

**WESTERN UNIVERSITY**  
**ENGLISH 3666F- AMERICAN DRAMA**  
**BEHIND THE MASK**

Tues. 11:30-12:30 p.m.; Thurs. 11:30-1:30 p.m.  
Instructor: Zeinab McHeimech  
Office: TBA  
Office Hours: Mon. 1:00-4:00 p.m. & by appointment  
Email: [zmcheime@uwo.ca](mailto:zmcheime@uwo.ca)

Room: UC - 286  
T.A: Cameron Riddell  
Office: TBA  
Office Hours:  
Email: [criddel@uwo.ca](mailto:criddel@uwo.ca)

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Blackface minstrelsy—a form of burlesque theatre that emerged in the United States during the nineteenth century, featuring performers that blackened their faces—haunts modern American culture, surfacing in drama and in the spectacle of contemporary politics. As the American critic Eric Lott asks, “[s]hould the spectre of a blackface Obama surprise us?” (250). By turning to the major works of African American playwrights Lorraine Hansberry, Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin, Amiri Baraka, Ntozake Shange, August Wilson, and Suzan-Lori Parks, we will explore how these dramatists address “the spectre of blackface” in the twentieth century. This course will be premised on the idea that the ghost of minstrelsy is impossible to separate from the legacy of American slavery. As such, we will take up the social and political environment of the plays in order to unmask the history of slavery’s violence and, just as importantly, whether the plays offer a space for healing.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

- Identify, discuss, and analyze major themes and arguments of African American drama.
- Engage critically and creatively with primary and secondary literature.
- Write an argumentative research paper with an effective thesis that is supported by appropriate and sufficient evidence.
- Articulate the intersections between the trans-Atlantic slave trade, blackface minstrelsy, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Black Power Movement.

### **COURSE CALENDER DESCRIPTION**

(<http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/2013/pg908.html#70580>)What is America, as a theatrical idea? How does the stage reflect the nation, its myths and aspirations? This course explores theatre as a “public art” form in the modern and contemporary United States, reading a variety of dramatists that may include Hansberry, Kushner, Miller, O’Neill, Parks, Williams, and Wilson.

**Antirequisite(s):** English 2460F/G.

**Prerequisite(s):** At least 60% in 1.0 of English 1020E or 1022E or 1024E or 1035E or 1036E or both of English 1027F/G and 1028F/G, or permission of the Department.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

*Crosswinds: An Anthology of Black Dramatists in the Diaspora.*

James Baldwin, *Blues for Mister Charlie.*

William Wells Brown, *The Escape; or, A Leap for Freedom.*

Lorraine, Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun.*

Suzan-Lori Parks, *The America Play and Other Works.*

Ntozake Shange, *For Colored Girls who have Considered Suicide when the Rainbow is Enuf.*

Customized Course Reader available at The Book Store. Code# M10988

## REQUIRED VIEWINGS

Spike Lee, *Bamboozled* (2000)

Vincente Minnelli, *The Bandwagon* (1953) (We will view both in class!)

## EVALUATION SCHEME

ASSIGNMENT	VALUE	DEADLINE
Participation /Attendance	10%	Cumulative
Reflection paper (500 words) or Oral Presentation (5 mins)	5%	Sept 18
Creative Assignment (Approx. 1000 words)	20%	Oct 7
Prospectus, Bibliography (500 words), and Peer –Workshop	10%	Oct 28, Nov 11
Research Essay (1800-2100 words)	20%	Nov 20
Final Exam	35%	TBA

**STUDENTS MUST PASS BOTH TERM WORK AND THE FINAL EXAMINATION (IN COURSES WITH FINAL EXAMINATIONS) IN ORDER TO PASS THE COURSE. STUDENTS WHO FAIL THE FINAL EXAMINATION (REGARDLESS OF THEIR TERM MARK) AUTOMATICALLY FAIL THE COURSE.**

## READING SCHEDULE

You are expected to complete the assigned readings prior to class and to bring hard copies of the readings to class! Please keep in mind that this is a tentative reading schedule.

