English 347: Introduction to African-American Literature

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Required Texts:
- Gates and McKay, *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*
- Toni Morrison, *Beloved*
- Gloria Naylor, *Mama Day*

Course Description
This course provides a survey of African-American literature from the 18th century to the present. We will not proceed according to strict chronological order, however; instead, we will concentrate our focus on some key themes of African-American literature. We will begin by examining slavery and its legacy. We will then investigate the rich vernacular tradition in African-American literature. Next, we will study various conceptions of the definitions and purposes of African American literary art and artists. We will conclude the course by reading literature that reflects the changing role of the family and identity in African-American culture.

Course Objectives
In this course we will develop an understanding of and an appreciation for African-American literature. As we move through various literary genres, we will become more attentive and intelligent readers, and will learn to ask questions of all types of texts. We will also sharpen our critical thinking, discussing, and writing skills.

Additionally, as you probably know, this course meets the Cultural Pluralism requirement. The intent of this requirement is to introduce students to different cultures, lifestyles, value systems, and heritages. Accordingly, we will closely examine African-American culture and heritage as they are reflected in literature. But more than that, we will try to open ourselves up to new ways of thinking about our own history and the history of our country. Such an endeavor demands that we approach this literature and our discussions with an open mind and a willingness to accept new ideas.

Course Requirements
- Midterm Examination: 30%
- Paper: 30%
- Final Examination: 30%
- Participation/Quizzes: 10%

*All work must be completed on time in order to receive a passing grade in the course.

*This course will be run as a lecture/discussion class. In other words, while I will lecture for part of most class periods, we will also have lively discussions which will rely heavily on everyone’s input. Merely attending class is not enough to give you an “A” or even a “B” in participation; you must make frequent and valuable contributions to the discussions. Such contributions can, of course, include intelligent, provocative questions as well as responses to such questions.

*Absences and tardies: You are expected to attend class every day, and I will take roll every day. Obviously, you cannot contribute to discussions if you are not in class, so ultimately, absences do affect your grade. If you miss more than 5 classes, you will fail the course. Being consistently tardy is one of the few things you can do to truly irritate me. If you have a legitimate problem getting to class on time, come talk to me about it. Otherwise, I consider tardies rude and intrusive, and they will affect your final grade.

*If you are absent, you will need to get class notes from another student in the course. If you have questions after reviewing these notes, please come to office hours; however, please recognize that I cannot repeat lectures/discussions for every student who is absent. It is your responsibility to get the information you missed (another reason not to miss class!).
*We will have periodic quizzes to ensure that you are keeping up with the reading. These quizzes will be unannounced and you will not be able to make up quizzes if you are absent.

*The paper will be assigned in writing at a later date. I do not accept late papers except under extreme circumstances. Check with me to see if your circumstance constitutes an “extreme” one.

*GWR certification: Those of you wishing to qualify for the GWR certification will receive two opportunities in this course. The first one is the second week of class, and the second chance is the final exam. Remember that you must have junior status in order to take the exam, and that you must end this course with a grade of “C” or better in addition to passing the writing test.

Miscellaneous Rules of the Road

*Please turn off all cell phones, pagers, and other electronic devices during class. If you have a legitimate reason for needing your cell phone on, please let me know in advance of the class period.

*Email etiquette: If you email me during the quarter, I will do my best to respond to the email in 48 hours. That means, then, that you shouldn’t email me the evening before an exam with a question—chances are, I won’t have time to email you back. Also, when you email me, please be sure to identify yourself by first and last name.

*Plagiarism is a serious offense. A basic definition of plagiarism is using someone else’s ideas or words without giving them credit. Given that this is an upper-division course, I assume that you know how to avoid plagiarism, and therefore we won't spend class time discussing it. If you are unsure of how to avoid plagiarism in your papers, however, you should talk to me before you turn the paper in. If you plagiarize a paper in this course, you will fail the course, and may be expelled from the university.

*You may not turn in a paper you completed for another class for credit in this class. In addition, you cannot turn in the paper you complete in this class for credit in any other class without obtaining express permission from that professor. It should go without saying (but it doesn’t always, so I’m saying it) that you can’t turn in someone else’s paper for credit. You should know that I am aware of internet and print sources for buying or "borrowing" papers, and I have penalized students for using these sources before. Use your own ideas and words—they're usually better anyway.

*If you would like to meet with me, but cannot make my office hours because you have to go to class or work, talk with me to schedule an appointment. You need to schedule an appointment at least 24 hours in advance so I can accommodate my schedule.

*It is my responsibility to respect you as students and individuals, and to treat you fairly and courteously. It is your responsibility to respect me as a professor and an individual, and to treat me with courtesy. In addition, it is your responsibility to treat your classmates and their opinions with respect.

*By remaining enrolled in this course, you are implicitly agreeing to abide by the guidelines and standards set forth in this syllabus. If you think you are unable to accept these standards, please drop the course now; doing so will save us both a lot of headaches down the road.
*The professor reserves the right to change this syllabus as needed.

M 9/23: Introduction to course

_Slavery and its Legacy_
W 9/25: Frederick Douglass, _Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself_, pp. 299-330
F 9/27: Douglass, pp. 330-369

M 9/30: GWR
W 10/2: Morrison, _Beloved_ pp. 1-105
F 10/4: _Beloved_ pp. 106-229

M 10/7: _Beloved_ pp. 230-275
W 10/9: _Beloved_

_The Vernacular and Folk Traditions_

M 10/14: Charles Chesnutt, “The Goophered Grapevine”
F 10/18: Research Day

W 10/23: Gwendolyn Brooks: “kitchenette building,” “the mother,” “the preacher: ruminates behind the sermon,” “We Real Cool,” “The Chicago Defender Sends a Man to Little Rock”
F 10/25: Brooks; Distribute paper assignment

M 10/28: _Midterm Exam_

_Literary Movements: The Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement_
Langston Hughes: “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain”

M 11/4: Hughes
Richard Wright: “Blueprint for Negro Writing”
W 11/6: Hoyt Fuller: “Towards a Black Aesthetic”
Amiri Baraka: “Black Art”

_Family and Heritage_
F 11/8: James Baldwin: “Sonny’s Blues”

M 11/11: Veterans’ Day—no class
W 11/13: Gloria Naylor: _Mama Day_
F 11/15: _Mama Day_

M 11/18: _Mama Day_
W 11/20: _Mama Day_


_Papers Due_
W 11/27 and F 11/29: Thanksgiving Holiday—no class

M 12/2: August Wilson: _Fences_
W 12/4: _Fences_
F 12/6: _Fences_  

_Final Exam: Friday, December 13. 7:10-10:00 am_