

**Professor John Keene**  
Rutgers University-Newark  
Spring 2014  
W/F 11:30 am - 12:50 pm, Conklin 352  
**E-mail 1 (BEST):** [johnkeene@earthlink.net](mailto:johnkeene@earthlink.net)

**English/AAAS Department**  
Office: Conklin Hall 321  
Office Phone: 973-353-3899  
Off. Hours: W 1-3 (and by appt.)  
**E-mail 2:** [john.keene@rutgers.edu](mailto:john.keene@rutgers.edu)

**REVISED**

**AAAS 21:014:358:01 / ENGLISH 21:350:394:02**  
**Comparative Literatures of Africa and the Caribbean**  
**History and Myth in the Contemporary African Diasporic Fiction**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course will explore the relationship between history and myth, and contemporary novels written by authors from throughout the African Diaspora. Our focus will be manifold: we will examine the ways in which these authors explore and confront local and global histories, as well as a range of mythologies, through different national, ethnocultural, racial, gender, and other frameworks. The course will begin with an examination of the idea of the African Diaspora, as well as of the novel's origins in the genre of history and epic, and proceed through various historical moments of major significance to the Africana experience.

While noting the inherent heterogeneities of works by authors of from throughout the Africa Diaspora, this course will specifically question the validity of and look for points of comparison within and between literary divisions, linguistic and geographic, as defined by the course parameters. The critical emphases will fall upon aesthetic issues such as the relation of each work to the various literary traditions, as well as artistic movements and theoretical developments over the last three decades. It also will fall upon larger sociocultural themes such nationalism and the Black Atlantic; hybridity and creolity; displacement and exile; intra, extra and transcultural links, and boundary negotiations; race, ethnicity, and the role of literature in a revolutionary society; the colonial legacy and post-coloniality; gender, sexuality, class, and the development of multifaceted Black identities and identifications.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

**Book-Length Texts:**

*Available at the Rutgers Bookstore (You can also order them online to find discounted copies):*  
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, New York: Anchor, 2007. □ ISBN-10:

1400095204 □ ISBN-10: 1400095204

Nana Ekua Brew-Hammond, *Powder Necklace*, New York: Washington Square Press, 2010. □ ISBN-10: 1439126100 □ ISBN-13: 978-1439126103

Edward P. Jones, *The Known World*, New York: Amistad, 2006. □ ISBN-10: 0061159174 □ ISBN-13: 978-0061159176

Ana-Maurine Lara, *Erzulie's Skirt*, Austin: Redbone Press, 2006. □ ISBN-10: 0978625102 □ ISBN-13: 978-0978625108

Alain Mabanckou, *Broken Glass*, New York: Soft Skull Press, 2010. □ ISBN-10: 1593762739 □ ISBN-13: 978-1593762735

Zakes Mda, *Cion*, New York: Picador, 2003. ASIN: B0013OOD2S

Ishmael Reed, *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down*, Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2000. □  
ISBN-10: 1564782387 □ ISBN-13: 978-1564782380

Please note that if you are unable to purchase the assigned texts, **let me know in advance of the date they have been assigned, and I will do my best to help you find a copy.**

### **Shorter Texts (Poems, Stories, etc.)**

*All other required texts will be posted to the CMS Blackboard site.* Please note that I may change the course texts, but will give you sufficient advance notice. If you would like to acquire the full-length books in which any of these shorter texts appear, please let me know and I will provide you with the proper citation. Please bring all texts we will be reading to class.

### **LEARNING GOALS**

(Please note that this course's learning goals are not limited to these alone.)

1. Gain greater understanding of the concept and ideas surrounding the African Diaspora, local and global(ized) forms of blackness, and African Diasporic literature, particularly fiction.
2. Understand complex and shifting relationships between literary texts from across the Diaspora, identifying commonalities and differences, based on concepts such as politics, economics, society, culture, language, nationality, gender, sexuality, and class, and how these concepts shape and inform literary expression and production.
3. Understand how literary texts relate to and participate in the discursive production of ideas of and material forms of blackness, and shape our ways of understanding black peoples.
4. Evaluate the roles and impact of history and historical events, particularly slavery, colonialism and post-colonialism, in shaping the literatures and cultural production of people of African descent.
5. Evaluate the roles and impact of myths and mythologies, in varying forms, in shaping the literatures and cultural production of people of African descent.
6. Compare and contrast the fictional approaches of the writers, and develop a language to discuss works of fiction, by writers of African descent as well as more generally.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

#### **Course Requirements:**

1. Regular, punctual attendance at and participation in class;
2. 3 short (2 at 1-2 pages maximum, 1 at 4 pages maximum, unless otherwise specified) response papers, which you will be submitting on the dates listed on the calendar below;
3. In-class mid-term examination;
4. *Periodic* pop quizzes or in-class very brief writing assignments;
5. A final, completed 7-to-10 page critical or research paper (1/2 of which you will submit several weeks in advance, for my review), to be submitted by the date listed on the calendar below. Please note that you must come to speak with me in person about your final paper.

