



**ENGLISH 205-W01**  
**AFRICAN-AMERICAN LITERATURE**  
**FALL 2006**

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**Professor:** D. Harlan Wilson  
**Office:** 257 Dwyer  
**Phone:** 419.586.0317  
**Office Hours:** MW 12:15-2:15  
**Email:** david.wilson@wright.edu  
**Course Website:** [www.wright.edu/~david.wilson/fall2006/index.html](http://www.wright.edu/~david.wilson/fall2006/index.html)  
**Personal Website:** [www.dharlanwilson.com](http://www.dharlanwilson.com)

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**MEETING PLACE & TIME**

W01 :: 188 Dwyer :: MW 2:15-3:55

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

English 205 is a reading and writing intensive study of African-American literature from the eighteenth century to the present day. In addition to developing critical thinking and writing skills, this course will examine the uneasy relationship between race and writing with a particular focus on how representations of gender and sexuality participate in a literary construction of race. Though this course is a survey of African-American literary self-representations, we will consider how these representations respond to and interact with the majority culture's efforts to define race in a different set of terms. We will focus throughout on literature as a site where this struggle over definition takes place—where African American writers have reappropriated and revised words and ideas that had been used to exclude them from both American literary history and America itself.

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**TEXTBOOK & SUPPLIES**

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. & Nellie Y. McKay. *The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004.

Butler, Octavia. *Kindred*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1988.

## **COURSE EVALUATION**

Course grades are based on the following percentages:

Attendance & Participation	10%
Assignments & Quizzes	15%
Minithemes	40%
Essays	35%

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### **ATTENDANCE**

Attendance is an essential part of this course. It is expected that you will come to each class period prepared for the day's activities; when you do not show up, or when you show up unprepared, the quality of the class's labor suffers. As we only meet twice a week, it is important that you attend class, barring any unforeseen illnesses, family emergencies, religious observances, etc. More than THREE unexcused absences will negatively affect your grade. Should you miss a class, you are responsible for all assignments given during that class period.

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### **PARTICIPATION**

This includes in-class speaking, activities, and responsive listening. Participation is crucial. Simply showing up for class does not constitute participation. You are expected to present your informed ideas and show respect for others in the classroom. Participation is mental attendance. You will be graded on how much you contribute to the learning environment of each class session.

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### **ASSIGNMENTS**

Throughout the semester, you will be given a number of assignments to be completed both in and out of the classroom. In-class assignments will often not be assigned ahead of time; they will be given to you during class and should be completed during that class session. If you have an unexcused absence from class, you will not be able to make up those assignments.

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### **QUIZZES**

Quizzes will be given periodically to ensure that the reading schedule is being followed. In general, they will consist of five to ten questions and will be administered at the beginning of class. If you have an unexcused absence or are tardy on a day that a quiz is administered, you will not be able to make it up.

## MINITHEMES

A minitheme is a one page, single-spaced essay in which you will be required to engage with the reading material for the class. The purpose of writing a minitheme is to develop your skills as a critical thinker and reader. In order to write a successful minitheme, you should keep a reading journal. As you read the course texts, look for recurring symbols, images and ideas and write them down in your journal along with anything else that seems interesting, disturbing or provocative. Then amass the information you have collected. Take one of the themes you have been focusing on in your reading journal and flesh it out with details, citations, and page numbers. Minithemes should exhibit four primary things: 1) evidence of attentiveness to the text under consideration; 2) strong textual support for your argument; 3) an explanation of the significance of the theme you have chosen to focus on; 4) suggestions and/or questions for further analysis.

Minithemes serve as models for the sort of process that should be undergone when you write longer essays. In short, you must first read a given text, taking notes and underlining important phrases and passages. Then gather and sort out your notes, making sure your focus is clear and sufficiently narrow. Finally, develop a meaningful and interesting reading of the text.

A total of FOUR minithemes will be due at the beginning of our discussion sessions for the following texts: Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life*, Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and the film *Brother from Another Planet*.

