ENG 352:420: Trends in American Fiction

Morrison & Music

Tuesdays and Thursdays: 11:30 AM-12:50 PM
Room: HAH 421

Professor: Dr. Melanie R. Hill
Office Hours: Tuesdays from 1:00 PM-2:00 PM and by appointment
Location: Hill Hall 512
Phone: (973) 353-5182
Email: mrh197@english.rutgers.edu

Course Overview:

In an article in The New Yorker entitled, “Toni Morrison and Nina Simone, United in Soul,” Emily Lordi writes, “Toni Morrison was such an exceptional talent and seemed to float so high above the fray, that it’s easy to forget she was a product of her time. But she was profoundly
influenced by the work of contemporary musicians. She wanted her writing to emulate, ... ‘all of the intricacy, all of the discipline, that she heard in black musical performance.’"

In this course, we will explore Toni Morrison's canonical oeuvre from novels, Jazz and Song of Solomon to Sula and Beloved. In addition to Morrison's works, we will examine the intersection of African American literature and music, as well as race, gender and spirituality. This seminar will juxtapose Morrison's renowned literature with the performances of black musicians from Nina Simone and Curtis Mayfield to Issac Hayes and Aretha Franklin. As both text and performance, prose and poetry, and literature and music, studying the works of Toni Morrison offers an excellent resource for our investigation of black literary studies.

This seminar is designed to give students a profound examination of Toni Morrison's writing, and 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 11-12 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 11-12 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 also present their final paper project idea in a creative form (i.e. Power Point presentation, et al.). Make this presentation creative!

Course Goals:

- Comprehend how the canonical works of Toni Morrison reflect the current cultures of African American literary studies.
- 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 will be able to 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.
Required Texts:

*Sula* (1973)
*Song of Solomon* (1977)
*Tar Baby* (1981)
*Beloved* (1987)
*Jazz* (1992)
*Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992)
*Paradise* (1997)
*A Mercy* (2008)
*Home* (2012)
*God Help the Child* (2015)
*Mouth Full of Blood: Essays, Speeches, and Meditations* (2019) (*these essays will be assigned throughout the semester*)


(*any short stories that are assigned will be distributed in .pdf files via email to all students*)
(*some texts are recommended reading that will help you throughout the semester; recommended texts are not required texts*)

Some of our Featured Music:

Jill Scott, *The Light of the Sun* (2011)
Solange Knowles, *A Seat at the Table* (2016)
Ms. Lauryn Hill, *MTV Unplugged* (2001)
India Arie, *Acoustic Soul* (2001)
India Arie, *Songversation* (2013)

Albums by:
*Sade*
*Abbey Lincoln*
*Nina Simone*
*Aretha Franklin*
*Isaac Hayes*
Curtis Mayfield

Some of our Featured Films and Documentaries:

Beloved (1998) (Duration: 2 hours and 52 minutes)
Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am (2019) (Duration: 2 hours)

Recommended Texts:
Zora N. Hurston, The Sanctified Church: The Folklife 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
Ntozake Shange, Lost in Language and Sound
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.

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 1 (3 pages): 15%
Reading Response Paper/Think Piece 2 (5 pages): 25%
Class Participation: 15%
In-Class Assignments: 10%
Final Paper/Project Presentation: 35%

In-class 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 question assignment is 1-2 pages. All in-class assignments must be submitted to Canvas the day BEFORE our scheduled class (Monday) by 4:00 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. 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 Proposals will be due on Canvas on Wednesday, March 25th by 2:00 PM.
Several weeks before the end of the semester, you will turn in a final project proposal (1.5-2 double-spaced pages that tell what topic and themes your final paper will encompass) that you can later incorporate into your final project. There are three forms this will take:

1. At the end of the semester, each student will give a presentation about your final paper topic (you can present this in Power Point, Prezi, et al; you can be creative with this presentation!). You must turn in a formal proposal stating the project, its goals, and the research that will underlie it by March 25th. 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.

   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


- 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
- 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
Course Calendar (*the professor reserves the right to change the course calendar at her discretion*):

Week One

**Tues. January 21st**

*First Day of Class*
- Introductions / Ice Breaker
- Overview of Syllabus
- *Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am*
- Notification of Thursday's Morrison & Music Assignment

Read New Yorker article on Morrison and Nina Simone:
Also read Morrison’s *Tribute to Martin Luther King, Jr.* (article can be found on Canvas)

**Thurs. January 23rd:**

Short Story Assignment: *United in Soul* (New Yorker article)
Short Essay Assignment: *Tribute to MLK*
Music Assignment: Nina Simone

Week Two:

January 28th:

*Article Assignment: Race Matters* by Toni Morrison
*Preface to Playing in the Dark*
*Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature* (Source of Self-Regard)
Start reading half of The Bluest Eye
Music Assignment: Aretha Franklin

January 30th:

Submit one-paged single-spaced reading response to Morrison’s *Black Matters* article and documentary
Black Matters article can be found in *Playing in the Dark*
*The Bluest Eye*

Week Three:

February 4th:
Women, Race, and Memory (Source of Self-Regard)

Finish *The Bluest Eye*

Music Selections and Discussion: Blues Music (Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday)

**Thursday, February 6th:**
Start *Sula*

The Individual Artist (Source of Self-Regard)

Supplemental Text: *Deep River: Music and Memory in Harlem Renaissance Thought*

Music Selection:


**Week Four:**

**February 11/13**

*Sula*

*Lena Horne*

*Josephine Baker*

**Week Five:**

**February 18/20**

*Sonic Language Series Part I*

*Song of Solomon*

*Mahalia Jackson*

**Week Six:**

**February 25/27**

*Tar Baby*

*(Think Piece Paper 1 Due Wednesday, February 26th by 4:00 PM)*

*Mary J*

**Week Seven:**

**March 3/5**

*Beloved*

*Dinah Washington*

*Marian Anderson*

*Ethel Waters*

**Week Eight:**

**March 10/12**

*Jazz*


*Deniece Williams*
Lena Horne

Spring Break: March 14-22, 2020 (Class will not meet)

Week Nine:
March 24/26
Paradise
Final Project Proposals Due Wednesday, March 25th by 2:00 PM
Mahalia Jackson
James Brown
Otis Redding

Week Ten:
March 31/April 2
Love
Think Piece Paper 2 Due Tuesday, March 31st by 4:00 PM
Sarah Vaughn
Erykah Badu
Donny Hathaway

Week Eleven:
April 7/9
Sonic Language Series Part III
A Mercy
Mouth Full of Blood
Music Selections: Lauryn Hill; Jill Scott

Week Twelve:
April 14/16
Sonic Language Series Part IV
Home
Music Selections: Ella Fitzgerald

Week Thirteen:
April 21/23
God Help the Child
Invisible Ink: Reading the Writing and Writing the Reading (Source of Self-Regard)
Music Selections: Roberta Flack
Week Fourteen:
April 28/30
Last Days of Class
Final Projects/Presentations: MORRISON & MUSIC SUMMIT 2020

Last Day of Classes: Monday, May 4\textsuperscript{th}
Readings Days: May 5\textsuperscript{th} & 6\textsuperscript{th}
Spring Exams Begin: May 7\textsuperscript{th}

\textbf{FINAL EXAM: FINAL PAPERS ARE DUE ON OR BEFORE FRIDAY, MAY 8, 2020 by 12 PM SHARP via CANVAS}