**ENGL 352:396: African American Literature since 1900**

**Tuesdays and Thursdays: 10:00 AM-11:20 AM**

**Room: Virtual Zoom via Canvas**

Professor: Dr. Melanie R. Hill  
Office Hours: Tuesdays from 1:00 PM-3:00 PM (*Virtual Zoom Coffee Office Hours with Dr. Hill*)  
Location: Hill Hall 530  
Phone: (973) 353-5182  
Email: mrh197@english.rutgers.edu

**Course Overview:**

From the spirituals and nineteenth century autobiographies of the enslaved to blues music, twentieth century fiction and poetry, *African American Literature since 1900* provides a broad survey of literary theory and black literature that encompasses themes of race, gender, music, and spirituality. In this course, we will explore particular pieces of literature from W.E.B. DuBois,
Ntozake Shange, James Baldwin and August Wilson to Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Tayari Jones, that effectively mark the presence of black writers and poets from the 1900s to present times. Juxtaposing spirituals, blues, and jazz with these works, we will also examine the intersections of literature and music in Langston Hughes’s and James Baldwin’s works as sound and text provide a critical framework through which we examine the breadth of the African American literary canon. As both text and performance, prose and poetry, and literature and music, the works of these authors offer an excellent resource for our investigation of black literary studies.

This survey course is designed to involve students in the kinds of research that the discipline of literary studies currently demands, including: working with primary sources and archival materials; reviewing the critical literature; using online databases of historical newspapers, periodicals, and other cultural materials; exploring relevant contexts in literary, linguistic, and cultural history; studying the etymological history and changing meanings of words; experimenting with new methods of computational analysis of texts; and other methodologies. This course typically involves several main texts that are studied intensively from a variety of approaches. Research exercises throughout the semester will enable and culminate in a final paper project: a scholarly essay of 10-11 pages. The final project must emerge out of each student's intensive, independent research agenda.

In-class assignments and reading response exercises (“Think Pieces”) throughout the semester will enable and culminate in a final paper project: a scholarly essay of 10-11 pages that will be turned in online via Canvas during final exam week at the end of the semester. At the end of the semester, students will present their final paper project idea in a creative form (i.e. Power Point presentation et al.). Make this presentation creative! The final project must emerge out of each student's intensive, independent research agenda.

Course Goals:

- Comprehend how canonical works in African American Literature since 1900 reflect the cultures of which African American authors write.
- Class discussions, reading responses (think pieces), formal essays, and in-class assignments will help carry students to a higher level of literary analyses of assigned texts.
- Students will trace, through assigned literary and historical texts, the development of African American consciousness, attitudes, and ideals.
- Recognize in literary and historical texts themes that continue to challenge America (i.e. class, gender and race consciousness, violence, religious values).
- Develop and express, formally and informally, perspectives on said African American themes to increase critical thinking.
- Use research to augment understanding and to develop analytical papers that demonstrate students' deep investment in assigned texts and writing responses over the course of the semester.
You can purchase the following required texts at the Rutgers University—Newark Barnes and Nobles Bookstore located at the Hahne’s Building 42 Halsey Street; Newark, NJ 07102. Bookstore Phone Number: (973) 353-2200

**Required Texts:**


Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)

Langston Hughes, *Short Stories* (1919-1963)


James Baldwin (*The Fire Next Time*) (1963)


Sonia Sanchez, *Shake Loose My Skin* (1999)


(*any short stories that are assigned will be distributed in .pdf files via email to all students*)

**Recommended Texts:**

Cheryl A. Wall, Ph.D., *On Freedom and the Will to Adorn: The Art of the African American Essay*

Zora N. Hurston, *The Sanctified Church: The Folklore Writings of Zora Neale Hurston*

Dolan Hubbard, *The Sermon and the African-American Literary Imagination*
Richard J. Douglass-Chin, *Preacher Woman Sings the Blues*
Kelly Brown Douglass, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*
Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*
Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminisms: Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*
Toni Cade Bambara, *The Black Woman: An Anthology*
Imani Perry, *May We Forever Stand: A History of the Black National Anthem*
Houston A. Baker, *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*
Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Editor—*Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*
Toni Cade Bambara, *The Black Woman*
Hayes and Williams, *Black Women and Music*
Trudier Harris—*Saints, Sinners, Saviors: Strong Black Women in African-American Literature*
Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez, Editors—*Black Performance Theory*
Aisha Durham, *Home with Hip Hop Feminism: Performances in Communication and Culture*
Brittany Cooper, Susanna M. Morris, Robin M. Boylorn, *The Crunk Feminist Collection*

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**Academic Honesty:** Any student who violates basic codes of academic conduct—through plagiarism, cheating on exams or assignments, double submission of papers, or any other means, can expect to fail the course and face disciplinary action from Rutgers University.