#### **Extra Credit:**

1. Creation *or* revision of a Wikipedia page on a living author from the African Diaspora.

**This course will *not* have a final exam, but there will be a mid-term, as noted above, and there may be pop quizzes throughout.**

### **Attendance & Punctuality**

Attendance is mandatory. You are expected to attend the entire class.

- *Three (3) unexcused (medical, family emergency, etc.) absences will lower your course grade ONE LETTER GRADE (e.g., B to C).*
- *Five (5) unexcused absences **may result in failure.***

Repeated tardiness is also unacceptable.

- *Four (4) excused tardy appearances will lower your course grade ONE LETTER GRADE (e.g., B to C).*

Please come to class. If you cannot attend this class regularly and on time because of a schedule conflict, do not enroll in this class. If you have a life event that prevents your class attendance, let me know. I am very flexible and will work with you. I want you to succeed in this class and at Rutgers University.

### **Short Response Papers**

You will submit two short 1 to 2-page papers, and one 4-page paper, in which you respond to one of the course readings assigned directly prior to the deadline for the paper. Although these papers are brief, you should take them seriously, and aim for clarity, cogency, and concision in the presentation of your ideas. Please place your name and the date of submission on your first page, and be sure to number your pages, use 12-point font, and double-space all your pages.

Turning in fewer than the three response papers will also lower your course grade by ONE FULL GRADE (e.g., from B to C), and late papers will not be accepted without a signed doctor's note or an equivalent form of excused late submission, such a personal family tragedy or a tropical storm like Sandy (broken printers, feeling blah, forgot the date, etc. are not acceptable).

Be sure to place your name and date on your response paper pages, and number your pages. It is your responsibility to identify who you are and that you are submitted required work.

### **Midterm Exam**

You will have a midterm exam in the middle of the course that draws upon all of the course readings you have done up to that point. You will not be allowed to bring any books or other course materials, or use any electronic and digital devices during the exam, so please do the reading so that you are able to answer the exam questions. The exam will comprise identification questions and one essay question. If you have done the reading, you should have no major problem with the exam.

### **Final Paper**

You must hand in your final paper, in the drafts outlined above, in **HARDCOPY** form to me on the date it is due. The two versions are to help *you* with your writing and ensure you submit the strongest paper possible. I will post guidelines, a template for you to structure it, and a checklist for you to review before you submit it. **Do not submit it via email.** Let me repeat: **do not**

**submit it to me via email.** Bring it to the African American and African Studies department main office. ***Without prior approval late papers will not be accepted.***

### **Wikipedia Project (Extra Credit)**

Students choosing this extra credit project will create, or edit and revise (to improve, with added links and references), a Wikipedia entry on a literary figure *from across the African Diaspora*, broadly conceived. This exercise should involve verifiable library and online research, and the student should

- add *at least 3 new* biographical, historical and cultural facts with bibliographical material, including lists of studies on the author, links to interviews, etc., to verify the additional information; OR
- add relevant critical and theoretical material on the author, based on your research, AND provide a short 2-3 sentence précis of several (not all) of the author's works.

(NB: all students interested in doing this should sign up for Wikipedia by the end of the *first* week of classes to be sure you'll be able to post by the due date. You also should check on the suitability of your proposed author or literary figure (creative writers in all genres, literary scholars, and essayists and journalists will all qualify), and clear this with me before you proceed.)

Be sure to place your name and date on your final paper, and number your pages. It is your responsibility to identify who you are and that you are submitted required work.

