

## Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison

Course: 4381/5381 Major African and African American Writers  
Class Meetings: 1 – 2:30 p.m. M-F Irby 304  
Instructor: Dr. Isiah Lavender, III  
Office: 401 Irby Hall  
Office Hours: M-T 2:30 – 4 p.m., and by appointment  
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**BOOKS:** Available at UCA Bookstore

Ralph Ellison: *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison, Flying Home: and Other Stories, and Invisible Man*

Arnold Rampersad: *Ralph Ellison: A Biography*

Hazel Rowley: *Richard Wright: The Life and Times*

Richard Wright: *Black Boy, Haiku, Native Son, and Uncle Tom's Children*

*You are responsible for gaining access to the textbooks in a timely manner.*

**Course Description:** As Ralph Ellison grappled with the idea of becoming a professional writer, Richard Wright proved his most valued sounding board for discussing philosophical, political, and formal issues. Writing to Wright in 1941, Ellison declares their shared artistic philosophy: “I am sure now more than ever: that you and I are brothers.” Yet ultimately, the two diverge sharply in their ideas regarding fictional representations of African American experience.

This course examines the significance of Wright’s early literary legacy in relation to Ellison’s evolving authorial imagination. We will interrogate how their texts document crucial transitions in literary portrayals of blackness as we ponder their long-term impact on black literature.

**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 **three** 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 **three** 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 after the official start time or after me is ill-advised. I will drop you from my class on the **fifth** absence.

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, IPODS, MP3s, 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; serious cases will be referred to the university authorities for discipline, which may include expulsion from UCA.

**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, 4 reader responses, 1 essay, 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 this requirement will receive zero credit without the possibility of a redo. 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 is a 100 point scale for the semester.

**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)**

**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. You can write on any material covered in class, whether it be a response to another person's expressed view or your own reading of a text or texts. You could possibly write all four on one text or spread them out over the course of the semester. You cannot turn in a response on a particular text after we take the quiz on it. 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 one full page and no more than three**. Any response which does not meet the minimum length requirement will receive a zero. You are responsible for 4 responses. **(5 points each)**

**Paper** – Students will write a **six page** paper on any single work be it short story or novel by Richard Wright. Any paper that does not meet the length requirement of six full pages will be docked a letter grade or worse. **Due Date: Friday July 30, 2010 (25 points)**

**Teaching** – Each graduate member of the class will serve as teacher, lecturer, or facilitator during at least one of the class sessions. As the teacher you will begin and lead class discussions, presumably on topics of your particular interest or previous knowledge in relation to Wright and Ellison. While the assigned readings determine the basic ground for our discussions, I also hope that the discussion leaders will move the class in directions I have not planned or anticipated. I will be glad to meet with discussion leaders prior to the class session they will lead if desired. **10 points**

**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 cover Ralph Ellison only and the format will be announced. **(25 points)**

**Grade Scale:** A 91 and Above; B 89-80; C 79-70; D 69-60; F 59 and Below

Participation – 20 points  
Reader Responses (4) – 20 points  
Essay – 25 points  
Quizzes (2) – 10 points  
**Grad Teaching (2) – 10 points**  
Final – 25 points **(Grad 15)**

**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:

### Week 1

M 7/12: Course Intro: Personal Intros

T 7/13: *Uncle Tom's Children* read "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow" and "Big Boy Leaves Home"

W 7/14: *Uncle Tom's Children* read "Down by the Riverside" and "Long Black Song"

Th 7/15: *Uncle Tom's Children* read "Fire and Cloud" and "Bright and Morning Star" (Grad Teacher)

**F 7/16: Quiz #1**

### Week 2

M 7/19: *Native Son* pp. 3-93

T 7/20: *Native Son* pp. 97-184

W 7/21: *Native Son* pp. 273-363

Th 7/22: *Native Son* pp. 363-430

**F 7/23: Quiz #2**

### Week 3:

M 7/26: *Black Boy* pp. 3-101

T 7/27: *Black Boy* pp. 102-207

W 7/28: *Black Boy* pp. 208-299

Th 7/29: *Black Boy* pp. 300-384

**F 7/30: Essay due**

### Week 4:

M 8/2: Ellison essay selections "The World and the Jug", "Richard Wrights Blues", and "Remembering Richard Wright"

T 8/3: *Flying Home* pp. 3-96

W 8/4: *Flying Home* pp. 97-173 (Grad Teacher)

Th 8/5: *Invisible Man* pp. 3-108

F 8/6: *Invisible Man* pp. 109-195

### Week 5

M 8/9: *Invisible Man* pp. 196-317

T 8/10: *Invisible Man* pp. 318-408

W 8/11: *Invisible Man* pp. 409-512

Th 8/12: *Invisible Man* pp. 513-581; essay selection "What America Would Be without Blacks"

**F 8/13: Final Exam**