

English 7/8336 .001: African American Literary Theory

Spring 2017

Mondays, 5:30-8:30

Instructor: Dr. L. Menson-Furr

419 Patterson Hall

Email: Lmnsnfrr@memphis.edu

Course Description

This course is a graduate seminar in which students engage in pivotal and controversial debates over art and politics in African American scholarship. Throughout the course we will consider in particular what Hortense Spillers terms "intramural" literature—that is, scholarship generated within and as a dialogue between black communities, particularly about the relationship between racial identity and literary representation, literary canons and race politics. Students will investigate the critical methods and strategies through which an African American literature and collectivity have been formed through four historical periods: the Harlem Renaissance; the Protest Era; the Black Arts Movement; and Postmodernism. Within these periods various critical approaches are examined including the New Negro, the Blues aesthetic, Black Feminist Criticism, and Critical Race Theory. This course asks a set of practical questions: What is the relationship between sociopolitical criticism and literary history? Should Afrocentric ideology govern the theoretical and critical examination of African American literature? What role does literature play in shaping contemporary debates about the social construction of political realities of race and gender? What is the nature of the relationship between American and African American literary history? More broadly, what is the relationship between African Americans and members of the larger African diaspora?

Course Objectives

- To develop an understanding of how African American writers/scholars have situated literature written by African Americans within the larger experience of Africans in America and understood the relationship of literature to history and community;
- To obtain a thorough understanding of the various theoretical approaches to analyzing African American literature.
- To further develop writing and analysis of literature with an understanding of African American literary approaches.

Required texts (partial listing):

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory*. ISBN 0-8166-1251-x

Hurston, Zora. *Moses, Man of the Mountain*. ISBN: 0061695149

Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark*. ISBN: 0679745424

Napier, Winston. *African American Literary Theory: A Reader*. ISBN: 978-0814758106

Parks, Suzan-Lori. *Getting Mother's Body*. ISBN: 081296800x

---. *Father Comes Home from the Wars*. ISBN: 1559365005

---. "New Black Math." (Project Muse)

Whitehead, Colson. *The Underground Railroad*. ISBN: 0385542364

Wilson, August. *Fences*. ISBN: 0452264014

(The film adaptation opens in theatres on December 25, 2016. Please attend a showing of the film and read the text before the third class meeting.)

---. *King Hedley II*. ISBN: 155936260x

Requirements

As a graduate seminar, this course is structured to guide students' intellectual processes and allow students to pursue subjective research interests. To that end students are expected to complete the following assignments:

- ✓ teaching presentation
- ✓ mid-semester conference length essay
- ✓ seminar essay
- ✓ literature review
- ✓ critically sound discussion contributions