(1 point per class meeting)***Graduate students are expected to orally participate each class period.**

Reader Responses – Ideally, these response papers will be a kind of diary where you contemplate issues, ideas, questions raised by the assigned readings and discussion. This affords me an opportunity to eavesdrop on “HOW” you are processing and engaging the material. Likewise, these response papers serve as a way for you to organize your developing thoughts, and recognize relationships between texts

and ideas that you have about texts. Keep in mind that reading only succeeds if you gain “meaning,” and the meaning(s) that you gain are transmitted in your interpretations. One possible way to do this assignment would be to provide an answer to one of your questions. You can write on any material covered in class, whether it is a response to another person’s expressed view or your own reading of a text or texts. For example, you could explain how and why a particular passage or line provokes a response from you or why the reading assignment is torturous to complete. What you cannot do is turn in a response on a particular text after we are finished with it or turn in more than one response on a text. This means any response written on a particular text must be turned in on the last day it is listed on the class schedule. Each response should be *no less than two full pages*. You are responsible for 4 responses. **(5 points each)**

Weekly Reaction Questions – Each student is responsible for supplying at least one question on a weekly basis for the class to consider about our reading whether I use them or not. Questions may concern whatever fascinates, arouses, disturbs, or confuses you about a text, character, situation, cultural moment, or something else entirely. Questions may be submitted in legible handwriting at the beginning of class or via email the night before class. Handing a question in during the middle of class or at the end of the period will disqualify you for the weekly point. Questions which display an honest, thoughtful attempt to gain insight into a text will make you eligible for the weekly point. Superficial questions will net you a zero at the end of the week. Failing to turn in a question every class period for a given week will result in a zero at the end of the week. **(1 point a week)**

Bibliographic Project – This annotated bibliography functions to present a survey of the literature on an issue, author, or text of your own choosing. Basically, an annotated bibliography presents your review of the secondary writings on a particular writer or work. The bibliography presents your overview of articles, books, etc. that you have read and outlines the major points of these works as well as, and crucially, the significant contribution it makes to an argument or idea of your own. While you will pay attention to (1) outline the articles main focus, you must also (2) demonstrate how that critical piece ties into a topic at issue in this course, and briefly (3) relate it to an issue/idea of concern to you. Generally, annotations run about a paragraph and can be thought of as a mini book or article review. This is by all accounts a research assignment, and as such it serves the purpose of getting you involved in the technical aspects of literary studies. As well, and more directly, it commences the process that will allow you to produce an informed research paper. The approximately 5-7 double spaced pages of bibliography should provide you with enough critical voices (*8-10*) to incorporate into your final essay and toward which you will direct your discussion. This project is due **Wednesday, April 7, 2010**. The Annotated Bibliography is worth **100 points**.

Research Paper – The research paper provides critical discussion of the themes outlined in the course description and ideas considered and pursued in the reader response journals. You will be asked to posit an argument that can be engagingly sustained for **10 to 12 pages**. This is not an easy task. The idea here is that you will build to this point using your previous assignments as steps in the process (i.e. your weekly response questions could form the crux of your argument). The questions that you might address are quite open: “What issues raised by the work, or critical to the author, have not been discussed?” The key to the argument is to view it as “problem solving.” What is the problem you see, the question you have. The essay then proceeds to answer that question, to present your claims, and the critical warrants for them. This essay will, of course, require extrinsic analysis—using information outside of the text to discuss a narrative message and/or theme. But, you must choose from several modes. For example, how an author’s history and/or literary corpus constitute a critical lens through which the text in question can be read. Or, you may compare one author’s treatment of an issue with how the same issue is handled by some other author. For this research paper you will have two very helpful tools at hand: your collective reader responses, which will hopefully highlight specific texts and moments upon which you can focus and the annotated bibliography, which contains your research to date. This paper is due on **Wednesday, April 21, 2010**. This paper is worth **100 points**.

*****Graduate students will write a longer 15-20 page term paper. The catch here is that the author and work selected must come from the MA Reading list. The essay is due on Monday, April 26, 2010. [Beloved, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Invisible Man, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, Native Son, The Souls of Black Folk, Their Eyes Were Watching God, Up from Slavery, and poetry selections from Phillis Wheatley and Langston Hughes]**

Plagiarism -- the act of passing off the ideas or words of another as your own without crediting the source -- is not acceptable and will be severely penalized, meaning an F for the course. Of course, you can use outside sources in as long as you cite them properly using MLA style. Please do not hesitate to ask whether something should be cited if you are unsure.

Final – The final exam will be composed of two parts. On the first part, you will choose to write on one of three essay questions. On the second part, you will identify the text and author from which a quote or character is taken and explain its relevance. You will choose 12 out of 20 ID items and explain in complete sentences. The final exam is worth **15 points**.

Grade Scale: A 91 and Above; B 90-80; C 79-70; D 69-60; F 59 and Below

	<u>U</u>	<u>G</u>
Participation	25	X
Weekly Questions	10	10
Reader Responses (4)	20	(8) 40
Bibliographic Project	15	15
Research Paper	20	25
Final	10	10

UNIVERSITY POLICIES: If you have questions about the university’s academic policies, guidelines regarding sexual harassment, or any other matters, please consult the relevant sections of the UCA Student Handbook. UCA adheres to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you need an accommodation under this act due to a disability, contact the UCA Office of Disability Services at 450-3135.

THIS SYLLABUS IS A TENTATIVE OUTLINE—IT IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

CLASS SCHEDULE:

W 1/20: Course Introduction/ Personal Introductions

M 1/25: Slavery Discussion and Phillis Wheatley from anthology “On Being Brought From Africa to America”

W 1/27: Slave narrative conventions and excerpts from *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

M 2/1: Excerpts of Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

W 2/3: Brown’s *Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter* pp. 43-122

M 2/8: Brown’s *Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter* pp.123-209

W 2/10: Emancipation, Reconstruction, and the Jim Crow Era Discussion; Charles Chesnutt stories

M 2/15: Paul Laurence Dunbar’s “Sympathy,” “We Wear the Mask,” and “When Malindy Sings”

W 2/17: Washington’s “The Atlanta Exposition Address” and Chapter I of DuBois’s *The Souls of Black Folk*

M 2/22: Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* pp. 3-125

W 2/24: Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* pp. 126-211

M 3/1: Wilson’s *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*

W 3/3: Harlem Renaissance Discussion; Langston Hughes’s poetry and Fauset’s “Mary Elizabeth”

M 3/8: Gaines's *of love and dust* pp. 3-199
W 3/10: Gaines's *of love and dust* pp. 203-281

M 3/15: Protest Era discussion, King's "I Have a Dream" and Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*;
W 3/17: No Class International Conference of the Fantastic in the Arts

3/22 -3/26: Spring Break

M 3/29: Petry's *The Narrows* pp. 1-120
W 3/31: Petry's *The Narrows* pp. 121-215

M 4/5: Petry's *The Narrows* pp. 216-353
W 4/7: Petry's *The Narrows* pp. 354-428; Bibliographic Project due

M 4/12: Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* pp. 1-200
W 4/14: Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* pp. 201-289

M 4/19: Walker's *The Color Purple* pp. 1-207
W 4/21: Walker's *The Color Purple* pp. 208-288; Essay due

M 4/26: Park's *Topdog/Underdog*
W 4/28: Morrison's "Recitatif" as well as end of semester festivities

Finals Week: 5/3 through 5/7; Final Exam Date, Time, and Location: **TBA**