Introduction to African American Literature

Course Description: This course offers a survey of African American literature from its beginnings through the present, introducing students to African American-authored writings from a variety of genres (autobiography, poetry, novels, drama, oratory). While conceiving of African American literature as a coherent tradition, we will seek to understand each writer’s representational project in depth and to situate his or her work in its specific literary, cultural, and historical contexts.

Required Texts:

- Toni Morrison, Home (Knopf)

Course Requirements:

- Weekly reading quizzes
- A midterm examination
- Two 4-5 page critical essays
- Regular attendance and active participation in class discussion
- A comprehensive final examination

Schedule of Readings and Assignments (subject to minor changes):

TH 8/23  Course Introduction

TU 8/28  Jupiter Hammon, “An Evening Thought” and “An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley” (pp. 163-168)
Phillis Wheatley, all selections from Poems on Various Subjects Religious and Moral (pp. 216-224)

TH 8/30  David Walker, excerpt from “David Walker’s Appeal in Four Articles…” (pp. 228-240)
Victor Séjour, “The Mulatto” (pp. 353-365)

TU 9/4  Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass…: Prefaces and Chapters I-VIII (pp. 387-417)

TH 9/6  Douglass, Narrative: Chapters IX-XI and Appendix (pp. 417-452)

TU 9/11  Sojourner Truth, accounts of “Ain’t I a Woman?” (pp. 246-248)
Douglass, excerpt from “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July” (pp. 462-473)

TH 9/13 Elizabeth Keckley, Behind the Scenes… (pp. 366-384)


<< ESSAY 1 DUE >>

TH 9/20 Paul Laurence Dunbar, “An Ante-Bellum Sermon,” “We Wear the Mask,” and “A Cabin Tale” (pp. 912-914, 918-921)
Folktales: “Brer Rabbit Tricks Brer Fox Again” and “The Awful Fate of Mr. Wolf” (pp. 142-143, 146-148)


TH 9/27 Booker T. Washington, excerpts from Up From Slavery (pp. 572-602)

TU 10/2 W. E. B. Du Bois, selected chapters from The Souls of Black Folk: The Forethought; Chapters I, III, and V (pp. 692-708 and 714-720)

TH 10/4 << MIDTERM EXAM >>

TU 10/9 Alain Locke, “The New Negro” (pp. 984-993)
Rudolph Fisher, “The City of Refuge” (pp. 1225-1236)

TH 10/11 Sterling Brown, “Southern Road,” “Strong Men,” “Memphis Blues,” “Ma Rainey,” and “Sam Smiley” (pp. 1251-1256, 1258-1259, 1263-1264)
Langston Hughes, “The Weary Blues,” “I, Too,” “Theme for English B” (pp. 1294-1295, 1309-1310)

TU 10/16 Fisher, “The Caucasian Storms Harlem” (pp. 1236-1243)
George Schuyler, “The Negro-Art Hokum” (pp. 1221-1223)
Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (pp. 1311-1314)

TH 10/18 Nella Larsen, Quicksand: Chapters 1-12 (pp. 1086-1126)

TU 10/23 Larsen, Quicksand: Chapters 13-25 (pp. 1126-1167)

TH 10/25 Richard Wright, “The Ethics of Living Jim Crow…” (pp. 1411-1419)
Ralph Ellison, selected excerpts from Invisible Man: Prologue and Chapter 1 (pp. 1548-1565)

TU 10/30 Gwendolyn Brooks, “a song in the front yard,” “the preacher…,” “The Sundays of
Satin-Legs Smith,” “The Lovers of the Poor,” “We Real Cool,” “The Chicago Defender…” (pp. 1626, 1628-1632, 1635-1640)

<< ESSAY 2 DUE >>

TH 11/1 James Baldwin, “Going to Meet the Man” (pp. 1750-1761)  
Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (pp. 1896-1908)  
Malcolm X, excerpt from The Autobiography of Malcolm X (pp. 1860-1876)

TU 11/6 Amiri Baraka, Dutchman (pp. 1946-1960)

TH 11/8 August Wilson, Joe Turner’s Come and Gone (pp. 2459-2504)

TU 11/13 Alice Walker, “In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens” and “Everyday Use” (pp. 2430-2442)

TH 11/15 Class does not meet

TU 11/20 Octavia Butler, “Bloodchild” (pp. 2515-2529)

TH 11/22 Class does not meet

TU 11/27 Toni Morrison, Home (Chapters 1-5)

TH 11/29 Morrison, Home (Chapters 6-17)

TU 12/4 Final Exam Review

<< FINAL EXAM: Monday, 12/10, 2:00-3:45 (in regular classroom) >>

Evaluation Method: Grades will be determined on basis of the midterm (15%), the two essays (20% each), the final exam (25%), and attendance/participation/quizzes (20%).

