SYLLABUS FALL 2020
AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE BEFORE 1950 (21 352 395 Q1)
SPECIAL TOPICS IN BLACK STUDIES (21 014 302 Q1)
Prof. Karen Oliver  karen.oliver@rutgers.edu  908-884-9023

This syllabus has all the information you need to do well in this class. Please read it carefully and bring it to every class. Check Blackboard (https://blackboard.rutgers.edu) frequently to keep up with any revisions. Please bring any concerns you may have to my attention.

COURSE DESCRIPTION
1. In this writing intensive African American Literature course, you will read, analyze and write about literature written by people of African descent in America between 1773 and 1946.
2. In addition, you will examine cultural values, historical events and literary and intellectual trends that influenced the authors we will study.
3. We will explore the impact of race in America and discuss how the literature exposes and/or opposes social conditions that challenge the lives and living conditions of Americans today.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
1. You will be able to speak and write clearly and knowledgeably about some of the prominent black American writers of the mid-18th through mid-20th centuries and the literature they produced.
2. You will be able to demonstrate critical thinking and analytical reading skills by actively participating in and occasionally leading class and small group discussions critiquing the aesthetic quality, effect and meaning of the literature studied.
3. You will be able to evaluate the literature studied by writing about and discussing the importance of the texts today, their historical relevancy and their lasting impact.

READING ASSIGNMENTS
1. These are the texts that must be purchased, borrowed or rented:
   2. Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston
   3. Native Son by Richard Wright
   4. The Street by Ann Petry
   5. MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, latest edition
2. Additional readings may be required and will be posted on Blackboard.
3. The texts are required in print editions – not e-books. All are available at the campus Barnes and Noble Bookstore but may be purchased cheaper elsewhere.
4. Make sure your books arrive in time to finish reading them by the date they are scheduled for class discussion. Not receiving books on time is not an acceptable excuse for being unprepared.
5. The text being studied must always be brought to class.
6. Spark Notes or other such publications not acceptable as a substitute for readings.
7. The following texts are recommended, but not required:
   1. A Short Guide to Writing about Literature by Sylvan Barnet and William Cain
   2. Rowman & Littlefield Guide to Writing with Sources
WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Rutgers University Academic Integrity Policy
Plagiarism is not tolerated. 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. For details, visit: http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/

Personal Essays
1. You will write several two-page (no more, no less) personal essays intended to present your individual reactions and responses to the texts studied.
2. Research for the personal essay is not needed and, in fact, is discouraged.
3. Essays submitted more than one week after the due date will not be accepted.
4. Grades for late essays will be reduced based on the number of days late.

Biography Research Paper - Due October 10.
1. Each student will write a 2,000-word (not significantly more or less) research paper about the thoughts, beliefs and philosophies of an assigned author and a researched analysis of a poem, short story, play, essay or novel written by the author.
2. The paper must focus on important details of the author’s writing life, beliefs, significant events, literary contributions and the trends that influenced him or her – not trite statistical information about the writer’s life such as birth, death and school records.
3. The paper must reference four or more scholarly research sources that are not part of the course reading and that support the thesis of the paper.
4. Biography.com, Wikipedia and similar websites are unacceptable as research sources.
5. Papers submitted more than one week after the due date will not be accepted.
6. Grades for late papers will be reduced based on the number of days late.

Final Research Paper - Due on December 5.
1. You will write a 2,000-word research paper (not significantly more or less) on a challenging topic of your choice that examines an issue, question or argument related to the course content.
2. The paper must take a position on the issue, defend the position and make a conclusion.
3. The paper must center on the selected text(s), not just refer to the text(s) in passing.
4. The paper will demonstrate how the issues, themes and objectives uncovered in the selected text(s) are reflected in actual lived experiences.
5. The paper must reference four or more scholarly research sources that are not part of the course reading and that support the thesis of the paper.
6. Wikipedia and similar websites are unacceptable as research sources.
7. This paper will not be accepted after the due date.
8. If you do not submit the final research paper, you will not pass the course, regardless of your other grades.

