

English 9152B: The African American Novel
Dr. Miranda Green-Bartee
Tentative Course Outline
Winter 2017

Instructor: Dr. Miranda Green-Bartee
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Class Time: Th 12:30-3:30

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Office Hours: M & Th 10-11:30
By Appointment
Location: Lawson Hall 2205

*Email is the best way to contact me. Please allow at least 48 hours for me to respond to you.

Course Description and Objectives:

This course examines the African American novel. We will start by thinking about the genre of the novel, including narrative traditions and narrative strategies and the historical context in which African Americans wrote. Specifically, we will consider what it meant to be an enslaved African American as well as a free black in the 19th century, as we ask: what did it mean to be Black and to write and to publish a novel or novels in the ante- and post-bellum eras? Further, we will consider why the African American novel began to flourish in the mid-nineteenth century, examining the changing political and cultural landscape of the United States. We will investigate works that seek to use and to revise the Plantation Tradition, which idealized and defended slavery on the racist belief that African Americans were inherently inferior, dependent, and needed whites to care for them. We will also consider how writers used the genre to protest the continued disenfranchisement of African Americans, and as we move into the 20th and 21st centuries, we will discuss works that can be considered "revolutionary" in content and/or form as well as writers who interrogate the gap between American ideals and values and American socioeconomic practices as they pertain to African Americans. As we read, we will reflect on America's changing literary market and Americans' changing tastes to consider what makes a novel part of the American canon (or what precisely the American canon is, for that matter). We will discuss issues raised by different writers, texts, and literary movements, and we will consider how these issues may relate to particular historical and cultural events; such issues may include the notion of "America" and "being an American," race and racism, the rise of industry, selfhood and alienation, the possibility of violence, regionalism, modernity, feminism, and multiculturalism. We will also consider the political and historical purpose of each novel, trying to determine what impact (if any) the work had and continues to have on American culture. Finally, we will consider these novels through a variety of theoretical lenses, including but not limited to Critical Race Theory, Black Feminist Thought, and Postmodernism.

Throughout the term, we will consider a variety of issues that are of concern to scholars studying the African American novel, including, but not limiting ourselves, to the following:

- What historical events lead to the development of the African American novel in the 19th century?
- How does the genre respond to, interrogate, and even question the historical and political context in which it was written?
- How does our understanding of these novels, particularly those written before 1950 change when we consider them through the lenses of Critical Race Theory or Black Feminist Thought?
- Do contemporary novels written by African American authors reflect a different understanding of historical context than those written in the 19th century?
- How do novels written for children and young adults differ from those written by adults?
- How do novels written by African Americans work to develop an African American identity?
- Where do these novels fit into the American canon?

Required Texts

*Please note: for the texts with an * beside them, please use the edition indicated below.

*Wilson, *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black*. 1859. Edited by P. Gabrielle Foreman and Reginald H. Pitts. Penguin, 2005.

Harper, *Iola Leroy, or, Shadows Uplifted*. 1892. Dover, 2010.

*Chesnutt. *The Marrow of Tradition*. 1901. Edited by Eric J. Sundquist. Penguin, 1993.

Hurston. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. 1937. Harper, 2006.

*Wright. *Native Son*. 1940. Harper, 1993.

Petry. *The Street*. 1946. Mariner, 1974.

Baldwin. *Go Tell It On The Mountain*. 1952. Vintage, 2013.

Hamilton. *The Planet of Junior Brown*. 1971. Aladdin, 2006.

Taylor. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. 1976. Puffin, 2004.

*Morrison. *Beloved*. 1988. Vintage, 2004.

Butler. *Parable of the Sower*. 1993. Warner Books, 2000.

Beatty. *The White Boy Shuffle*. Picador Press, 1996.

Thomas. *The Hate U Give*. Balzer & Bray, 2017.

*Secondary readings as assigned, available on OWL.

Term Work

*This is subject to change prior to the start of term.

Participation	10%
Historical Context Presentation and Co-authored Paper	15%
Follow the Footnote Assignment	20%
Abstract and Annotated Bibliography	20%
Research Paper	35%

*Written assignments do not have page requirements, but the Co-Authored Paper, the Follow the Footnote Assignment, and the Abstract and Annotated Bibliography should be no more than 10 pages.

