

# English 254

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Ethel Morgan Smith, ENGL 254, Fall 2004

Fall 2004

**WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY**

**Department of English**

Professor Ethel Morgan Smith

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Office Hours-Tue 4:30-6 and by appointment

African American Literature-English 254

*To the Spirit:*

*Without whose assistance*

*Neither this book*

*Nor I*

*Would have been*

*Written.*

Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

This course aims to reclaim the writers of the Harlem Renaissance, that period of intense flowering of African American writers, artists, and musicians. We will read representative texts by a wide variety of writers, and we will examine those texts within the aesthetic, social, and political contexts of the period. A central assumption is that you you've had some reading in African American texts. If that is not the case, I will assume that you're very interested in the subject and have a general love and interest in American literature. We will examine issues of

subjectivity and agency (ability to assert life), multiple consciousness and experience by looking at topics such gender relations, family life, work patterns, organizational activities, and cultural production of the period.

Student's participation is the heart of the class. It is essential to the development of competency in analyzing these literary works, thus students are expected to be prepared for class by completing the readings prior to class discussion, and further to participate in class orally. **This is a very demanding course. Reading is a must. We complete all of the textbooks.**

## CLASS OBJECTIVES

- To stimulate the understanding and enjoyment of African-American literary works in relation to their historical period and their relationship to experience and culture
- To develop the ability to read literary texts for meaning, structure, and style
- To develop critical reading, writing, and thinking skills through the analysis of literary works of African Americans
- To deepen your understanding of American literature and culture through the specialized study of and focus on works by African Americans as important components of American literature, culture, and aesthetics
- To recognize and critically analyze selected African-American works through genre, predominate themes, literary movements, and relationship to historical and social contexts

## CLASS PROCEDURES

1. **Attendance** is very necessary! If you cannot attend class for some reason, you are responsible for finding out from a classmate what you have missed, and what the assignment is for the next class meeting. **Please do not call me at home or in the office for assignments you've missed.** You're expected to be prepared to participate fully in the class discussion on the day you return to class, and to hand in any assignment that is due. Quizzes, homework, and writing in class assignments cannot be made up if you're absent on the day they're due. Don't expect an A if you miss ONE day of class.

2. **Class participation** will be an important portion of your grade, not that it will be equivalent in value to all of the written work and discussion. I will assume that each of you would have read the assignment, and I will, therefore, feel free to call on you.
3. To prepare yourself for class discussions, **mark what you read by underlining passages**, or by writing the page and paragraph number down so that you can easily refer to materials. What I mean by that is, material that strikes you as important or interesting, or part of the text that you simply do not understand. This is the time to raise questions as well.
4. **Assignments must be turned in** as a minimum requirement for passing this course. Assignments are due at the end of the class on the due date. They should be placed in my hand. Late papers will be **penalized one grade for each day they are late**, and will receive a failing grade! In cases where illness or absences from campus has made it impossible for you to hand in your work on schedule, you must present a properly authorized excuse in order to avoid a late penalty.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

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Class Participation 20%

Two Quizzes 20%

(Unannounced)

Midterm Examination 30%

Final Examination 30%

## REQUIRED TEXTS

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*If Beale Street Could Talk* by James Baldwin

*The Price of the Ticket* (film)

*Plum Bun* by Jesse Fauset

*Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston

*Quick and Passing* by Nella Larsen

*Jazz* by Toni Morrison

*The Street* by Ann Petry

*The Living is Easy* by Dorothy West

*The Wedding* (film) Dorothy West

## ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

The following electronic sites provide useful links to materials relevant to our course. As you find new links, please share them with the class via email or in class.

<http://www.digital-librarian.com/africanamerican.com>. This is an extremely useful bibliography of materials in African American Literature.

<http://www.columbia.edu/culibraries/subject/afam/resource.html>. The, too, provides many valuable links to resources available on the Internet in the general area of African American Literature.

<http://voices.cla.uinn.edu/>. Voices from the Gaps: Women of Color.

"<http://vos.ucsb.edu/shutt1oe/eng-min.html#afro-american> : <http://vos.ucsb.edu/shutt1oe/eng-min.html#afro-american>. Voice of the Shuttle: English Literature

<http://www.si.umi9ch.edu/CHICO/Harlem/>. Harlem 1900-1940: An African American Community.

## CLASS SCHEDULE (subject to change, as necessary)

Week of

**Aug 24th** Introduction-Review of Syllabus-Discussion on Expectations

**Aug 31st** *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

**Sept 7th** Plum Bun

**Sept 14th** *The Living is Easy*

**Sept 16th** Rosh Hashanah (Day of Special Concern)

**Sept 21** *Quicksand/Passing*

**Sept 25th Yom Kippur (Day of Concern)**

**Sept 28th** *The Price of the Ticket* (film)

**Oct 6th Pizza Party for English Majors-11:30-2-346 Stansbury Hall**

**Oct 8th Mid-Semester** (exam will be announced)

**Oct 12th** *The Price of the Ticket* (continued)

**Oct 19th** *Jazz*

**Oct 26th** *The Street*

**Oct 29th Last Day to Drop a Class**

**Nov 2 Election Day Recess-Vote!**

**Nov 8th** *If Beale Street Could Talk*

**Nov 22nd Thanksgiving Recess**

**Dec 9th Last Day to Withdraw from University**

**Dec 10th Last Day of Classes**

**Dec 10th Final Exam Week (exam time will be announced)**

## **HONOR CODE**

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Any work that you submit must be your own. In addition, any words, ideas or data that you use from another source (individual, website, published text) must be properly documented. It is your responsibility to learn the rules and conventions of citing sources in your academic work. If you have questions about academic citation, consult with me during office hours or raise the issue in class. Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses. Clear cases will result in an F for the course and appropriate academic sanctions. Please see the WVU Undergraduate Catalog section on Academic Integrity/Dishonesty for a full explanation of expectations and procedures.

## **LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

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WVU is committed to social justice. I support that commitment and will work to create a positive learning environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and nondiscrimination. I

welcome suggestions for furthering such an environment. If you are an individual with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with Disability Services at 293.6700.