You are expected to read this syllabus in its entirety and refer to it throughout the semester
General Writing Guidelines
1. All writing assignments must follow the MLA guidelines for student papers.
2. Your submission must be typewritten and carefully spell-checked, edited and proofread.
3. All writing assignments must have a title that you create that reflects the message and content of the research paper or essay.
4. The first line of every paragraph must be indented. Do not include extra space between paragraphs. If your version of Microsoft Word defaults to extra space between paragraphs, select Format, then paragraph, then check “Don’t add space between paragraphs of the same formatting.”
5. The first page should have your first and last name, the date, the class, and my name in the upper left-hand corner – single spaced. E.g.:

   Angela Williamson
   African American Literature
   Spring 2020
   Professor Karen Oliver
   October 6, 2020

6. After page one, all pages must have your name and the page number in the upper right-hand corner.
7. All writing assignments must be posted on Blackboard as a Doc or Docx file – not PDF.

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS / EXAMS
1. You must submit three thoughtful questions about the text (refer to page numbers) by 8 a.m. on each Saturday to be used for class discussion. The questions should be on the text’s concept, characters, theme, symbols, style, form, meaning, and historical context, something interesting or hard to understand, etc.
2. There will be short quizzes focused on the reading assignment due that day.
3. There are no make-ups for missed quizzes.
4. The final exam on December 19 will cover the literature and class discussions studied during the semester.

ZOOM CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE
Civil and Respectful Learning Environment
1. You must participate with the camera on and your name displayed.
2. You must be dressed in a presentable way as you would in an in-person class.
3. Ours is a learning environment where we all can feel comfortable asking questions and making statements without fear of being interrupted, ridiculed or threatened.
4. Classroom discussion is meant to allow us to hear a variety of viewpoints. This can only happen if we respect each other and our differences.
5. Disagreeing with and challenging each other is encouraged but must be done in a respectful and thoughtful way.
6. If you use or engage in threatening, disrespectful, demeaning, profane or vulgar language and/or behavior, you will be removed from the class for the day.
7. When you have a comment or question, raise your hand virtually and wait to be called on.

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**Class Participation.**
1. You are required to participate in classroom discussions about the texts studied.
2. Before speaking, ask yourself **“W.A.I.T. = Why Am I Talking?”**
   a. Think before you speak – has somebody already made the point you would like to make?
   b. Have you spoken a lot already?
   c. Can you take an opportunity to practice your active listening and make room for other voices that haven’t been heard yet?
   d. Does your comment relate to the topic being discussed or is it personal or about a different topic that can be discussed later?
3. Raise your hand virtually and wait to be called on before speaking. If you think you may forget your comment or question before being recognized, write it down.
4. Classroom participation will be reflected in your final grade.

**Attendance and Lateness.**
1. Class begins at 9 a.m. You are expected to be on time and ready to participate.
2. Class ends at 12:15 p.m. Please do not sign off before then.
3. Attendance is mandatory and will be recorded at each class.
4. You are allowed two excused absences – which must be appropriately documented.
5. Three absences are grounds for failure in this course.
6. It is better to come to class late than not to come at all, but frequent lateness will affect your grade. Two unexcused late arrivals equal one absence.
7. If you leave before the end of class without permission, or if you leave the class for extended periods of time without permission and then return, you will be marked absent for the entire class.
8. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get notes, homework assignments, etc. from classmates and to submit assigned work on the due date.

