ENGLISH 152E/ AFRICAAM 152E/ AMSTUD 152E
(What is) African American Literature
Winter Quarter 2014
Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:15-3:05pm
Building 160, Room 314

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Office Hours: Mondays, 3:05-5:00pm; Wednesdays, 10-11am

** Note: This course fulfills the American Cultures and Humanities GERs and, for students entering Stanford this year under the new Ways of Thinking/ Ways of Doing breadth system, the Aesthetic and Interpretive Inquiry and Engaging Diversity Ways.

What is African American literature? This course is both an introduction to some of the great works of black literary expression and an examination of this category. What aesthetic traditions define African American literature, and how does it relate to American literature as a whole? Is African American literature inherently political? Where does this literary tradition start and where does it (or does it) end? Who can write it and who can’t? In this course we will examine how African American writers have asked and answered these questions, track the formal and rhetorical strategies that figure most prominently in this literary tradition, and investigate the historical circumstances (including slavery, Reconstruction, the Great Migration, and Jim Crow) that have shaped—and been shaped by—this body of literature. Topics to be addressed in this course include canon formation, negotiations between fiction and history, sectional tensions (between North and South), gender politics, and folk culture.

COURSE TEXTS

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1:
**Monday, January 6:** Introduction

**Wednesday, January 8**
Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), Preface – Ch. 2
Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Preface – Ch. 3 (“The Slaves’ New Years Day”)
Week 2:

**Monday, January 13**
Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), Ch. 3 – Ch. 10
Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Ch. 4 – Ch. 12 (“Christmas Festivities”)

*First Translation due in class Wed., Jan. 15:* Following the example modeled in class, select a short passage (100-200 words) from Douglass and rewrite it in the voice of Jacobs, or vice versa. As you write, consider what these texts share and where they differ in terms of both what they’re saying or representing (rhetoric, themes) and how they’re saying it (style, tone, diction, syntax, literary devices including metaphors, allusions, and symbols). Make sure to copy the original text at the top of your assignment.

**Wednesday, January 15**
Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), Ch. 11 – Appendix
Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Ch. 13 – Appendix

Week 3:
NO CLASS Monday, January 20 (MLK Jr. Day)

**Wednesday, January 22**
Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), Ch. 1 – Ch. 16

Week 4:
*First informal literary analysis due to the Coursework Forum Sunday, Jan. 26, by midnight:* Following the example modeled in class, post a 500-word literary analysis of a short passage (100-150 words) from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Include the selected Stowe passage at the top of your post.

**Monday, January 27**
Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), Ch. 17 – Ch. 28

**Wednesday, January 29**
Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), Ch. 29 - 45

Week 5:

**Monday, February 3**
Charles Chesnutt, “The Goophered Grapevine” (1899), “Her Virginia Mammy” (1899) (handout)

**Wednesday, February 5**
James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), Ch. 1-6

Week 6:

**Monday, February 10**
James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), Ch. 7-11
Poems: Langston Hughes, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” (1921); Claude McKay, “If We Must Die” (1919), “Africa,” “America” (1921); Sterling Brown, “Memphis Blues,” “Southern Road,” “Slim Greer” (1931) (handout)

Wednesday, February 12
Zora Neale Hurston, “The Gilded Six-Bits” (1933) (handout)
Richard Wright, “Big Boy Leaves Home” (1938) (handout)
Choice of ONE critical essay:
W. E. B. Du Bois, “Criteria of Negro Art” (1926)
Langston Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (1926)
Zora Neale Hurston, “Characteristics of Negro Expression” (1934)
James Weldon Johnson, “The Dilemma of the Negro Author” (1928)
Richard Wright, “Blueprint for Negro Writing” (1937)

* Literary Paper due to your Coursework dropbox Friday, Feb. 14 by midnight. (Directions distributed in class.)

Week 7:
NO CLASS Monday, February 17 (President’s Day)
In lieu of class: meet in small groups for peer editing assignment.

Wednesday, February 19
Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man (1952), Prologue – Ch. 10

Week 8:
Monday, February 24
Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man (1952), Ch. 11 – Ch. 16

Wednesday, February 26
Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man (1952), Ch. 17-22

* Friday, Feb. 28 by midnight: Literary paper revision due to your Coursework dropbox

Week 9:
Monday, March 3
Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man (1952), Ch. 23 - Epilogue

Wednesday, March 5
Gwendolyn Brooks, Maud Martha (1953)

Week 10:
Monday, March 10 – LAST CLASS
August Wilson, The Piano Lesson (1990)

NO CLASS Wednesday, March 12 (Professor Spingarn out of town for a conference.)
* Final assignment due Thursday, March 20 by NOON
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and participation (20%)
You are the discussion; because a seminar is by its very nature collaborative, its success depends on your thoughtful preparation and active, respectful participation. In this course, strong participation involves doing all of the required reading (which I’ve tried to keep manageable: very rarely more than 200 pages per week, usually closer to 150 pages, and sometimes less than that) and coming to class both prepared with comments and questions and open to engaging thoughtfully and courteously with your classmates’ ideas. Debate is essential to any intellectual discussion, so you should feel free—and in fact encouraged!—to disagree with me and with each other. But please do so respectfully.

