

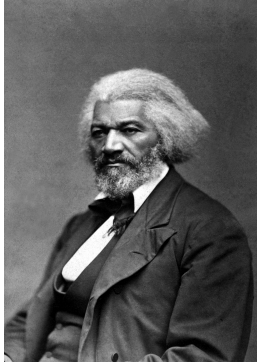
African American Literature
Fall 2013
Professor A. Soltysik Monnet
Moodle key: voices

Office Hours:
Anthropole 5133

021 692 2994

Email:

Agnieszka.Soltysikmonnet@unil.ch



Syllabus: African American Literature

Objectives: This seminar aims to introduce 3rd year BA students to the major themes and texts of African American literature. We begin with the slave narrative, recording the experiences of escaped slaves, and finish with Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1968). In between, we will discuss issues of language, dialect, political art, music, genre, and gender as we read poems, novels, speeches, short stories and several chapters of W.E. B. Du Bois's influential and magisterial *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). A guest speaker from the United States will come lecture on the cultural work of African American Gothic, and students will have the opportunity to enroll for the annual spring African American History study trip to Paris with a solid background of the texts written by writers who made the most impact on African American culture and intellectual life.

Sept. 26: Introduction to African American literature: historical context, major themes, early writers

Oct. 3.: The Slave Narrative

Read: Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845): Chapters 1-7 & Harriet Jacobs

Critical text: "The Slave Narrative" (on Moodle)

Oct. 10: No Class: Reading Week

Recommended reading: Maisha Wester, "Introduction" and Chapter One of *African American Gothic*

Oct. 16: Guest lecture by Maisha Wester on African American Gothic

Oct. 17: African American Gothic & Miscegenation

Read: Victor Sejour, "The Mulatto," 1837 and Alice Walker, "The Child Who Favored Daughter" (1967); discussion of Maisha Wester's talk

Discussion questions:

Oct. 24: Du Bois and Post-Reconstruction Black Culture: The Politics of Voice

W.E.B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk* (1903): "The Forethought, The Forethought," Chapters 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 10, 13, 14

Discussion:

Relevant background films: *Birth of a Nation* (1915), Dir: D.W. Griffith & Oscar Micheaux (1919)

Oct. 31: The Harlem Renaissance I: Black Internationalism

Poems by Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, selected poems and excerpt from *The Big Sea* (1940)

Critical Text: Lois Tyson, "African American Criticism," (359-367) in *Critical Theory Today* (2006)

First written assignment due

Nov. 7: The Harlem Renaissance II: The Return to Black Folklore

Primary Texts: Zora Neale Hurston, Chapters 1, 2, 3 & first half of mule chapter & 9, 10, 11 of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1936)

Recommended Film (not required): *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Discussion:

Nov. 14: Class, Politics and Hard-Boiled Masculinity

Primary Text: Richard Wright, "Long Black Song," (1938), and "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow" & Chester Himes, excerpt from *Rage in Harlem*

Watch biographical video about Himes online: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTJUP1gKeKI>

Discussion:

Nov. 21: James Baldwin & the Cultural Politics of Queer Masculinity

Primary Text: excerpt from *Giovanni's Room* (1950), p. 3-41 & excerpt from *Another Country* (1960) & "Stranger in the Village" from *Notes of a Native Son* (1955)

Discussion:

Watch: *Brother to Brother* (2004)

Recommended Film: <http://www.rts.ch/archives/tv/divers/documentaires/5056118-montagne-insolite.html> (James Baldwin's 30-minute video essay on his experience of Loèche-les Bain)

Nov. 28: Black Nationalism vs. Integration: The Power of Speeches

Primary Text: Malcolm X's "The Ballot or the Bullet"; Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech

Critical Text: Critical text: *American Cultural Studies*, Chapter 3, to page 102

Watch the speeches online: (ballot or the bullet)

Second written assignment due

Discussion:

Dec. 5: Black Power and the Black Arts Movement

Selections by Amiri Baraka and Nikki Giovanni & begin Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

Critical text: "The Black Arts Movement," James Edward Smethurst

FILM: *Black Power Mixtape*

Discussion:

Dec. 10: Guest lecture & concert by Will Kaufman

Dec. 12: Toni Morrison - continued

Primary Texts: Continue *The Bluest Eye*

Discussion:

Dec. 19: Last Day

Primary Text: Finish *The Bluest Eye*

Watch film: *Beat Street* or *Bamboozled*

Third written assignment due (possibility of extending deadline to Jan. 6, 2014)

Course Requirements:

1. active participation in discussions
2. group discussion animation
3. For 2005 study plan students: 3 take-home short written assignments (answering questions in one-page answers) OR one final essay 2500-3000 words

Extended essay

Students **in the 2013 *plan d'études*** who are taking this class in the module *BA-ANG-2-201010* may choose to write a second, extended, essay for an **extra 2 credits**. This essay will give a more in-depth treatment of a theme related to the seminar, and should engage with primary and secondary texts not treated extensively during class time. Students will negotiate a topic with the teacher and then will work independently on the essay, which should be c. 4000 words long. This essay should normally be submitted by the **Jan. 30th 2014** (extensions negotiable).

Group discussion: Preparing questions on the readings and topics for the day, or a short presentation on material for the class, providing critical background information and raising pertinent questions for class discussion. The questions should be sent to me the night before.

Course Material: The following book is available at Basta! (1st floor Anthropole): Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*. Everything else will be on Moodle.

