

ENGL 9144B Autobiography and #Black Lives Matter**INSTRUCTOR: TAIWO ADETUNJI OSINUBI**

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Office Hours: Tuesday 10.30-12.30, Thursday 9.30-11.30.

Time: Thursday 12.30-3.30 Venue: Alumni Hall 101

Description:

The rise of the Black Lives Matter Movement has revived interest in the relations between anti-black violence and African American lives and deaths. This seminar will examine the modalities through which authors/critics probe and theorize these deaths as well as the modes of habitation with which individuals respond to life under duress. We will assess a number of positions and critical vocabularies that inform recent scholarship on the social phenomenon of Black lives/death: post-blackness, color blindness, Black feminist thought, social death, and Afro-pessimism. We will also analyze films, life writing, and essays that illuminate the historical terrains of Black Lives Matter Movement.

The objectives of this seminar are: (1) to introduce students to the poetics of death/dying in contemporary African American life writing; (2) to elaborate genealogies for the theorization/representation of black lives; (3), to identify the characteristic features that attend the confluence between social justice movements and life writing; and, (4), to identify key concepts, vocabularies, and positions with/from which critics respond to anti-black violence.

Reading List (in seminar sequence):Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*.Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*.Margo Jefferson, *Negroland*.Jesmyn Ward, *Men We Reap*.Edwige Danticat, *Brother, I'm Dying*.**Assessment:**

Participation: 20%

Presentation: 20%

Research Paper: 60%

SCHEDULE**Week 1 January 5**Introduction: Please watch *12 Years a Slave*.

Week 2 January 11 Re-Animating the Slave Narrative

Orlando Patterson, "Authority, Alienation, and Social Death."

Frank B. Wilderson, "The Structure of Antagonisms." In: *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*.

Frank B. Wilderson, "Social Death and Narrative Aporia in *12 Years a Slave*." *Black Camera* 7.1 (Fall 2015): 134-149.

Week 3 Debating Post-Blackness

Touré. *Who's afraid of post-blackness? : What It Means to Be Black Now*.

1. "Tour(é)ing Blackness." (Foreword)
2. "Forty Million Ways to Be Black." (Chapter 1)

Houston A. Baker Jr. & K. Merinda Simmons,
The Trouble with Post-Blackness. K. Merinda Simmons, "Introduction: The Dubious Stage of Post-Blackness."

Wise, Tim. *Colorblind: The Rise of Post-Racial Politics and the Retreat From Racial Equity*. Chapter 1.

Week 4 January 25 Blackness, the Human

Garza, Alicia. 2014. "A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement." *The Feminist Wire*, October 7.

Jared Sexton, "Unbearable Blackness."
Cultural Critique, Number 90, Spring 2015, pp. 159-178.

Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom." *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3.3 (Fall 2003): 257-337. Excerpts.

Spillers, Hortense J. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics* 17.2 (1987): 65-81.

Alexander G. Weheliye. *Habeas Viscus*. Chapter 1.

Week 5 February 1 Afro-Pessimism and Anti-Blackness

Jared Sexton, "Afro-Pessimism: The Unclear Word."

Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Ch. 1.

Frank B. Wilderson, "The Prison Slave as Hegemony's (Silent) Scandal." *Social Justice* 30.2 (92 (2003): 18-27.

"'We're trying to destroy the world' Anti-Blackness & Police Violence After Ferguson
An Interview with Frank B. Wilderson, III."

Week 6 February 8 Life Writing and Black Deaths

Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*.

Week 7 February 22

Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*.
Cont'd.

Week 8 February 29

Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*.

Week 9 March 7

Margo Jefferson, *Negroland*.

Week 10 March 14 Excursus: Sex, Flesh, Death

Marc Foster, dir. *Monster's Ball*.
Sharon Holland, *Raising the Dead*. Chapter 1.
---. "Death in Black and White."

Week 11 March 21 Life Writing and Black Deaths

Jesmyn Ward, *Men We Reap*.

Week 12 March 28

Edwige Danticat, *Brother, I'm Dying*.

Week 13 April 4

Edwige Danticat, *Brother, I'm Dying*.

Course Readings:

You will find course readings on the course OWL site under "Course Readings."

A Note on Method:

Although this seminar has "autobiography" in its title, its material exceeds the parameters of the genre. In the first five weeks, we will be engaging with critical responses and key concepts. We begin with the film, *12 Years a Slave*, because re-animated the subject of slavery and it has been fundamental to theorizations of social death and its relevance to contemporary African American experience. I expect students to watch the film and read the articles listed. The second half of the seminar focuses on autobiographical texts. I suggest you read the second chapter of Kenneth Surin's *Autobiography and Black Identity Politics*

("African-American Autobiography and the Field of Autobiography") as preparation for the seminar.

Seminar Presentation:

Each student will be asked to make one seminar presentation. The presentation should be about 20 minutes long and should engage with the week's primary and critical reading. All presentations come at the beginning of class. Speakers should stimulate /generate discussion and responses to the presentation by presenting questions, arguments, or passages from or about the week's reading. Or, the speaker could highlight theoretical problems from readings, tensions within texts, or conflicts between different authors. The presentation will be submitted as a paper (5 pages) one week after the presentation.

Research paper:

The research paper is due one week after the last seminar. It should be on a topic related to the course. I must approve this topic in advance. The emphasis is on a research paper that addresses issues raised by this seminar: it may be an analysis of theoretical debates from readings, close reading of literary texts, or analyses of films addressing the subject of the seminar. This paper must draw upon substantial research beyond the texts on our lists. The research paper can be based on your presentation. Length: 15 pages.

Participation:

This grade will reflect your weekly attendance and contributions in class discussions. It will also reflect your preparedness for weekly meetings and your grasp of the material. Three absences will mean that you forfeit your grade for this course.

Background Readings:

These titles are suggested for your individual research and preparation for presentations or final papers. They provide overviews or introductions to key terms in this course.

Ashley, Kathleen M., Leigh Gilmore, and Gerald Peters. *Autobiography & Postmodernism*. U of Massachusetts P, 1994.

Butler, Judith, & Athena Athanasiou. *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*. Cambridge, UK: Malden, MA: Polity, 2013.

Christman, John. "Relational Autonomy, Liberal Individualism, and the Social Constitution of Selves." *Philosophical Studies* 117.1 (2004): 143-164.

Gilmore, Leigh. "The Mark of Autobiography: Postmodernism, Autobiography, and Genre." *Autobiography and Postmodernism* (1994): 3-18.

Morrison, Toni. *Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992.

Mostern, Kenneth. *Autobiography and Black Identity Politics: Racialization in Twentieth-Century America*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge UP, 1999.