Informal Assignments (25%)
The following informal assignments will help you prepare for and actively contribute to discussion. Each will receive credit (✓/✓/✓-) rather than letter grades. If you complete all of them, your grade for this portion will be a minimum of 85. Stronger performance will receive higher grades.

1) Weekly Discussion Questions [10%]
To help you approach your reading and class discussions with an active critical mind, once each week beginning Week 2, post 2-3 discussion questions related to the reading in the Forum section of the course website by midnight either Sunday or Tuesday. During most class sessions, we will consult these questions and engage those that spark discussion.

2) Translations (2 total) [5%]
Following the example to be modeled in class, twice during the term, you will select a short passage (100-200 words) from a previous week or session’s reading and rewrite it in the style of the current week’s reading. Your first translation is due Jan. 15. The second should be submitted in class before the end of the term.

3) Informal literary analysis and presentation (2 total) [10%]
Following the example to be modeled in class, twice during the term, you will write and present to the class a 500-word literary analysis or gloss on a short passage (about 100-150 words from the reading). You should bring copies of your analysis for each member of the class as well as myself. Your first literary analysis is due Jan. 26. The second should be submitted before the end of the term.

Literary paper (20%)
4-5 pages. Details distributed in class.
Following a peer editing session, you are encouraged to submit a revised draft.

Final (35%)
Writing assignment of 8-10 pages. Details distributed in class.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance: You are the class so your attendance and participation are mandatory. You may miss one class during the quarter without any penalty to your grade and for any reason; you do not need to explain this absence to me but you do need to let me know via email by 10am on the day of the class that you will miss. Beyond that one free absence, unexcused absences will have substantial negative impact on your grade. Also, please arrive to class on time. Repeated tardiness will lower your attendance and participation grade.
**Readings**: Please bring each session’s readings to class, as access to the texts under discussion is essential to productive analysis. Readings not in the main course texts will be distributed in class as handouts.

**In-class informal writing**: Expect to do informal writing in many classes. Bring paper and a writing utensil to each class.

**Technology**: I ask you not to use your laptop or any other electronic devices unless absolutely necessary.

**Extensions**: Because written assignments often directly inform our class sessions, in this course I will not give extensions on informal writing assignments except in the case of documented illness or emergency, about which you should contact me as soon as possible. For graded assignments, each student may have one free 24-hour extension; you do not need to explain your reasons for taking this extension to me but you do need to let me know that you will be taking it before the deadline. Otherwise, I’ll give extensions only in the case of documented illness or emergency. Beyond the one free 24-hour extension, the penalty for assignments submitted after the deadline is the lowering of the assignment grade by one third of a grade for each day it is late. (An A paper will get an A- if one day late, a B+ if two days late, etc.) Although I’m sympathetic to how overloaded you might become with course and extracurricular responsibilities, all members of the class must follow the same schedule of deadlines.

**Grading**: You will have an opportunity to contribute to a grading rubric for formal, graded assignments.

**Accountability**: I believe that it is my responsibility as a teacher to make thoughtful choices about what we read and how we approach the material both in class discussion and in formal and informal assignments. If there is any point in class or in an assignment when it’s unclear why we’re doing something, please ask me, as there’s always a reason. Accordingly, if you’re dissatisfied or frustrated with the class at any point, it is your responsibility to think about what you can do to create a more productive learning experience for yourself, and to come talk with me about your concerns in my office hours if you’re unsure how to do that.

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**STANFORD UNIVERSITY HONOR CODE**:

Please re-read Stanford’s Honor Code and follow it carefully. Academic integrity is integral to scholarship, to education, and to the university as a whole. It is never okay to represent the work or language of others as your own.

The Honor Code is the University’s statement on academic integrity written by students in 1921. It articulates University expectations of students and faculty in establishing and maintaining the highest standards in academic work:

The Honor Code is an undertaking of the students, individually and collectively:

1. that they will not give or receive aid in examinations; that they will not give or receive unpermitted aid in class work, in the preparation of reports, or in any other work that is to be used by the instructor as the basis of grading;
2. that they will do their share and take an active part in seeing to it that others as well as themselves uphold the spirit and letter of the Honor Code.

The faculty on its part manifests its confidence in the honor of its students by refraining from proctoring examinations and from taking unusual and unreasonable precautions to prevent the
forms of dishonesty mentioned above. The faculty will also avoid, as far as practicable, academic procedures that create temptations to violate the Honor Code.

3. While the faculty alone has the right and obligation to set academic requirements, the students and faculty will work together to establish optimal conditions for honorable academic work.

**STUDENTS WITH DOCUMENTED DISABILITIES**

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk. Phone: 723-1066; http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oae.