**Technology.**
Keep your cell phone off and put away during class.

You are expected to read this syllabus in its entirety and refer to it throughout the semester.
GRADING

Formula for Final Grade.
Your grade for the semester is calculated on the following basis:
1. Participation, personal essays, quizzes, attendance, general effort
2. Biography paper
3. Final research paper
4. Final exam

General grading guidelines

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Outstanding work beyond expectations. Extremely accomplished, creative, visionary, representing all that was required of the assignment and more.</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Exceeds expectations but is lacking in some aspects of the assignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Satisfactory, average achievement that is acceptable but not exceptional. Misses some of the requirements but shows a broad understanding of the requirements of the assignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Poor, substandard work. Key points were missed. Substantial work is required to meet basic expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Assignment not done or fails to meet the requirements.</td>
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Grading for class participation

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>You are a class leader who almost always contributes to discussions and encourages others to respond. You ask questions or build on the comments of others and support your position with evidence from the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>You frequently contribute to class discussion and sometimes are a class leader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>You share useful and relevant ideas and opinions but not frequently and you don’t support your ideas with examples from the text. You rarely engage others. You come to class prepared but you are not a leader.</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>You never or rarely participate in class discussions, or, if you do, your ideas are vague or not clearly articulated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>You did not complete the reading assignment. You are extremely late. You make insulting comments; interrupt when others are speaking; hold side conversations; dominate discussions with off-topic points; sleep in class; engage in disruptive, obnoxious or disrespectful behavior.</td>
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RUTGERS UNIVERSITY OFFICE OF DISABILITY SERVICES.
Suite 219, Paul Robeson Campus Center (973) 353-5315; odsnewark@rutgers.edu;
https://ods.rutgers.edu/contact-ods
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, 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:
https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/applying-for-services

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.

You are expected to read this syllabus in its entirety and refer to it throughout the semester
LEARNING RESOURCES.
Rutgers Learning Center (tutoring services), Room 140, Bradley Hall; (973) 353-5608; http://www.ncas.rutgers.edu/rlc

WRITING CENTER.
Provides tutoring and writing workshops. Room 126, Conklin Hall (973) 353-5847; nwc@rutgers.edu; www.ncas.rutgers.edu/writingcenter

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT CORE LITERATURE RUBRIC.

