

African-American Literature

ENG 364WA – SP'21 (Online course conducted through Canvas)

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THIS IS NOT THE OFFICIAL SYLLABUS FOR THIS COURSE. THE OFFICIAL SYLLABUS WILL BE DISTRIBUTED TO REGISTERED STUDENTS VIA CANVAS WHEN THE COURSE BEGINS. CHANGES WILL BE MADE.

Texts:

These are the editions I recommend; however, you may purchase other editions of these texts if you see fit.

Crafts, Hannah. *The Bondwoman's Narrative*. New York: Warner Books, 2002.

ISBN: 0-446-69029-5

Douglass, Frederick. *My Bondage and My Freedom*. New York: Penguin, 2003

ISBN: B0043RK671

Ellison, Ralph. *The Invisible Man*. 2nd ed. New York: Vintage, 1995.

ISBN: 0-679-73276-4

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. New York: Harper

Perennial Modern Classics, 2006. ISBN-10: 0061120065

Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*.

New York: Vintage Books, 1993. ISBN: 0-679-74542-4

Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf

Press, 2014. ISBN: 978-1-55597-690-3

*There will also be many readings made accessible through Blackboard.

Course Description:

Toni Morrison argues that American literature has always contained an Africanist presence, a presence that haunts the background of American history and the cultural imagination. This course will track the transition of African Americans from background to foreground in American literature. As African Americans take on authorship, what forms do they employ and why? How do they navigate the difficulties of slavery, reconstruction, and institutionalized racism? We will examine a variety of literary forms, including slave narratives, the romance, regionalism, poetry, short stories, and drama, and cover a variety of time periods and authors. This course will pay particular attention to concepts of belonging and national identity, and we will explore how race and gender complicate this sense of belonging.

This is a three-semester-hour course that earns LO2 credit for Diversity. It is an elective for the English major and a requirement for the African-American Studies minor.

Course Objectives:

- To learn about early African-American history and culture through reading primary texts.
- To compare literary texts from a given period or genre to learn how these African-American authors responded to their cultural milieu, noting the similarities, differences, and contradictions in these responses.
- To develop close reading skills.
- To learn how to use close reading skills to construct written arguments about literature.
- To learn how others have interpreted these texts over time. This includes generating your own interpretations, as well as learning about your classmates' readings and professional critics' interpretations of the texts.

Instructor Information:

I started working for the English department at Mary Baldwin nine years ago. Prior to this position, I worked at Le Moyne College in Syracuse, NY, where I taught courses in American Literature, Literature and the Environment, and writing. I have an interdisciplinary background, earning my doctorate in English at Loyola University Chicago, my M.A. in English from the State University of New York (SUNY) at Cortland, and a B.S. in Biology from Le Moyne College. I specialize in nineteenth-century American literature, focusing on issues of nature, race, and identity. My dissertation, *Infectious Agents: Race and Environment in Nineteenth-Century America*, examines the mutual constructions of space and race in America across the long nineteenth century. I have been published in *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *Western American Literature*, *Studies in the Novel*, and was an invited guest on *BackStory with the American History Guys*, a public radio program that aired on more than 100 public radio stations in 38 states, on an episode entitled, "Rinse and Repeat: Cleanliness in America."

Course Policies:

Assignments: Papers should be submitted through Blackboard under the "Assignments" section. If you have trouble submitting the assignment through Blackboard, email it to me as a Word attachment (or embed the paper into the body of your email if absolutely necessary). Do not submit papers via Google docs or other formats (Word only). I will grade papers using "track changes" in Word. Since you are submitting your work electronically, be sure to save your work before submitting it. All papers must be double-spaced, in 12 point font, with standard margins in Times New Roman. When saving your work, always insert your name in your file name. **Any missing papers or exams receive zeros and will result in automatic failure of the course.**

NOTE: Because of the nature of this course, **you CANNOT wait until the end of the semester to do the reading and written work.** Written assignments and discussion board postings have deadlines with penalties for lateness.

Late Work: If you turn in a paper late, your grade for that paper will be lowered by 1/3 of a grade each week it is late (for example, a "C+" would become a "C"). While the deduction increases weekly, please note that the penalty is enacted the first day the assignment is late (there is no grace period). I will not grant last minute extensions;

however, if you foresee a conflict with a paper deadline, speak to me ahead of time, and I might be able to grant you extension. If extenuating circumstances prevent you from turning in a paper on time, notify me immediately. While late work receives a deduction, it still receives credit. Missing assignments receive no credit (a zero) and will result in failure of the course.

NOTE: I will only grant an ET (extended time) for extreme circumstances, and you must have 2/3 of the work completed. (An extreme circumstance might include death of an immediate family member or extended hospitalization of the student).