Participation

This is a discussion focused class. While I may briefly lecture and turn the class over to groups for presentations throughout the term, the bulk of each class will be spent discussing the novels. You are expected to actively participate in each class. Actively participate means to be engaged with the discussion and the materials and to participate, thoughtfully, in the discussion.

Written Assignments

All texts on the syllabus are available for use in any assignment, but no text may be substantively employed in more than one assignment. Please use MLA formatting to document your research. I highly recommend you meet with me to discuss your plan for each assignment before you begin working on them.

Presentation & Co-authored Paper

Students will work in pairs give a 12 to 15-minute presentation (maximum) in which each group will teach the class about a historical event connected to the novel we're reading. For some classes, I may have specific events that I want to be discussed, but for others, groups may focus on an event of their choosing. Each presentation needs to:

- Identify a significant historical event or series of events relevant to the day's novel;
- Teach the class about that historical event, including offering sources and explaining how the author was aware of and likely drew on that historical event.
- Bring in secondary sources to support the presentation.

Presentation requirements:

- Construct an argument about the topic you select. While you are, in some ways, giving a history lesson, you also need to connect your lesson to the novel we're discussing. Think about how the author uses historical context to make the events of their novel relevant.
- Meet with me a minimum of one week in advance of your presentation to discuss your presentation.
- Provide a short outline/handout (no more than two pages) for your classmates (unless you choose to use PowerPoint/Prezi/etc.).

Co-authored Paper Requirements:

- Writing with your partner, you will submit a co-authored paper that summarizes your presentation. This will be submitted one week following your presentation.

Follow the Footnote

Chose a single footnote (or referenced works in the text) or a set of footnotes from one of the secondary course readings we consider, read the works referenced, and analyze the critical debate constructed by the note(s). How does the writer of the note(s) see herself/himself as intervening in the academic debate? How does the footnote add to your understanding of the secondary source as well as the primary text on which the secondary source focuses? *You must engage with at least three sources through a single footnote or a series of footnotes.

Abstract and Bibliography

You will write an abstract that outlines your research paper. You will also include an annotated bibliography with 5 sources.

Research Paper

Write an argumentative, analytical research paper on a topic of your choosing that is pertinent to our study of the African American Novel.

Course Policies

Submitting Assignments: All assignments are due in-class on the date stated on the class schedule. You are expected to submit an electronic version to OWL. All papers should be submitted as .doc or .dox files.

Attendance Policy: The very nature of this course requires that you attend regularly to do well. You are expected to come to class each week. Should you need to be absence, notify me as soon as you know you will be away.

Owl/Sakai: The use of Owl/Sakai is necessary for successful completion of this course. This includes accessing readings as stipulated in the course outline, downloading instructions and guidelines for assignments, and submitting assignments OWL. All course information, including assignments, will be posted on the course website.

Statement on Academic Offences: Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web

site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

Reading and Assignment Schedule

Jan. 11	Introduction In-class reading
Jan. 18	Harriet E. Wilson, <i>Our Nig</i> Frances E.W. Harper, <i>Iola Leroy</i>
Jan. 25	Charles Chesnutt, <i>The Marrow of Tradition</i> *Group 1
Feb. 1	Zora Neale Hurston, <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> *Group 2
Feb. 8	Richard Wright, <i>Native Son</i> , Books 1-2
Feb. 15	Richard Wright, <i>Native Son</i> , Book 3 James Baldwin, <i>Go Tell It On The Mountain</i> *Group 3
Feb. 22	Reading Week
March 1	Ann Petry, <i>The Street</i> *Follow the Footnote Assignment Due
March 8	Virginia Hamilton, <i>The Planet of Junior Brown</i> Mildred D. Taylor, <i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i> *Group 4
March 15	Toni Morrison, <i>Beloved</i> , Foreword-146 *Group 5
March 22	Toni Morrison, <i>Beloved</i> *Abstract & Annotated Bibliography Due
March 29	Octavia Butler, <i>Parable of the Sower</i>
April 5	Paul Beatty, <i>White Boy Shuffle</i> *Group 6
April 12	Angie Thomas, <i>The Hate U Give</i>