	Themes and Terms		Assignment Due
R: 4 Sept	<b>Blackface Minstrelsy</b>	Hello! Introduction Laurence Dunbar, “We Wear the Mask” Janelle Monáe, “Q.U.E.E.N.” Feat. Erykah Badu (music video)	
	<b>Week 2</b>		
T: 9 Sept	<b>“The Question of America”</b>	William Wells Brown, <i>Escape</i> (1858) Stanley Cavell, “Fred Astaire Asserts the Right to Praise”(R)	
R: 11 Sept		Vincente Minelli, <i>The Band Wagon</i> (1953)	
	<b>Week 3</b>		
T: 16 Sept	<b>Harlem Renaissance Jim Crow</b>	Zora Neale Hurston, <i>Colour Struck</i> (1926) (R)	
R: 18 Sept	<b>Double Consciousness</b>	Hurston continued W.T. Lhamon Jr., “Turning around Jim Crow” (Handout) Selections from W.E.B Du Bois, <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> (R)	<b>Reflection paper</b>
	<b>Week 4</b>		
T: 23 Sept	<b>Civil Rights Movement</b>	James Baldwin’s <i>Blues for Mister Charlie</i> (1964)	
R: 25 Sept	<b>Melancholy</b>	Baldwin cont. Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia” (R)	
	<b>Week 5</b>		
T: 30 Sept	<b>Blues Aesthetic</b>	Baldwin continued Selections from Houston Baker’s <i>Blues Ideology</i> (R) Ralph Ellison, “Richard Wright’s Blues.” (R)	<b>Performance</b>
R: 2 Oct	<b>Jazz Aesthetic</b>	Jürgen Grandt, “Kinds of blue : Toni Morrison, Hans Janowitz, and the jazz aesthetic” (Handout)	
	<b>Week 6</b>		
T: 7 Oct	<b>Constructions of Blackness</b>	Spike Lee, <i>Bamboozled</i>	<b>Creative writing project</b>
R: 9 Oct		<i>Bamboozled</i> continued	

	<b>Week 7</b>		
T: 14 Oct	<b>American Dream</b>	Lorraine Hansberry, <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> (1959) Robin Bernstein, “Inventing a Fishbowl: White Supremacy and the Critical Reception of Lorraine Hansberry’s <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> .” Please retrieve from <i>Project Muse</i>	
R: 16 Oct		Hansberry continued	
	<b>Week 8</b>		
T: 21 Oct.	<b>Mask</b>	Richard Wesley, <i>The Talented Tenth (Crosswinds)</i>	
R: 23 Oct.		Wesley continued.	
	<b>Week 9</b>		
T: 28 Oct.	<b>Black Feminism Healing</b>	Ntozake Shange, <i>For Colored Girls who have Considered Suicide when the Rainbow is Enuf</i> (1976)	<b>Annotated bibliography</b>
R: 30 Oct.		Fall Study Break	
	<b>Week 10</b>		
T: 4 Nov	<b>Redress</b>	August Wilson, <i>Joe Turner’s Come and Gone</i> (1984) ( <i>Crosswinds</i> ) Herrington’s “The Development of <i>Joe Turner’s Come and Gone</i> ” (R)	
R: 6 Nov		Wilson continued	
	<b>Week 11</b>		
T: 11 Nov		Peer-workshop	<b>Peer-workshop</b>
R: 13 Nov	<b>Violence and Photography “rep and rev”</b>	Suzan Lori Parks, <i>Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom</i> Parks, “Possession” and from “Elements of Style”	
	<b>Week 12</b>		
T: 18 Nov	<b>“The Question of America”</b>	Parks, <i>The America Play</i> (1995)	
R: 20 Nov		Parks, <i>The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World</i> (1992)	<b>Research paper</b>
	<b>Week 13</b>		
T: 25 Nov	<b>Blackface Minstrelsy</b>	Parks continued Eric Lott, “The Blackening of America: Popular Culture and National Cultures” (Handout)	
R: 27 Nov			
	<b>Final Week</b>		
Dec 2	<b>Review</b>		

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

### **Attendance:**

To maintain a productive and positive environment, you are expected to attend every class and to arrive on time. You are allowed to miss up to two classes for any reason without penalty. After your second missed class, unexcused absences will reduce your final attendance and participation grade by 0.5% for every missed class. Attendance will constitute 5% and participation 5% of your final grade.

### **Reading:**

A communal learning environment depends on your attentive reading and engaging discussions. As such, you are expected to complete readings on time, and to be prepared to discuss the texts in class.

### **Critical reading practice:**

I look forward to hearing your thoughts and reflections on the assigned material. To foster critical reading habits you should: engage in a conversation with the text, ask questions, mark important passages, and write a summary of the content.

While reading, answer the following questions:

What kinds of arguments does the text put forth?

What evidence does the text provide for its positions?

Is the text persuasive in its claims?

### **Participation includes:**

You are expected to actively participate in class discussions and activities. Merely attending class does not constitute participation. However, aside from contributions to class discussion, scheduled meetings outside of class on class material; formal and informal chats about the material; and placing images or questions on OWL will be taken into consideration in evaluating your participation grade.

Discriminatory, rude, and disrespectful behaviour will not be tolerated in the classroom and will jeopardize your participation and attendance grade.

### **Electronic devices:**

Laptops and other electronic devices are not permitted in class. I will grant special allowance for laptops if necessary (they can only be used for note-taking), but please talk to me first.

### **Email:**

If you have any questions or concerns about the course, feel free to email me. You can expect to receive a reply to your email within 24-48 hours.

### **Late assignments:**

Assignments are due on the dates indicated on the syllabus. Late assignments will be deducted by 2% per day, weekends included, to a maximum of 14 days (28%). Assignments not handed in during class should be submitted through the essay drop-box outside the English Department's General Office. Essays may not be emailed as attachments. You are required to submit your assignments both electronically through SAKAI to Turnit.com and as paper copies in class.