Official course registration

The deadline for registration for courses, evaluations and January exams is the **13th October 2013**. Students in the 2013 *plan d'études* should note that they must register for both the class and the relevant *évaluation* in order to receive credits.

BA exam

You may choose to present a BA exam on this class. Different regulations and guidelines apply to the different *plans d'études*, so make sure you follow the correct set of instructions below. Mobilité IN students are not required to take faculty exams.

The **deadlines** for both *plans d'études* are the same. If you plan to present the exam in **January** you need to sign up for the exam by the **13th October 2013**. The deadline for submitting your exam dossier to me is the 29th November. If you plan to present the exam in **June** (or **September** - written exams only), you need to sign up for the exam by the **16th March 2013**, and the deadline for submitting your dossier to me is the 9th May 2014.

2005 plan d'études

If you choose to present a BA exam based on this class, DB and Options students may choose between a 4-hour written or a half-hour oral exam. (The exam for DCII, if you choose to offer it on this class, is a 4-hour written exam.) In either case you should present **2 topics and a Reading List** to the examiner in advance. (These topics should NOT include the topic of your essay.) See the Reading List guidelines on the website for more details on compiling your reading list.

http://www.unil.ch/angl/page62593_en.html

The topics you present may be topics explicitly treated in class (e.g. National Anthems; Gender and Nation; Postcolonial approaches to Scottish Literature) or topics you develop yourself (e.g. Scots language poetry; metaphors of freedom; landscape and the Scottish nation). The exam question will be based on these two topics. In the written exam you will be given a choice of two questions; in the oral exam you are given only one question based on one or both of your topics. Both written and oral exams will also include a Reading List question.

2013 plan d'études

If as a DB student you choose to present a BA exam based on this class, you may choose between a 4-hour written and a half-hour oral exam. In either case the exam will expect you to have knowledge of all the material covered in the seminar. You will also **present a personal reading list** of primary and secondary texts from the "Further Reading" section of the course bibliography.

In the written exam you will be given a choice of three questions and you will answer one question only. In the oral exam there will be one question only, which will require you to closely analyse a text/extract of a text studied in the seminar.

Bibliography:

Campbell, Neil, and Alasdair Kean, *American Cultural Studies: An Introduction to American Culture*, 3rd edition. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Edwards, Brent Hayes. *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2003. This book is owned by the Fribourg library and must be ordered by inter-library loan. A copy of the "Prologue" will be put on Moodle.

Henry Louis Gates, "Literary Theory and the Black Tradition," *Figures in Black: Words, Signs and the "Racial" Self*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987. This is an indispensable historical survey and theoretical introduction to African American literature.

Smethurst, James Edward. "The Black Arts Movement." *A Companion to African American Literature*. Ed. Gene Andrew Jarrett. Blackwell-Wiley, 2013.

Tyson, Lois. "African American Criticism." *Critical Theory Today*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2006. Available at Dorigny.

Zinn, Howard. *A People's History of the United States*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1980.

Other books and articles of interest:

Dimock, Wai Chee. "African, Caribbean, American: Black English as Creole Tongue." *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature*. Edited by Wai Chee Dimock and Lawrence Buell. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2007. Dorigny.

Fisch, Audrey, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007. Online through UNIL database.

Iton, Richard. *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. A very good history of 20th century black political culture and its relationship to popular culture, including jazz and rap. Dorigny.

King, Loyal. "African American Womanism: from Zora Neale Hurston to Alice Walker." *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel*. Ed. Maryemma Graham. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004. Dorigny.

Young, Elizabeth. *Black Frankenstein: The Making of an American Metaphor*. New York: NYUP, 2008. Dorigny.

Recommended Films:

The Birth of a Nation (Dir. W.D. Griffith, 1915)

A film stunning for its racism but worth watching for its historical importance.

Brother to Brother (Dir. Rodney Evans, 2004)

A story taking place in contemporary New York, but with flashbacks to the Harlem Renaissance, focusing on the tensions between black gay writers and a vocally homophobic black political culture.

The Josephine Baker Story (Dir. Brian Gibson, 1991)

An excellent biographical film about the first great international African American superstar, Josephine Baker.

Beat Street (Dir. Stan Lathan, 1984)

Good film about the beginnings of hip-hop culture in the US in different media, and also the film which introduced hip-hop to Europe.

Slam (Dir. Marc Levin, 1998)

Powerful film about a young African American man with a talent for poetic performance but trapped by his social conditions.

Bamboozled (Dir. Spike Lee, 2000)

Brilliant satirical film about a modern-day minstrel show on TV.

Paris Blues (Dir. Martin Ritt, 1961)

Fun film with Paul Newman and Sidney Poitier about two American jazz musicians living in Paris, who meet two American girls on vacation. The black musician is torn between his desire for the girl and a reluctance to leave the comforts of Paris for the racial struggle back in the US.

Around Midnight (Dir. Bertrand Tavernier, 1986)

Haunting film about a black jazz musician down and out in Paris. The film shows the long-standing love affair of the French with black American jazz.

Black Power Mixtape (1967-1975) (Dir. Göran Olsson, 2011)

Fascinating Swedish documentary about the Black Power movement.

Their Eyes Were Watching God (Dir. Darnell Martin, 2006)

Film adaptation of the novel, starring Halle Berry. Very watchable!

A Rage in Harlem (1991)

Film adaptation of the Chester Himes novel, with Forest Whitaker and Danny Glover.