Grading Scale: I will use the following grading scale in this course:

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<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<td>A</td>
<td>93+</td>
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<td>A-</td>
<td>92.90</td>
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<td>D</td>
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<td>E</td>
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Quizzes: In order to ensure that all members of the class are keeping up with and are prepared to discuss the readings, I will give a brief quiz once a week (on the Tues. or the Thurs. meeting). The quizzes will consist of a few (~3-5) basic factual/informational questions. I want to devote as little time as possible to these quizzes, and they will not be graded as such: anyone who has read the material carefully will be able to answer the questions correctly. If a quiz indicates that you have not
completed the readings assigned for that meeting, I will contact you to let you know; failure on any quiz following this warning will result in the attendance/participation/quizzes portion of your grade being dropped by 10 points. There won’t be a quiz during the week of the midterm.

**Essays:** Detailed topics for the two essays will be distributed at least two weeks before the due dates (see above schedule). Essays submitted after the due date will not be accepted without prior approval.

**Attendance and Participation:** Regular attendance is expected at all class meetings, and you are expected to arrive punctually and to remain in the classroom for the duration of our scheduled time. Excessive absences (more than 1 unexcused absence) will negatively affect your final grade, with each successive unexcused absence subtracting 5 percentage points from your attendance/participation score. Routine and/or extreme lateness to class will also negatively affect this score. If you foresee that you will be absent from class due to some legitimate reason, let me know ahead of time; I'll be happy to excuse you from class.

Lively, productive class discussions depend upon your active participation: You should come to class prepared to comment on the assigned readings and to engage with your classmates’ ideas. While participation, of course, requires attendance, my evaluation of your participation also takes into account other factors. Any activity that makes it impossible for a member of the class to be attentive and to engage with the proceedings of the class—for example sleeping or using electronic devices (texting, checking messages, etc.)—will be treated as a barrier to participation and thus negatively affect this component of his or her grade. Class members earn highest participation scores for thoughtful, regular contributions to discussion. Civility and respect in the discussion setting are also paramount.

**Academic Integrity:** This course follows the standards laid out by the University’s Office of Academic Affairs: “Academic integrity is essential to maintaining an environment that fosters excellence in teaching, research, and other educational and scholarly activities. Thus, The Ohio State University and the Committee on Academic Misconduct (COAM) expect that all students have read and understand the University’s Code of Student Conduct, and that all students will complete all academic assignments with fairness and honesty. Students must recognize that failure to follow the rules and guidelines established in the University’s Code of Student Conduct may constitute ‘Academic Misconduct’ [and lead to subsequent referral to the COAM]. OSU’s Code of Student Conduct (Section 3335-23-04) defines academic misconduct as: ‘Any activity that tends to compromise the academic integrity of the University, or subvert the educational process.’ Examples of academic misconduct include (but are not limited to) plagiarism [the unauthorized representation of another’s ideas or words as one’s own], collusion (unauthorized collaboration), copying the work of another student, and possession of unauthorized materials during an examination.” The Code of Student Conduct is available online (http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/resource_csc.asp).

*If you have any questions about academic integrity, please contact me, or consult the COAM’s helpful website (http://oaa.osu.edu/coam/faq.html#.faqlist). We will be discussing the concept of plagiarism at length later in the semester, but you are expected to be familiar already with university policies on plagiarism and other aspects of academic integrity.
Disability Services: The Office of Disability Services (150 Pomerene Hall; x2-3307) offers support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Their policies and procedures can be viewed online (http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/current.asp).

GEC Categories: English 281 fulfills (I) the GEC Arts and Humanities literature requirement as well as (II) the social diversity in the United States requirement. The goals and expected learning outcomes of GEC courses in these categories are as follows:

(I) Arts and Humanities literature. Goals: Students evaluate significant writing and works of art. Such studies develop capacities for aesthetic and historical response and judgment; interpretation and evaluation; critical listening, reading, seeing, thinking, and writing; and experiencing the arts and reflecting on that experience. Expected learning outcomes:

1. Students learn to analyze, appreciate, and interpret significant literary works.
2. Through reading, discussing, and writing about literature, students learn to understand and evaluate the personal and social values of their own and other cultures.

(II) Social diversity in the United States. Goals: Students’ understanding of the pluralistic nature of institutions, society, and culture in the United States is enhanced. Expected learning outcomes:

1. Students describe the roles of such categories as race, gender, class, ethnicity and religion in the pluralistic institutions and cultures of the United States.
2. Students recognize the role of social diversity in shaping their own attitudes and values regarding appreciation, tolerance, and equality of others.