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<th></th>
<th>A: Outstanding</th>
<th>B: Exceeds Expectations</th>
<th>C: Meets Expectations</th>
<th>D: Marginal</th>
<th>F: Unacceptable</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Thesis</strong></td>
<td>Central claim is controversial, insightful, sophisticated, and unexpected. Thesis is stated clearly and forcefully, leaving no doubt where the argument is going.</td>
<td>Central claim is reasonable, but either simpler, less sophisticated, or less controversial than an A thesis. It may lack subtlety or nuance; the idea may be unmanageable.</td>
<td>Central claim may be too obvious or too broad to be convincing. Plot summary or vague claims about “importance” may take the place of specific argument.</td>
<td>Mere summary instead of argument, or claims too obvious. Essay may not ask the right kind of question, or significant parts of the text may be misunderstood.</td>
<td>No central claim, or just miscellaneous observations. The basics of the text are misunderstood.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
<td>Introduction clearly states the thesis; argument develops logically with clear transitions; a conclusion convincingly ties the argument together. Helpfully guides the reader to the conclusion.</td>
<td>Argument is not always developed in a way that is helpful to the reader. The conclusion doesn’t quite bring everything together.</td>
<td>Structure does not serve the reader well; reader has to struggle to follow the argument. Essay disjointed. Paragraphing not used to best effect.</td>
<td>Structure doesn’t guide the reader through the paper. Argument doesn’t build from point to point; it may be disjointed or drift without direction. Paragraphing problems.</td>
<td>No discernible structure. The reader has to struggle to follow the argument from introduction to conclusion.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence and Close Reading</strong></td>
<td>All claims are grounded in the texts with impressive attention to language and other textual details. Judicially selected evidence convinces the reader to accept the thesis. Essay is sensitive to nuances.</td>
<td>Most but not all evidence supports the thesis. Generalization may take the place of careful attention to the text. Links between the evidence and the thesis are not always clear.</td>
<td>Evidence may be superficial, based on misunderstanding the text or historical context. Paraphrase may take the place of careful engagement with the text. Important evidence may be neglected.</td>
<td>Evidence does not support the thesis, or is irrelevant, oversimplified, or misinterpreted. Paraphrase or summary takes the place of careful engagement with the details of the text.</td>
<td>Little or no evidence drawn from the text, or the text is seriously misinterpreted.</td>
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<td>Research</td>
<td>The best sources convincingly integrated into the thesis. Various sources are accorded the appropriate degree of authority. All sources cited properly.</td>
<td>Research contributes adequately to the thesis. Appropriate attention to the authority of various sources. Sources are cited.</td>
<td>Some research brought to bear on the subject, not always successfully. Sources used without proper regard for their authority, or are not cited properly.</td>
<td>Research not convincingly integrated into the thesis. Sources used without regard for accuracy or relevance. Sources not cited.</td>
<td>Sources not credible or not integrated into the argument. No attempt made to cite evidence. Any passage of the essay is plagiarized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar, Style, and Mechanics</td>
<td>Style is graceful, clear, engaging, and suited to the audience. Diction is precise, sentences demonstrate variety, technical terms are used correctly, and mechanical errors are minimal. No words are wasted.</td>
<td>Style is generally clear and with no substantial flaws. Sentences are well constructed and terms are used precisely. Mechanical errors are limited.</td>
<td>Prose is awkward, verbose, or unclear. It may be too colloquial or too stilted. Diction may be vague or inappropriate. Mechanical errors, but not so many to threaten the reader's comprehension.</td>
<td>Serious problems with coherence and sentence clarity, or mechanical problems that interfere with comprehension. Terms are used imprecisely. Prose is awkward or verbose, making the reader struggle.</td>
<td>The writing is confusing, awkward, or verbose, and marred by mechanical problems that interfere with comprehension. Diction imprecise and sometimes inappropriate for the subject.</td>
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**CLASS SCHEDULE.**
Assigned readings must be completed by the indicated date. Additional readings may be assigned during the semester. *Spark Notes* or other such publications are unacceptable as a substitute for readings. This schedule is tentative and may be revised. All revisions will be posted on Blackboard.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Due Date</th>
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| Sept 5 | **Lerone Bennett** “The Road Not Taken” from *The Shaping of Black America* [Blackboard]  
**Thomas Jefferson** *Notes on the State of Virginia* excerpt [Blackboard] |
| Sept 12 | **Frederick Douglass** (bio *Norton* 326)  
*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (*Norton* 330-393) |
| Sept 19 | **Harriet Jacob** (bio *Norton* 221)  
*Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl* by Linda Brent (excerpt *Norton* 221-261) |
| Sept 26 | **David Walker** (bio *Norton* 160)  
from *David Walker’s Appeal ... To the Coloured Citizens of the World*  
“Preamble” and “Article One” (*Norton* 161-171)  
**Booker T. Washington** (bio *Norton* 548)  
from *Up from Slavery* (*Norton* 550-579)  
**W.E.B. DuBois** (bio *Norton* 679)  
| Oct 3 | **Nella Larsen** (bio *Norton* p 1079)  
*Passing* (*Norton* 1080 – 1141) |
| Oct 10 | **Biography Research Paper Due**  
**Zora Neale Hurston** (bio *Norton* 1305)  
*Their Eyes Were Watching God* by (chapters 1-10)  
**Note:** You are to buy and read the novel – not the excerpt in *Norton*. |
| Oct 17 | **Note:** You are to buy and read the novel – not the excerpt in *Norton*.  
*Their Eyes Were Watching God* (chapters 11- end) |
| Oct 24 | **Richard Wright** – *Native Son* – ‘Fear’ |
| Oct 31 | *Native Son* – ‘Flight’ |
| Nov 7 | *Native Son* – ‘Fate’ |
| Nov 14 | **Ann Petry** – *The Street by* (chapters 1-9) |
| Nov 21 | *The Street* (chapters 10-end) |
| **Nov 28** | **THANKSGIVING RECESS – NO CLASS** |
| Dec 5 | **Final Research Paper Due / Class Presentations** |
| Dec 19 | **Final Exam** |

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