

ENG 241 Introduction to African American Literature, Winter 2016, CRN 22171

T/Th 12-1:20pm, Chapman 204

Professor Thorsson, thorsson@uoregon.edu

Office Hours: T/Th 10-11:30am, 521 PLC

Course Description

This course is a survey of writings by African American authors from the 1930s to the present. Studying fiction, essays, and poetry, we will read representative texts to consider whether there are specific formal and thematic elements that characterize an African American literary tradition in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We will consider how these texts fit into or defy ideas about race, gender, and class on the one hand and classifications of genre, period, and literary style on the other. We will study relationships among these works to uncover how they reflect on, depend on, or revise one another. We will look for relationships between these works and other art forms such as music and visual arts. This means that as we read each text closely, we may also listen closely to a relevant speech, poetry reading, or piece of music. The goal of this course is to help you engage with African American literature, improving your writing, reading, and critical thinking skills in the process. This class requires substantial reading and writing and vigorous participation.

Goals:

The goal of this course is to help you engage with African American literature, improving your writing, reading, and critical thinking skills in the process. To that end, you will:

1. read literary and cultural texts with comprehension and with an understanding of their conventions;
2. draw on relevant cultural and/or historical information to situate texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts;
3. perform critical, formal analyses of literary and other cultural texts;
4. write focused analyses of literature in clear, correct prose;
5. employ logic, creativity, and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments;
6. employ primary and/or secondary sources, with proper acknowledgment and citation.

Required Texts

There are two required texts for this course: the *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, third edition, volume two (2014), edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Valerie Smith and *Between the World and Me* (2015) by Ta-Nehisi Coates. Both books are available at the UO Bookstore and at the Knight Library reserves desk. Handouts marked with an asterisk on the schedule below are on the Canvas site for our class.

Course Requirements and Policies

Reading, participation, and attendance are mandatory. Bring the assigned readings to class and be prepared to discuss them. Your participation grade is based on your work in class including discussion, in-class writing, and group work.

Missing class more than twice in the term will result in reduction of your final grade by 1/3 of a letter grade (B becomes B-) for each absence beyond the two permitted. There is no distinction

between excused and unexcused absences. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get notes for that day from a classmate and otherwise catch up on any material you have missed.

We will discuss each assignment in detail as it approaches. Please print and consult the assignment sheet posted on Canvas. Assignments must be submitted in hard copy at the beginning of class on the due dates listed below and formatted according to current MLA guidelines, including 1 inch margins, single-side printed, stapled, correct citation and quotation, and a works cited page. Consult the *MLA Handbook* if you are uncertain of correct format. I will mark late assignments down by 1/3 of a letter grade (B becomes a B-) for each day they are late.

If you anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please meet with me soon. Please request that the Accessible Education Center (<http://aec.uoregon.edu/>) send me a letter outlining your approved accommodations.

The University Student Conduct Code (see conduct.uoregon.edu) defines academic misconduct. Students may not commit or attempt to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. Students should acknowledge and document all sources of information. If there is any question about whether an act constitutes academic misconduct, see me.

UO is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence and gender-based stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences gender-based violence (intimate partner violence, attempted or completed sexual assault, harassment, coercion, stalking, etc.), know that you are not alone. UO has staff members trained to support survivors in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and offering other help.

Please be aware that all UO employees are required reporters. This means that if you tell me about a situation involving harassment, bias, or assault, I have to report the information to my supervisor or the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity. Although I have to report the situation, you will still have options about how your case will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a formal complaint. My goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and have access to the resources you need. If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, you can call 541-346-SAFE, UO's 24-hour hotline, to be connected to a confidential counselor to discuss your options. You can also visit the SAFE website at safe.uoregon.edu.

In this class, we are studying literature of the United States in its historical and political contexts. This means that we will read about and discuss racial and sexual violence. There are incidents of both in our readings, some of which include explicit language and graphic sexual acts, both consensual and not. If you wish to select another class to take instead of this one, I will be happy to meet with you in office hours to help you select a suitable course.

Grading:

Participation	10%
Close Reading Assignment #1 (2-3 pages)	20%
Response to <i>Selma</i> (2 pages)	15%
Close Reading Assignment #2 (4-5 pages)	30%
Close Listening Assignment (2-3 pages)	25%

Schedule:**Week One**

T 1/5 Introduction
Syllabus*

Th 1/7 No class meeting. In lieu of attending class, watch video of PBS episode "Rise! The Road to Civil Rights (1940-1968)" and write down one thing you learned and one observation about what you saw to share in class next week.
The video is available here: <https://vimeo.com/81156696> and here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aN1dxdmeaTI>.

Week Two

T 1/12 Richard Wright, "Blueprint for Negro Writing" (1937) (p 125-132)
Assignment Sheet*

Th 1/14 Ann Petry, chapter one of *The Street* (1946) (p 168-179)
Close Reading Handout*

Week Three

T 1/19 Ralph Ellison, from *Invisible Man* (1952) (p 258-279)
Passive Voice Handout*

Th 1/21 Ralph Ellison, from *Invisible Man* (1952) (p 258-279), continued

Week Four

T 1/26 Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (1964) (p 594-607)
Close Reading Assignment #1 Due (2-3 pages)

T 1/26 Screening of *Selma* (2014) at 7pm in 125 McKenzie

Th 1/28 Gwendolyn Brooks, all poems (1945-1969) (p 326-343)
Meter Handout*

Week Five

T 2/2 Gwendolyn Brooks, all poems (1945-1969) (p 326-343) continued
Response Paper on *Selma* Due (2 pages)

Th 2/4 James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues" (1957) (p 413-435)

Week Six

- T 2/9 Larry Neal, from "The Black Arts Movement" (1968) (Vol 2, p 784-787)
Amiri Baraka, "Black Art" (1969) (p 703-704) and "Wailers" (1982) (p 706-708)
Sonia Sanchez, all poems (1969) (Vol 2, p 711-713)
- Th 2/11 June Jordan, "Poem about Police Violence" (1978) (p 764-765) and "Poem about My Rights" (1980) (p 766-769)
Jayne Cortez, "How Long Has Trane Been Gone?" (1969) (p 771-773)

Week Seven

- T 2/16 Paule Marshall, "Reena" (1962) (p 959-971) and "The Making of a Writer: From the Poets in the Kitchen" (1983) (p 978-984)
- Th 2/18 Toni Cade Bambara, "Gorilla, My Love" (1972) (p 842-846)
Close Reading Assignment #2 Due (4-5 pages)

Week Eight

- T 2/23 Toni Morrison, *Sula* (1973) (p 989-1027)
- Th 2/25 Toni Morrison, *Sula* (1973) (p 1027-1067)

Week Nine

- T 3/1 Alice Walker, "Everyday Use" (1973) (p 1189-1194) and "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" (1974) (p 1180-1188)
- Th 3/3 Toni Morrison, "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" (1984) (p 1067-1071)
Close Listening Assignment Due (2-3 pages)

Week Ten

- T 3/8 Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between The World and Me* (2015) (p 1-71)
- Th 3/10 Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between The World and Me* (2015) (p 72-132)
Conclusion
- Fri 3/11 Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between The World and Me* (2015) (p 133-152)
Instead of having an exam on Friday of finals week, on **Friday 3/11 from 3-4:30pm in 111 Lillis**, we and Professor Rossi's Reacting to the Past class will meet to discuss Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between The World and Me* (2015).