### **Classroom Etiquette**

Everyone enrolled in the class is expected to behave in a polite, thoughtful, agreeable manner. If you behave rudely or are inconsiderate to your classmates (excessive domination of the discussion, cutting people off, name-calling, etc.) you will be asked to leave the room. (Repeated disruptions may result in a failing grade.) You should be ready to participate in every discussion. You may *not* keep a laptop computer open or a tablet computer running for note-taking unless you have spoken first with and gotten permission from me. You must shut off all cellphones; texting, Tweeting, Facebooking, Instagramming, Pinteresting, listening to your cellphone, mp3 player or similar device, and above all, cellphone conversations, as well as any other similar forms of behavior, are unacceptable. If you are caught doing any of these more than once, your *course* grade will fall by ONE LETTER GRADE (e.g., C to D).

### **GRADING POLICY:**

3 Response papers = 25%

Mid-term examination = 30%

Final paper = 35%

In-class participation and Attendance = 10%

+

Pop quizzes/in-class writing assignments (these can help to raise or lower your grade)

= 100 percent!

Extra credit (this can only raise your grade)

= + 10 percent!

**A = Exceptional work**

**B+ = Very good work**

**B = Pretty good work**

**C+ = Good work**

**C = Average work**

**D = Substandard work but enough to pass**

**F = Very poor work (I do not want to give anyone this grade, so please, make the effort.)**

### **PLAGIARISM:**

Simply put, plagiarism, which entails the unattributed copying of someone else's work, is unacceptable. This includes copying passages of someone else's work—published, unpublished, in a book, from a newspaper, from a blog, from Google, anywhere--without attributing the copied material either in the text or in footnote or endnote as a quote, with adequate citation. It is always better to write a flawed draft that you can strengthen and revise than to submit someone else's work. Always.

Even if you are pressed for time, do not copy someone else's work and submit it as your own without proper attribution. I will devote one of our class sessions towards the end of the term, before your paper draft is due, to discussing matters such as research, endnotes, and so forth. You may also always schedule a session at the Writing Center in Conklin 126 to discuss your paper; the Writing Center is not just for students who may be struggling with their writing, but also for everyone who wants to improve her or his work. They are there to help you.

There are programs that faculty members can access which can scan for plagiarized texts, so please, do not do so.

Please note that Rutgers takes breaches of code of academic integrity very seriously, and if you plagiarize, you will be putting your college future in jeopardy. Violations of the University academic integrity policy will be prosecuted.

**DO NOT PLAGIARIZE.**

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Also, please note that the State of New Jersey has very serious penalties, including a substantial fine and potential prison time, for students who purchase and submit papers from online academic paper mills. I am not making this up: it is very serious business. So again, do your own work, come talk with me and also visit the writing center if you are experiencing any issues with your papers, and absolute do not plagiarize someone else's material.

### **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AGREEMENT:**

As per the rules of Rutgers University, students should sign the Academic Integrity Agreement, which can be found on the CMS Blackboard site.

### **ADDITIONAL COURSE POLICIES:**

#### **E-mail:**

Please provide me with the best e-mail to reach you. If you do not use e-mail, please let me know as soon as possible.

E-mail is the best way to reach me. **My earthlink account is the best route.**

**Emergencies:**

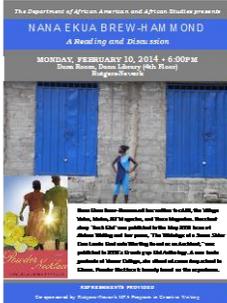
In the case of an emergency, please contact the African American and African Studies department's main office at 973-353-5528, OR the English Department's main office at 973-353-5158, or have someone you trust contact them. If you are ill and not incapacitated, please send me e-mail if you can; if you can only contact me afterwards and you must be out for a long period of time, please have the appropriate person in your school notify me.

**Religious Holiday Policy:**

It is University policy (University Regulation on Attendance, Book 2, 2.47B, formerly 60.14f) to excuse without penalty students who are absent from class because of religious observance, and to allow the make-up of work missed because of such absence. Examinations and special required out-of-class activities shall ordinarily not be scheduled on those days when religiously observant students refrain from participating in secular activities. Absences for reasons of religious obligation shall not be counted for purposes of reporting.

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.

