

MASTERPIECES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE
AFRO-AMERICAN STUDIES 227
FALL 2006

Michelle Y. Gordon, Lecturer
Lectures: MW 1:20-2:10 p.m., 1111 Humanities
Office Hours: Tuesdays 9:30-11:30 a.m., or by appointment
4135 Helen C. White Hall
263-2330
mygordon@wisc.edu

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course reads selected masterpieces of African American literature in “conversation” with one another, and places particular emphasis on three key themes in black American literature, culture, and life: (1) slavery and freedom, (2) the Vernacular (or, Oral) Tradition, and (3) double consciousness/multiple jeopardy. As an introductory African American Studies and literature class, AFROAM 227 is designed to explore aspects of the black American literary canon in multiple periods – slavery, Jim Crow, Harlem Renaissance, Civil Rights Movement, Black Arts Movement, etc. – and forms – autobiography, poetry, drama, speech, novel, essay, and music.

Throughout the semester, students are expected to develop a vocabulary and base of knowledge for reading, discussing, and analyzing African American literature. This course is also intended to help students develop effective essay writing skills in literary and critical analysis. Regular class participation is expected of all students – thoughtful contribution to class discussions, attentive listening, and engagement with the readings.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance at discussion section *and* lecture is obligatory, and your active participation in class is essential to your success in this course. **More than three absences from discussion – excused or unexcused – will result in a failing participation grade; five absences or more will result in a failing grade for the entire course.** Although I will only take “spot” attendance in lecture, each student is responsible for all material covered in lectures.

There is no sleeping, talking, listening to headphones, or reading newspapers during class. Each member of the class will treat other class members and instructors with respect at all times.

GRADING

The course’s grading breaks down as follows:

Midterm – 20%
Participation – 25%
Essay (4-5 pages) – 25 %
Final Exam – 30%

REQUIRED TEXTS

Books are available at Rainbow Bookstore Cooperative, 426 W. Gilman St.
Norton Anthology of African American Literature, Gates and McKay eds.,
2nd edition
The Fire Next Time, James Baldwin
Song of Solomon, Toni Morrison
Course reader, available at Printex Graphics, 627 State St. starting Sept. 6

OFFICE HOURS AND LECTURER ACCESSIBILITY

I care very much about your learning experience, enjoyment, and educational needs in this course. I try hard to be approachable to all students, and you should feel free – encouraged, rather – to make use of my office hours to discuss your course interests, essay, questions, or difficulties with me. If your schedule conflicts with my office hours, please make an appointment to meet with me.

WRITING CENTER

From individual appointments with trained writing instructors to classes designed to help in a variety of areas of writing (essay exams, grammar, literary analysis), the UW Writing Center can help you build and polish your writing skills for this course and beyond. For class schedules, satellite locations, or to register for classes online: <http://www.wisc.edu/writing>. To schedule an appointment, go to the Writing Center (6171 Helen C. White) or call 263-1992. Make appointments early!

PLAGIARISM

The university does not tolerate plagiarism, which entails claiming “credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation,” or engaging in “conduct aimed at making false representation of a student’s academic performance.” The penalty for plagiarism ranges from failing the course to expulsion from UW.

COURSE READINGS AND SCHEDULE

Students are expected to have the assigned readings completed by the day indicated on the syllabus, and should bring the assigned text to both lecture and discussion. Readings marked with a (*) are included in the course reader, and are required.

- W Sept. 6 Introduction
- M Sept. 11 Sojourner Truth, “Ar’n’t I a Woman?” (N 245-247 - both versions)
Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” (N 462-473)
- W Sept. 13 Phillis Wheatley, “To the University of Cambridge,” “On Being Brought from Africa to America,” “Earl of Dartmouth,” “To S.M., a Young African Painter” (N 213-216, 219-224)
- M Sept. 18 Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (N, 385-417)
W Sept. 20 Douglass, *Narrative* (417-452)
- M Sept 25 Douglass, *Narrative*
W Sept. 27 Ishmael Reed, “Flight to Canada”*
Robert Hayden, “Middle Passage,” “Runagate Runagate” (N 1520-1524, 1526-1528)
- M Oct. 2 W.E.B. DuBois, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” (N 686-689, 692-699)
Paul Lawrence Dunbar, “An Ante-Bellum Sermon,” “We Wear the Mask,” “Sympathy,” (N 912, 918, 922)
- W Oct. 4 Ida B. Wells, *A Red Record* (N 675-686)
DuBois, “Of the Coming of John” (N 748-758)
- M Oct. 9 Claude McKay, “If We Must Die” (N 1007)
June Jordan, “I Must Become a Menace to My Enemies,” “Poem About My Rights” (N 2019)
- W Oct. 11 Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet”*
Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (N 1895-1908)
- M Oct. 16 Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement”*
W Oct. 18 **MIDTERM EXAM**
- M Oct. 23 Richard Wright, “The Ethics of Living Jim Crow, an Autobiographical Sketch” (N 1399-1403, 1411-1419)
Ralph Ellison, “Richard Wright’s Blues” (N 1535-1548)
- W Oct. 25 James Weldon Johnson, *God’s Trombones**
DuBois, “The Sorrow Songs” (N 758-766)
- M Oct. 30 Jean Toomer, *Cane* (N 1168-1191)
W Nov. 1 Toomer, *Cane* (1192-1219)
- M Nov. 6 Langston Hughes (N 1288-1314)*
W Nov. 8 Margaret Walker (N 1617-1622)*
Sterling Brown (N 1248-1266)

M Nov. 13 Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (N 1768-1796)

W Nov. 15 Hansberry, *Raisin* (1797-1830)

M Nov. 20 Gwendolyn Brooks, "kitchenette building," "We Real Cool," "Chicago *Defender* Sends a Man to Little Rock,"
"Malcolm X," "Riot," "Third Sermon on the Warpland" (N 1623-1625, 1638-1640, 1643-1646)

Amiri Baraka, "Poem for Black Hearts," "SOS," "Black Art," "Wailers" (N 1940, 1942-1946)

W Nov. 22 NO CLASS

M Nov. 27 James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

W Nov. 29 Baldwin, *Fire Next Time*

M Dec. 4 Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*

ESSAY ROUGH DRAFT DUE IN DISCUSSION SECTION

W Dec. 6 Morrison, *Song of Solomon*

M Dec. 11 Morrison, *Song of Solomon*

W Dec. 13 Morrison, *Song of Solomon*

ESSAY DUE IN LECTURE

FINAL EXAM: THURSDAY DEC. 21, 7:45 A.M.