

350:376 Issues and Problems in Black Literature

Undergraduate Courses | Spring 2011 - [African-American, Ethnic American, or Global Anglo](#)



01 M6 CAC 54516 KERNAN SC-104
W6 SC-106

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Office Hours: Wednesday at 7:00 pm and by appointment

This course can also be used to fulfill the Literary Theory requirement.

01-African American Literary Theory

This course provides an overview of the history of African-American literary criticism that spans from 1926 to 2010, and contextualizes this body of criticism inside the broader context of the field of study that has come to be known as "literary theory." Hence, we will examine the canon of African American literary theory (Du Bois, Locke, Larry Neale, Addison Gayle, Paul Gilroy, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Franz Fanon, Kwame Appiah, Brent Hayes Edwards) in light of several texts penned by figures now considered the seminal to the canon of contemporary literary theory in general (Saussure, Derrida, Barthes, Foucault). We will explore questions such as: how does African Literary theory function as both an expansion and a revision of what is generally considered to be "literary theory"? To what extent have critics of African American literature distanced or associated themselves from theorists of structuralism, post-structuralism, and post-modernity? What other fields of philosophical endeavors have proved attractive to critics of African American literary theory? What makes a theory or work of literature Black? Students will be expected to write one midterm paper and one final paper. Each of these papers will require students to examine one work of contemporary art (be it a painting, a poem, or even a billboard) through a critical lens afforded by one of our texts.

Schedule

Week 1- Jan. 19th- Introductory Lecture

Week 2- Jan 24th – Selections from Plato's *The Symposium*

Week 2- Jan 26th – "The Criteria for Negro Art" by W.E.B. Du Bois

Week 3- Jan 31st– Selections from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*

Week 4- Feb 7th– Forethought and Chapter 1 of The Souls of Black Folk by W.E.B. Du Bois

Week 4- Feb 9th – "The Death of the Author" by Roland Barthes

Week 5- Feb 14th– "What is an Author?" by Michel Foucault

Week 5- Feb 16th– "The Characteristics of Negro Expression" by Zora Neal Hurston

Week 6- Feb 21st– "Introduction" to The New Negro by Alain Locke

"The Negro Art Hokum" by George Schuyler

Week 6- Feb 23rd- “On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense” by Friedrich Nietzsche

Week 7- Feb 28th- “The Negro Art Hokum” by George Schuyler

Week 7- March 2nd- “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” by Langston Hughes

Week 8- March 7th – Selections from Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Course on General Linguistics*

Week 9- March 9th- Selections from the work of critic Houston Baker

Week 9- March 14th- “Blueprint for Negro Literature” by Richard Wright

Spring Break

Week 10- March 21st **Midterm Paper due (3 pages)**- “Everybody’s Protest Novel” by James Baldwin

Week 10- March 23rd- -Selections from Understanding the New Black Poetry by Stephen Henderson

Week 11- March 28th- Selections from Discourse on Colonialism by Aimé Césaire

Week 11- March 30th- “And Shine Swam On...” by Larry Neal

Week 12- April 4th- Selections from The Wretched of the Earth by Franz Fanon

Week 12- April 6th- “Cultural Strangulation” by Addison Gayle Jr.

Week 13- April 11th- Selections from *Grammatology* by Jacques Derrida

Week 13- April 13th- “The Uses of Diaspora by Brent Hayes Edwards”

Week 14- April 18th- “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” by Walter Benjamin

Week 14- April 20th- “The Post-Colonial and the Postmodern” by Kwame Appiah

Week 15- April 25th- Selections from “Preface to Blackness” by Henry Louis Gates Jr.

Week 15 April 27th—Final Lecture and *The Great MacDaddy*

May 3rd- Final Paper due (7 pages)

Required Readings:

All Readings Can be Found Online on the Class Blog

Class Blog- <http://rutgersblackliterarytheory.wordpress.com/>

Course Objectives

To both familiarize you with the seminal texts of literary theory and to help you **read those texts at a college level**. “Read,” in this sense, means a deep engagement with the text where you not only recognize what is explicit on the page, but also formulate your own understandings of how the work conveys meanings. You’ll better learn to think of each work both in terms of its parts and as a whole.

Close Reading

This is the “meat and bones” of what we’ll be focusing on all quarter. A close reading pays detailed attention to the particular elements of a text’s language and relates

those elements of language to the larger issue of how the text conveys complex meanings to the reader. The elements we will look at include word choice, sentence construction, imagery as well as several other poetic devices and figures of language. Examining these elements helps us to arrive at a deeper understanding of a text and helps us to explore the text's crucial issues (social, political, philosophical, familial, etc.).

Discussion

Your discussion sections offer you a place for exploration, a space where—if you come prepared—all can benefit from your insights and from those of others. Exploring texts can be difficult, and fascinating discussions depend on a variety of opinions. **You should never be afraid to ask a question. THERE ARE STUPID PROFESSORS, BUT THERE ARE NOT STUPID QUESTIONS.** Discussion is meant to clear up any confusion you might have about lectures, our texts or the essay writing (or test-taking) we'll be doing. Most of the time, I'll be able to stay after lecture to answer brief questions, and you should also (in all of your classes for the rest of your academic life) take advantage of my office hours! Office hours allow you to get one-on-one help with any difficulties you may encounter, and your visitation keeps professors from getting too lonely and spiteful in their offices.

Grading Breakdown

Attendance-10%

Participation - 25%

Paper #1- 20%

Paper #2- 45%