**Academic Integrity:** As an academic community dedicated to the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge, Rutgers University is committed to fostering an intellectual and ethical environment based on the principles of academic integrity. Academic integrity is essential to the success of the University's educational and research missions, and violations of academic integrity constitute serious offenses against the entire academic community.

**Academic Integrity Policy:**

http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/

**Email:** Please check your email regularly. Feel free to discuss any questions you have regarding the material we flesh out during class with me after class or office hours.
Virtual Class Attendance Policy: I expect all students to attend each virtual class meeting on time with cameras on. Please be aware of your attire (casual/business attire) and background for each virtual class session.

Assignments: You are expected to read all of the texts and attend class prepared. Class attendance and participation are essential to each student’s full development in this course. Please come to class on time! I expect each student to attend class ready to delve into each text and discuss the materials in an engaging manner. Attendance is mandatory. Any unexcused absences will result in a lowering of your final grade by ⅓ of a grade for each unexcused absence (e.g. from A- to B+). If you cannot attend class due to an illness or extreme emergency, it is important that you email me in advance.

Class Percentages:
Reading Response Paper/Think Piece (5-6 pages double-spaced): 30%
Attendance/Class Participation: 15%
In-Class Presentations/Assignments: 15%
Final Paper/Project Presentation: 40%

In-class presentations/assignments will involve two students per week submitting 4-5 discussion questions and several sentences about what was most engaging about the readings for that week. This work will be submitted online via Canvas. The length of this discussion assignment is typically two pages. Students have also submitted Power Point/Prezi presentations or creative visuals to go along with their in-class presentations. All in-class assignments must be submitted to Canvas the day BEFORE our scheduled class (Monday) by 5:00 PM. All Reading Response/Think Piece Papers must be submitted to Canvas no later than the designated day and time noted on the course calendar.

In-Class Work: You should come to class prepared to participate in small and large group discussions. If you have any concerns about participating, please see me immediately. Please be respectful of everyone’s opinions, presence, and person in this course. A primary purpose of our discussions is to give you the opportunity to practice developing interpretations of the texts. While you are encouraged to offer differing interpretations, you should do so in a respectful and thoughtful manner.

Final Paper Project Options:

1. At the end of the semester, each student will give a brief presentation about your final paper topic (you can present this in Power Point, et al; you can be creative with this presentation!). You have the option of turning in a formal proposal stating the project, its goals, and the research that will underlie it by November 17th. Your proposal should be as clear and specific as possible, as this will form part of the basis on which I evaluate your final project/paper. In the proposal, you must pay equal attention to the paper project and to the research that scaffolds it. If you want to submit a final paper project for extra credit, you may do so by November 17th. There will not be a final paper project proposal required.
• For the critical essay, here are a couple of ideas to use as you're planning your final paper topic:

2. A literature review analyzing and synthesizing the current scholarly conversation about your topic. Your literature review should not simply be a summary of others’ arguments. Rather, you must make clear the intervention that your essay will make in the field and the thesis of your own argument.

3. A close reading of three non-consecutive passages from the major text you will be analyzing in the final project. These passages should be central to the argument you want to make about that text; that is, rather than selecting random quotations, make sure to choose passages that can help you develop a strong argument about the text. As with option two, your final paper should make the thesis and structure of your essay clear.

Rutgers University-Newark Policies

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• Academic Integrity: As an academic community dedicated to the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge, Rutgers University is committed to fostering an intellectual and ethical environment based on the principles of academic integrity. Academic integrity is essential to the success of the University's educational and research missions, and violations of academic integrity constitute serious offenses against the entire academic community.

• Academic Integrity Policy: http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/

• Disability Services: Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must complete and submit the Registration Form, schedule and complete an intake meeting, and submit appropriate documentation. If your request for reasonable accommodations is approved, you will receive a Letter of Accommodations (LOA), which you should present privately to the instructor as early in the semester as possible. Accommodations are not retroactive and are effective only upon submission of the LOA to the instructor. Please begin the process by completing and submitting the Registration Form, Applying for Services, available at the website below.
• Applying for Services: https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/applying-for-services

• Documentation Guidelines: https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines
• **Letter of Accommodations** (LOA): [https://ods.rutgers.edu/my-accommodations/letter-of-accommodations](https://ods.rutgers.edu/my-accommodations/letter-of-accommodations)

• Office of Disability Services (ODS)
  Suite 219, Paul Robeson Campus Center
  (973) 353-5315
  odsnewark@rutgers.edu

• Religious Holiday Policy: Students are advised to provide timely notification to instructors about necessary absences for religious observances and are responsible for making up the work or exams according to an agreed-upon schedule.