Expectations: Students are expected to keep up with the reading, do all written assignments (three response papers, two formal papers), take a midterm and final exam, and post on Blackboard weekly. Since the class will be communicating through discussion boards, it is imperative that students treat each other respectfully. If personal issues arise or you get behind on your work for whatever reason, notify me immediately. I can only assist students who ask for help!

Correspondence: While we can arrange phone conversations, video conversations, or face-to-face meetings, email is the most efficient way to contact me. When emailing me, please put your course and section number in the subject line (Eng. 364WA). If you are asking a question that would benefit the class, then please ask it through Blackboard; there will be an “ask your professor” thread available every week on the discussion board.

Plagiarism: Stealing someone else’s ideas or words without proper acknowledgment is unacceptable. All work written for this course (including the discussion board), must be generated for this class exclusively. Sources must be properly documented in MLA format. Plagiarism is defined as follows:

- Using the exact words of another person’s work/writing without acknowledgement of your source through the use of quotation marks and correct citation/documentation;
- Rephrasing a passage by another writer without giving proper credit;
- Using someone else’s facts or ideas without acknowledgement;
- Using a piece of writing for one course that was already used in a previous course (or in courses in which you are simultaneously enrolled) without express permission from both instructors to do so; and
- Presenting fabricated or falsified citations or materials.

Cheating on exams is also an affront to the principle of academic honesty and the Mary Baldwin Honor Code. These are serious offences and will be punished accordingly.

Suspected plagiarism/cheating may result in a failing grade for this course.

Special Needs: If you have a disability (physical or leaning) that may prevent you from meeting course requirements, contact Associate Provost Dr. Carey Usher at (540) 887-7064 or cusher@marybaldwin.edu as soon as possible. Course requirements will not be waived but reasonable accommodations can be developed.

Using Blackboard:

- You should check Blackboard (abbreviated as BB) multiple times a week, paying particular attention to the “**All Announcements**” section, which is where I will announce changes.
- Go the “**Getting Started**” section for a brief introduction on what to do first and information on proper online course etiquette and technology requirements. The “**Faculty Contact**” section contains my contact information; the “**Syllabus**” section contains the official syllabus for the course; the “**Course Schedule**” section contains a quick view of the schedule (the schedule is also in the syllabus).
- Notes on the weekly readings will be posted under “**Content**,” another section you should check regularly. This section is broken into folders by week. Each week, you should do the weekly reading, and then go to the Content section and view the notes on the readings. You will find that some questions in the notes do not have answers. This is because these questions are Discussion Board questions which will be answered through class discussion (explained below). After each weekly discussion board is completed, I will attach a pdf of Smartboard notes to each content item. These notes are slightly different than the original version of notes and contain answers to discussion board questions (hence, they are more complete than the original notes). The Smartboard notes are useful when studying for exams. The Content section also contains “Research” and “Writing” folders full of potentially useful materials on writing essays, grammar, and research.
- Writing Assignments – including response papers, formal papers, and exams – will be posted under the “**Assignments**” section of Blackboard, and you will submit assignments here. The “Assignments” section will be broken into three folders: two contain the specific assignments according to week and the other folder, called “General Assignment Info. & Grading Info.” contains general information about assignment types and how things are graded. Be sure to review the materials in this general folder the first few weeks of class. (You will miss very important information if you skip this).
- You need to look at the “**Discussions**” section (abbreviated DB) of Blackboard multiple times a week because you will need to do weekly postings.
 - What is a posting? – You need to write at least **one posting per week**. I will drop the two lowest posting grades. (So, if you have a bad week and fail to post by Sunday, the zero you would receive for that would hopefully be dropped). Your posting must respond to the reading by attempting to answer at least one of the discussion questions I have posted under “Discussions.” You should also respond to your fellow classmates within your posting if possible. Your comment should be at least 200 words or more.

Within the “Discussion” section of Blackboard, each week will have its own “forum” simply labeled by week (i.e. “Week 1”). I will post the discussion questions as “threads” on the discussion board, and you can

chose which question(s) you wish to answer. You do not have to answer every discussion question within the forum to meet the minimum requirement for postings, but students who post under multiple threads earn higher grades.

Keep in mind that the point of the discussion board is to discuss; hence, constant repetition is not that fruitful. If one thread has 10 comments and another has none, post under a different thread. Feel free to *ask questions* within this medium, as well as make comments. Try to respond to your classmates' comments: a good response goes beyond saying "I like this" by explaining why, engaging the content, and trying to propel the conversation forward. It can be particularly helpful when a posting cites a text (giving the page number) to prove its point.