**Grading:**

While grades are non-negotiable, I'm happy to discuss your grades and to provide further feedback after the assignments have been handed back.

Your work will be graded for its originality and clarity of argument, rhetorical persuasiveness, ability to provide sufficient evidence for claims, syntax, grammar, and adherence to MLA format. More information on the department of English's grading criteria can be found at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/PDFs/UndergradGradingCriteria.pdf>

**Formatting:**

You are required to follow MLA guidelines for all assignments. Essays must be typed, double spaced, with 1-inch margins. On your first page should appear your name, the course code, the instructor's name, date submitted, and word count.

**DEPARTMENTAL POLICIES & RESOURCES****Mental Health**

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help

**Plagiarism:**

I trust that your essays will be written in your own words and using your own ideas. Plagiarism is a serious academic offence as it involves fraud and misrepresentation. You are assumed to be familiar with the department's policy on plagiarism:

<http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/info%20for%20students.html#plagerism>

**Academic Accommodation**

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf)

The full policy is set out here:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf)

**Writing Support Centre**

The Writing Support Centre offers writing support for students, including meetings with a writing counsellor:

<http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing/>

## ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

I will provide more detailed descriptions of the assignments in class.

### **REFLECTION PAPER or ORAL PRESENTATION (5% of final grade):**

In this short reflection (500 words or 2 pages long) or oral presentation (5 mins long) you are asked to reflect on Vincente Minelli's *The Band Wagon* (1953). By drawing on key scenes, you may discuss, though you are not limited to these topics, blackface minstrelsy, America's racial progress, continuities and discontinuities between the past and present, the gaze, and music/acoustics. Your reflection can be guided by the following question: How does Fred Astaire conceive of America? Please inform me by the end of the second week if you choose the oral presentation option.

### **CREATIVE ASSIGNMENT (20% of final grade):**

This assignment will put into question the divide between criticism and literary writing. It will consist of two parts. The first part can take the shape of a creative writing piece, a performance, or a work of art. The second part is a 500 word or 2 page analysis of your piece. Your project will be guided by one of the following topics:

Consider the ways racial masquerade is sustained by amnesia or whether black spectres haunt the American stage.

Consider ways American drama deserts, undermines, or reclaims the American dream.

Consider ways consciousness is shaped by desire and/or memory.

You may also choose your own topic.

Part 1:

Creative piece (Approximately 2-4 pages): You may choose to write an original play; illustrate an act from one of the plays on our syllabus; paint a scene from one of the plays; write a poem, short story, or autobiography; create a diorama, and so on.

Performance (Approximately 15 minutes long): You may choose to act a scene (either individually or in a group) from any of the plays on our syllabus, or offer a creative interpretation of a scene (imagine it scene in a post-apocalyptic world, as a musical, a dance, and so on).

Should you choose the option to perform, you must inform me of your decision by week four of the term.

Part 2:

A critical analysis (500-750 words or 2-3 pages) that offers justifications for your creative piece or performance. Your analysis should include an analysis of your composition (i.e. explaining your choice of format, technique, genre, and so on), along with an explication of the thesis behind the piece.

## **PROSPECTUS & ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY (10% of final grade):**

In preparation for your final research paper you will compile a prospectus (a preliminary statement for your paper) and an annotated bibliography. Your prospectus should be approximately 300 words and your annotated bibliography approximately 400 words.

Your prospectus will contain the following:

1. A guiding question about any play(s) from our syllabus.
2. A preliminary thesis statement. Your thesis is a debatable claim, one that is not self-evident, about the play(s) you wish to analyze.
3. A brief outline of the evidence that will support your argument.

Annotated Bibliography:

Using correct MLA bibliographical citations of the sources, follow each source with a one-paragraph summary of the critic's main argument and detail how you wish to incorporate this source into your essay. Include a few direct quotations from each critic with pages cited. "Tertiary" sources, such as encyclopaedias and textbooks may not be used as one of your secondary critical sources for the annotated bibliography, but may be used to supplement your research in your final paper.

## **PEER WORKSHOP**

The purpose of the in-class workshop is to receive and provide constructive feedback on the research essays. You are expected to come to class with a draft of your paper. You will be assigned a partner, and I will provide you and your partner with a worksheet to fill out. You must include the worksheet with your final essay to receive the grade. Failure to include the worksheet with your final essay will decrease your final grade for the paper by 5%.

## **RESEARCH ESSAY (20% of your final grade):**

Your research paper is a 6-7 page or 1800-2100 word essay. This assignment will involve significant work with one or two plays from our syllabus, along with secondary critical sources. In this paper you will construct a convincing argument, correctly use MLA-style parenthetical citations, critically engage with the secondary criticism, and include a Works Cited. In your essay, you are also expected to note linguistic features, such as figurative language or recurrent themes (larger concepts, artistic, political, or philosophical issues).

I will provide you with a list of topics a few weeks before the deadline.

## **FINAL EXAM (30% percent of your final grade):**

The exam will be cumulative and will consist of a combination of identifications, passage analysis, and a comparative essay. It will be written during the exam period.