Learning Resources:
• Rutgers Learning Center (tutoring services)
  Room 140, Bradley Hall
  (973) 353-5608
  [http://www.ncas.rutgers.edu/rlc](http://www.ncas.rutgers.edu/rlc)

• Writing Center (tutoring and writing workshops)
  Room 126, Conklin Hall
  (973) 353-5847
  nwc@rutgers.edu

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[https://www.ncas.rutgers.edu/writingcenter](https://www.ncas.rutgers.edu/writingcenter)
Course Calendar (*the professor reserves the right to change the course calendar at her discretion*):

Week One
**Tues. September 1**
*First Day of Class*
- Introductions
- Ice Breaker
- Overview of Syllabus
- Notification of Thursday’s Reading Assignment

**Thurs. September 3**:
**Finding Ourselves through Af. Am. Literature**
Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens (found on Canvas)*
Cheryl Wall, Ph.D., Chapter One: “On Freedom and the Will to Adorn: The Art of the African American Essay.” (found on Canvas)
*Come to class with two discussion questions or points of engagement with the text. Be prepared to discuss.*

Week Two
**Tues. September 8**:
Short Essay Assignment: Cheryl Wall, Ph.D. Chapter Six: “On Women, Rights, and Writing: June Jordan and Alice Walker.” (*On Freedom and the Will to Adorn*) (can be found on Canvas)

**Thurs. September 10**:
**Muse & Music**
Short Essay Assignment: “Strange Fruit: Music and Social Consciousness” (essay by Angela Y. Davis found on Canvas).
Short Essay Assignment: Ntozake Shange, *My Pen is a Machete (Lost in Language and Sound)* (found on Canvas)
Short Essay Assignment: *In Her Own Write* (found on Canvas)

Week Three
**Tues. September 15**:
**Sound, Sorrow, and DuBois**
The Sacred Writings of W.E.B. DuBois

W.E.B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk (1903)

Thurs. September 17th:
W.E.B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk (1903)

Week Four
Tues. September 22nd:
Poetic Possibilities
Sonia Sanchez, Shake Loose My Skin

Thurs. September 24th:
Sonia Sanchez, Shake Loose My Skin

Week Five:
Tues. September 29th:
Looking for Zora
Zora Neale Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God

Thurs. October 1st:
Zora Neale Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God

Week Six:
Learning Langston
Tues. October 6th:
Langston Hughes, Short Stories
Thurs. October 8th:
Langston Hughes, Short Stories

Week Seven:
Baldwin’s Literature & Letters
Tues. October 13th:
James Baldwin, The Amen Corner
Thurs. October 15th:
James Baldwin, The Amen Corner

Week Eight:
Baldwin’s Literature & Letters
Tues. October 22th:
James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time
Thurs. October 22nd:
James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time
Week Nine:
Morrison & Music
Tues. October 27th:
Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

Thurs. October 29th:
Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

*(Submit Think Piece Paper on Canvas Friday, October 30, 2020 by 5:00 PM SHARP!)*

Week Ten:
Short Stories of Love & Trouble
Tues. November 3rd:
Alice Walker, *In Love and Trouble*
Thurs. November 5th:
Alice Walker, *In Love and Trouble*

Week Eleven:
Lost in Language and Sound
Tues. November 10th:
Ntozake Shange, *Betsey Brown*

Thurs. November 12th:
Ntozake Shange, *Betsey Brown*

Week Twelve:
Tues. November 17th:
Tayari Jones, *An American Marriage*

Thurs. November 19th:
Tayari Jones, *An American Marriage*

Week Thirteen:
Tues. November 24th:
Tayari Jones, *An American Marriage*

*THANKSGIVING RECESS: NO CLASS THURSDAY*
*Thursday, November 26th-Sunday, November 29th*

Week Fourteen:
Tues. December 1st
Imani Perry, *Breathe*
Thurs. December 3rd:
Imani Perry, *Breathe*

Tues. December 8th:
African American Literature Summit Presentations Part I
2020 (Creative Presentations)

Thurs. December 10th:
LAST DAY OF CLASS
Last Day of African American Literature Summit Presentations Part II
2020 (Creative Presentations)

**FINAL EXAM: FINAL PAPERS ARE DUE ON OR BEFORE THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2020 by 8:00 PM SHARP via CANVAS (NO LATE PAPERS ACCEPTED)**