**COURSE SCHEDULE\***

<b>DATE</b>	<b>WEEK / TOPIC</b>	<b>ASSIGNMENT</b>
<b>Wed 1/22</b>	<b>Week 1:</b> Introduction Discussion of Syllabus Discussion of Course Topic and Themes	READ: Syllabus; Colin Palmer, "The African Diaspora"
<b>Fri 1/24</b>		READ: John Keene, "Mannahatta" (at <a href="http://www.triquarterly.org/issues/issue-145/mannahatta">http://www.triquarterly.org/issues/issue-145/mannahatta</a> ) and Robin D. G. Kelley, "How the West was One: On the Uses and Limitations of Diaspora"
<b>Wed 1/29</b>	<b>Week 2:</b>	READ: Natalie Zemon Davis, "Stories and the Hunger to Know" and Claude Lévi-Strauss, "When Myth Becomes History"
<b>Fri 1/31</b>		READ: Nana Ekua Brew-Hammond, <i>Powder Necklace</i> <b>FIRST RESPONSE PAPER DUE (1-2 pages)</b>
<b>Wed 2/5</b>	<b>Week 3:</b>	READ: Nana Ekua Brew-Hammond, <i>Powder Necklace</i>
<b>Fri 2/7</b>		READ: Nana Ekua Brew-Hammond, <i>Powder Necklace</i>
<b>Mon 2/10</b>	<b>Week 4:</b>	 <p><b>NANA EKUA BREW-HAMMOND</b> <b>READING, 6 pm Dana Room, Dana Library</b> <b>(please bring your question for her)</b></p>
<b>Wed 2/12</b>		READ: Yvonne Denis Rosario, "silencing"
<b>Fri 2/14</b>		READ: Edward P. Jones, <i>The Known World</i>
<b>Wed 2/19</b>	<b>Week 5:</b>	READ: Edward P. Jones, <i>The Known World</i>
<b>Fri 2/21</b>		READ: Edward P. Jones, <i>The Known World</i>
<b>Wed 2/26</b>	<b>Week 6:</b>	READ: Yvonne Denis Rosario, "the newspapers of yesteryear" / READ: Ishmael Reed, <i>Yellowback Radio Broke Down</i> <b>SECOND RESPONSE PAPER DUE (1-2 pages)</b>
<b>Fri 2/28</b>		READ: Ishmael Reed, <i>Yellowback Radio Broke Down</i>

Wed 3/5	Week 7:	READ: Ishmael Reed, <i>Yellowback Radio Broke Down</i>
Fri 3/7		READ: Edwidge Danticat, "Nineteen Thirty Seven"
Tu 3/11		<b>EDWARD P. JONES READING (w/ US Poet Laureate Natasha Trethewey), Writers at Newark 2014 Spring Series, Paul Robeson Gallery, 5:30 pm</b>
Wed 3/12	Week 8:	<b>MIDTERM EXAM</b>
Fri 3/14		READ: Ana Maurine Lara, <i>Erzulie's Skirt</i>
Wed 3/19	Week 9:	<b>NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK</b> READ: Ana Maurine Lara, <i>Erzulie's Skirt</i>
Fri 3/21		
Wed 3/26	Week 10:	Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, <i>Half a Yellow Sun</i>
Fri 3/28		<b>NO CLASS</b> READ: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, <i>Half a Yellow Sun</i>
Wed 4/2	Week 11:	READ: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, <i>Half a Yellow Sun</i>
Fri 4/4		READ: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, <i>Half a Yellow Sun</i> / ZZ Packer, "Doris Is Coming"
Wed 4/9	Week 12:	READ: Alain Mabanckou, <i>Broken Glass</i>
Fri 4/11		<b>NO CLASS</b> READ: Alain Mabanckou, <i>Broken Glass</i>
Wed 4/16	Week 13:	READ: Zakes Mda, <i>Cion</i> <b>THIRD RESPONSE PAPER DUE (4 pages)</b>
Fri 4/18		READ: Zakes Mda, <i>Cion</i>
Wed 4/23	Week 14:	READ: Zakes Mda, <i>Cion</i>
Fri 4/25		READ: Jean Wyllys, "Mother of the Monster," "The Color of Blood" and "Pharmakon" <b>FIRST DRAFT OF 1/2 (3-5 pages) of FINAL PAPER</b>
Wed 4/30	Week 15:	READ: Nalo Hopkinson, "The Glass Bottle Trick"
Fri 5/2		<b>FINAL DISCUSSION</b> (Professor present) <b>WIKIPEDIA PROJECT DUE</b> (Only if you are doing it)
Wed 5/8	<b>EXAM WEEK</b>	<b>FINAL PAPER DUE (7-10 pages), in History/AAAS Main Office, Conklin Hall, by 5 pm.</b>