- When are postings due? – Your weekly posting is always due by the end of the week (Sunday at midnight).
- How are they graded? – Your discussion board postings will collectively count towards your final grade for the semester (worth a total of 60 points). When evaluating your discussion board grades, I will consider your engagement with the reading, with your classmates, and across the discussion board forum for that week. Students who go beyond the minimum requirements, show interest and originality in their posts, and move conversations forward (rather than just repeating), score higher on the discussion board. Postings are graded on a six point scale on Blackboard (rubric visible under Assignments).
- I do expect you to ***read everything on the discussion board***, including questions which you did not respond to and postings that might have been made after you posted. Keep in mind that many students will post over the weekend, and I will make my comments after the discussion board closes (typically by Friday night). **I often post very important notes this way; this material will appear on your final exam.** *Therefore, you will need to revisit the discussion board after the Sunday due date to make sure you have read everyone's comments including mine.*

I plan on "closing" each weekly discussion board the Friday after the reading is due (again, readings and postings are always due by Sunday night). When I say "close," I mean that I will have responded to the discussion board at this point and graded it on Blackboard. The discussion will still be visible, but anyone who posts past the due date will not receive credit (unless I grant you special permission). This means that **if you do not keep up with your weekly postings, you will lose your opportunity to post which will negatively affect your final grade.**

- If you have any technical problems contact the Help desk at 540-887-7075 or <http://help.marybaldwin.edu>.

Grading:

Formal Paper #1 (5-8 pages) - 100 points

Formal Paper #2 (5-8 pages)	- 100
Midterm exam	- 80
Final exam	- 100
Response papers (3)	- 60 (<i>each response paper is worth 20 points</i>)
Discussion Board	- 60 (<i>Each posting is worth 6 points. There will be 12 DBs. Students drop the two lowest grades for a total of 10</i>)

A student's total earned points over the course of the semester will be divided by a total of 500 points to calculate his/her grade. A full description of the grading scale for the formal papers, response papers, and discussion board can be found on Blackboard under "Assignments." This percentage score will be converted according to the following MBU grade scale:

	A \geq 93 - 100	A- = 90 - 92
B+ = 87 - 89	B = 83 - 86	B- = 80 - 82
C+ = 77 - 79	C = 73 - 76	C- = 70 - 72
D+ = 67 - 69	D = 63 - 66	D- = 60 - 62
F \leq 59		

Course Schedule: Instructor holds the right to change the schedule at any time. Page numbers are written in parenthesis. Your discussion board posts based on the weekly reading are due every Sunday @ midnight and are not individually written on the schedule. You are not required to read the introductions provided by your books, but I recommend reading them.

Week 1 (Mon. - Sun.)	Online introductions, Wheatley poems (available on Blackboard), Morrison <i>Playing in the Dark</i> (chapters 1&2)
Week 2	Morrison <i>Playing in the Dark</i> (chapter 3), Douglass <i>My Bondage and My Freedom</i> (chapters 1-15)
Week 3	Douglass <i>My Bondage and My Freedom</i> (chapters 16-end), Response Paper #1 Due (Sun. @ midnight)
Week 4	Crafts <i>The Bondwoman's Narrative</i> , chapters 1-10
Week 5	Crafts <i>The Bondwoman's Narrative</i> , chapters 11-end, Response Paper #2 Due (Sun. @ midnight)
Week 6	Dunbar selected poetry (Blackboard), MIDTERM EXAM (Sun. @ midnight)
Week 7	Washington from <i>Up From Slavery</i> (Blackboard), Du Bois from <i>Souls of Black Folk</i> (Blackboard)
Week 8	Locke "The New Negro," Harlem Renaissance poetry I: Hughes, McKay, (Blackboard), Harlem Renaissance poetry II: Bennett, Bonner, Cullen (Blackboard), FORMAL PAPER #1 DUE (Sun. @ midnight) (last day to withdrawal or change to P/NC is Fri.)
Week 9	SPRING BREAK
Week 10	Hurston <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i>
Week 11	Ellison <i>The Invisible Man</i> (prologue – chapter 11), Response Paper #3 Due (Sun. @ midnight), no discussion board

Week 12	Ellison <i>The Invisible Man</i> (chapters 12 – end)
Week 13	Gayle, from “The Black Aesthetic,” Black Arts Movement poetry: Evans, Baraka, Giovanni (Blackboard)
Week 14	Rankine, <i>Citizen</i> , FORMAL PAPER #2 DUE (Sun. @ midnight)
Week 15	FINAL EXAM DUE (Sun. @ midnight) Any late work must be turned in by Mon. @ midnight