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## ESSAYS

You are required to write two major essays for this course. The first essay will be an analysis of a text of your choice from *The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature*. The second essay will be an analysis of Octavia Butler's *Kindred*. Details of the specific requirements for each essay will be posted online two weeks in advance of the essay's due date. For each day that an essay is late, one letter grade will be deducted from its final grade. After one week, essays will not be accepted and you cannot receive credit.

Essays should exhibit the following rubric: 12 TIMES NEW ROMAN FONT — 1" MARGINS (TOP, BOTTOM, SIDES) — DOUBLE-SPACED TEXT — TITLE OF ESSAY CENTERED AT THE TOP OF THE FIRST PAGE (NO TITLE PAGES) — TITLE OF ESSAY THAT IS YOUR OWN IMAGINATIVE CREATION — PAGE NUMBERS CENTERED AT THE BOTTOM OF EVERY PAGE EXCEPT THE FIRST — MLA FORMAT — BIBLIOGRAPHY.

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## PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism occurs when a writer: (1) copies verbatim from an author without quotation or attempts to disguise the act by selective omissions or alterations; (2) paraphrases from an author without naming the source in the text of the paper or providing a list of references at the end; (3) turns in a paper written by somebody else. As a point of academic integrity, you are required to submit original material of your own creation. Plagiarism of any material is a serious offense and, if established with sufficient evidence, can result in failure of the course or dismissal from the university.

## WITHDRAWALS & DROPPING

You may withdraw from the course with a full refund no later than September 11. The last day to drop the course without a grade is September 25. The last day to drop the course with a grade of **W** is October 23.

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## WRITER'S HOTLINE

This service is available for quick or one-time questions that can be answered over the phone and usually involve grammar or writing mechanics. The phone number is 937.775.2158. The hotline is open daily until 4 p.m.

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## CLASS CALENDAR

For each author we study in this course, be sure to read their respective biographies. Except for Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, all texts are in *The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature*.

Week	Schedule
1	Introduction to the Course
2	Introduction: Talking Books (xxxvii-xxlvii) The Literature of Slavery and Freedom (151-162) Frederick Douglass, <i>Narrative of the Life</i> (385-452) <b>Due:</b> Minitheme #1
3	The Vernacular Tradition (3-8) Hip Hop (78-94) The Blues (48-64) Harriet Jacobs, <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> (279-315) <b>Due:</b> Minitheme #2
4	Literature of the Reconstruction and the New Negro (541-554) Booker T. Washington, <i>Up From Slavery</i> (570-602) – "A Slave Among Slaves" (572-580) – "The Atlanta Exposition Address" (594-602) W.E.B. Du Bois, <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> – "The Forethought" (692-693) – "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" (693-699) – "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others" (699-708)
5	The Black Arts Era (1831-1850) Ishmael Reed, Poems & Fiction (2051-2070) James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues" (1728-1749) <b>Due:</b> Midterm Essay
6	The Harlem Renaissance (953-962) Claude McKay, Poems (1003-1010)

Zora Neale Hurston, "Sweat" (1019-1030) & "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" (1030-1033)  
Langston Hughes, Poems and Essays (1288-1339)

7 Octavia Butler, *Kindred*  
**Due:** Minitheme #3

8 Realism, Naturalism, Modernism (1355-1368)  
Richard Wright, "The Man Who Lived Underground" (1436-1470)  
Ralph Ellison, "Richard Wright Blues" & *Invisible Man* (1535-1570)

9 *Brother from Another Planet*  
Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1768-1806)  
**Due:** Minitheme #4

10 Literature Since 1975 (2127-2139)  
Samuel R. Delany, *Atlantis: Model 1924* (2392-2411)  
Octavia Bulter, "Bloodchild" (2515-2529)  
**Due:** Final Essay

(NOTE: This schedule is subject to minor changes.)