

**Course**                    **English 285, Section 01, African American Literature**

**Instructor**                **Chris Gilliard**

**Office**                      **Briggs 218, 993-1050**

**Office Hours**            **MW 12:00-1:00, and by appointment**

**Email**

**Day/Time**                **MW 1:00-2:15**

**Room**                      **Briggs**

## Required Texts

*Cornerstones, an Anthology of African American Literature*

ed. Melvin Donalson

*A Gathering of Old Men*, Ernest J. Gaines

*Middle Passage*, Charles Johnson

*Sula*, Toni Morrison

# Course Description

This course will critically examine the work of traditional and contemporary black authors. In addition, the course will analyze these works within the context of several issues that are essential to the African-American experience, including: the construction of “blackness”, notions of black masculinity and femininity, and representations of the black body.

## Assignments and Policies

As a literature course, the main focus of this class will be on **critically** reading the texts of various authors. A critical reading entails more than just gathering the basic facts of a particular work. A critical reading also necessitates understanding and engaging the issues discussed in a given text as well as linking those issues to themes discussed in class and present in the wider culture, and being able to articulate your knowledge to me and to the rest of the class.

Along with the reading assignments and quizzes, students will be responsible for writing two papers. These papers are your opportunity to display your grasp of the material, your ability to synthesize the different issues discussed in class, as well as address some issues with the texts that may not have been covered in class. **The grades you receive on these two papers will constitute the majority of your grade for the course.** No late papers will be accepted without prior arrangements with the professor. All papers must be typed, double spaced, and free of basic errors of convention. Papers that do not meet these minimum standards will be returned without a grade and will be automatically lowered one letter grade upon resubmission.

Also, within the first two class sessions, each student will sign up to do one of two tasks. You may either do a short in-class presentation in which you summarize and critically examine a scholarly essay written about the work we are currently covering in class, as well as introduce discussion on the material you present. Students who choose this option should turn in a one-page summary of their class presentation, as well as a copy of the article they have chosen to review. Or, you may summarize and discuss-- in writing, two reviews of two different scholarly articles that address a work being covered in class. Students who choose this option should also include copies of the articles they have reviewed.

Finally, if there comes a time when we are able to consistently rely on UDM’s network, students will be responsible for posting two messages per week on an email list. These messages

must be relevant to the course and/or larger cultural issues, and must adhere to the same standards of etiquette which govern the classroom.

## Attendance and Punctuality

Class discussion and participation are fundamental aspects of a literature course. If you are absent, you miss out on a vital component of the course. Also, you will lose points on any quizzes, which **cannot be made up** (don't even ask). Because of this, you are expected to attend every class. There is no such thing as an excused absence; students are either in class or are not. After three absences, each additional absence will cause your final grade to be reduced by one letter grade. Being excessively or habitually late may also count as an absence. If you do miss class, it is your responsibility to obtain any missed assignments or materials and attend the next class session prepared.

## Plagiarism

You must do your own work in English 285--and appropriately identify that portion of your work which is collaborative with others, or borrowed from others, or which is your own work from other contexts. Whenever you quote passages, or use ideas from others, you are legally and ethically obliged to acknowledge that use, following appropriate conventions for documenting sources.

## Course Readings

January 10 & 12

Intro

# **Cornel West “The New Cultural Politics of Difference”**

## **January 17**

University closed for Martin Luther King Jr. Day

## **January 24 & 26**

Charles Johnson, *Middle Passage*

## **January 31 & February 2**

Amiri Baraka, “Malcolm as Ideology” (742), “Spike Lee at the Movies”

Sections from *Autobiography of Malcolm X* (648)

bell hooks, “Spike Lee Doing Malcolm X”

## **February 7 & 9**

A Focused Study on W.E.B. Du Bois (556-596)

## **February 14 & 16**

bell hooks “Selling Hot Pussy”

Ida B. Wells-Barnett, “Lynch Law in All its Phases” (34)

Angela Davis “We Do Not Consent” (795)

June Jordan, selections

Sander Gilman “Black Bodies, White Bodies”

## **February 21 & 23**

Herman Gray “Black Masculinity and Visual Culture”

George Jackson, from *Soledad Brother*

Eldridge Cleaver, from *Soul on Ice*

Ed Guerrero “The Black Man on Our Screens and the Empty Space of Representation”

## **February 28 & March 1**

Richard Wright “The Man Who Killed a Shadow” (317)

Chester Himes “One More Way to Die” (326), Section from *If He Hollers Let Him Go*

Walter Mosley from “Devil in a Blue Dress” (447)

**First Paper Due**

## **March 6**

Spring Break

## **March 13 & 15**

Ernest J. Gaines *A Gathering of Old Men*

## **March 20 & 22**

Michael Eric Dyson “The Culture of Hip-Hop” (835)

Amiri Baraka, Haki Madhubuti (178), Gil Scott-Heron (22)

Matthew T. Grant “Of Gangsta’s and Guerillas”

Larry Neal “The Black Arts Movement” (925)

### **March 27 & 29**

Jean Toomer “Theater” (293)

Zora Neale Hurston “Sweat” (297)

Langston Hughes

### **April 3 & 5**

August Wilson *Fences* (470)

Michael Awkward “The Crooked With the Straights” (518)

Alice Walker “Her Sweet Jerome” (210)

### **April 10 & 12**

Toni Morrison *Sula*

### **April 17 & 19**

Nikki Giovanni (182)

Audre Lorde “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference” (755)

Gloria Naylor, from “The Women of Brewster Place” (431)

Terry McMillan, “Zora” (441)

**April 24**

**Final Paper Due**