



ENGLISH 205
AFRICAN-AMERICAN LITERATURE
FALL 2008

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Meeting Place & Time

188 Dwyer | TTh 1:30-3:10

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 racial construction. While this course offers a selection of African-American texts, 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 appropriated and revised words and ideas that had been used to exclude them from American literary history and community.

Books

Butler, Octavia. *Kindred*. 1988. Boston: Beacon Press, 2004.

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. 1845. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. 1987. New York: Vintage Books, 2004.

Wright, Richard. *Native Son*. 1940. New York: Harper Perennial, 2005.

Films

The Brother from Another Planet. Dir. John Sayles. Perf. Joe Morton, Steve James and Rosanna Carter. Cinecom Pictures, 1984.

Malcolm X. Dir. Spike Lee. Perf. Denzel Washington, Angela Bassett and Albert Hall. 40 Acres & a Mule Filmworks, 1992.

Shaff. Dir. Gordon Parks. Perf. Richard Roundtree, Moses Gunn and Gwenn Mitchell. MGM, 1971.

Songs

The Sugarhill Gang. "Rapper's Delight." *The Sugarhill Gang*. Dbk Works, 1979.

Run-D.M.C. "King of Rock." *King of Rock*. Profile/Arista, 1985.

Public Enemy. "Brothers Gonna Work It Out." *Fear of a Black Planet*. Def Jam, 1990.

Snoop Doggy Dogg. "Gin and Juice." *Doggystyle*. Death Row, 1993.

Eminem. "My Name Is." *The Slim Shady LP*. Aftermath/Interscope, 2000.

(NOTE: You are only responsible for purchasing books. All other texts will be provided to you in class or online. Additional texts include short essays and excerpts of nonfiction.)

Course Evaluation

Course grades are based on the following percentages:

Attendance & Participation	10%
Assignments & Quizzes	25%
Minithemes	40%
Final Essay	25%

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.

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.

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 are absent, you will not be able to make up those assignments.

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 are absent or tardy on a quiz day, you will not be able to make it up.

Minithemes

A minitheme is a one page, single-spaced writing assignment 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 components: 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 kind of process that should be undergone when you write longer essays. In short, you must first read a given text, taking notes and underling 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 Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Richard Wright's *Native Son*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, and Octavia Butler's *Kindred*.

Final Essay

You are required to write one major essay for this course. The essay is a 4-5 page literary analysis of one or more texts that we have studied this quarter; you must also cite at least five secondary sources. See module 10 for more details.

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.

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.

Class Calendar

Week	Schedule
1	Introduction to the Course
2	Affectation & Metamorphosis <i>Malcolm X</i>
3	The Trope of the Talking Book Frederick Douglass, <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i> Due: Minitheme #1
4	Rap Music: Origins & Evolution Selections from The Sugarhill Gang, Run-D.M.C., Public Enemy, Snoop Doggy Dogg & Eminem
5	Realism & Existentialism Richard Wright, <i>Native Son</i> Due: Minitheme #2
6	Blaxploitation <i>Shaft</i>

- 7 Magic Realism & the Ghosts of History
Toni Morrison, *Beloved*
Due: Minitheme #3
- 8 Race, Aliens & Science Fiction
Brother from Another Planet
- 9 Race, Time Travel & Science Fiction
Octavia Butler, *Kindred*
Due: Minitheme #4
- 10 Office Hours
Due: Final Essay

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