

Spring 2016

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY  
Department of English

Professor Ethel Morgan Smith  
331 Colson Hall  
304-293-9732  
Ethel.smith@mail.wvu.edu  
(I don't use mix)

Office Hours-11:30 a.m.  
Tuesday and by appointment

**African American Literature-English 154**

This course identifies GEC objectives of: Artistic Expression (5) and American Culture (7). Furthermore, the course is a historical introduction and survey in the literature of African Americans. We will examine African American cultural issues of subjectivity and agency (ability to assert life), multiple consciousness and experience by looking at topics such as gender relations, family life, work patterns, organizational activities, and cultural production. This is an interdisciplinary course in that we will draw upon the works of fiction (novels and short stories) nonfiction (memoirs) and films.

Student participation is essential to the development of competency in analyzing these literary works, thus student are expected to be prepared for class by completing the reading prior to class discussion, and further to participate in class orally. **This is a demanding course. Reading is a must!**

**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 or email me to ask me for assignments you've missed.** You are 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.

**If you miss more than two class periods, you will be penalized, by losing one point from your total grade for each class period you miss.**

2. **Class participation** will be an important portion of your grade, not that it will be equivalent in value to quizzes and exams. I will assume that each of you would have read the assignment, and I will, therefore, feel free to call on you. Furthermore, student questions and comments provide a springboard for starting class discussions. The rationale is that this allows me to see if students are reading and understanding the texts. And there might be students who have questions and feel embarrassed to share them with the class.

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 quickly. 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 a time to raise questions as well.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Class Participation	20%
Two Quizzes (unannounced)	20%
Midterm Examination	25%
Final Examination	35%

**Grading Rubric:** 100-90=A; 89-80=B; 79-70=C; 69-60=D; 59-below =F

### **Grading Criteria for Short and Long Essay Exam Questions**

**90%-100%-A Excellent Work.** The essay states an interesting thesis, clearly and originally phrased, which responds directly to the question or prompt. The works goes on to support the thesis with substantial reference to and analysis of the primary texts. The analysis demonstrates original insight into literary and historical issues discussed in class. The argument is logically and coherently developed. The style is fluent; grammar and mechanics demonstrate mastery of the conventions of standard written English.

**80%-89%-B Good Work.** The essay states an interesting thesis, clearly phrased, which responds directly to the question or prompt. The essay goes on to support the thesis with reference to and analysis of the primary texts. The analysis demonstrates good awareness of the literary and historical issues discussed in class. The argument is logically and coherently developed. Grammar and mechanics demonstrate mastery of the conventions of standard written English.

**70%-79%-C Average Work.** The essay states a thesis that responds directly to the question or prompts. The essay goes on to support the thesis with reference to the primary texts. The analysis demonstrates awareness of the literary and historical issues discussed in class. The argument is logically and coherently developed. Grammar and mechanics demonstrate competence in conventions of standard written English.

**60%-69%-D Below Average Work.** The essay frames a topic that responds to the question or prompts. The essay goes on to identify primary texts relevant to that topic. The essay demonstrates some awareness of the literary and historical issues discussed in class. Grammar and mechanics demonstrate competence in conventions of standard written English.

**60%-F Failing Work.** The essay fails to frame a response to the question or prompt. The essay demonstrates only minimal awareness of the literary and historical issues discussed in class.

## **REQUIRED TEXTS**

*Nobody Knows My Name* James Baldwin

*White Boy Shuffle* by Paul Beatty

*Quicksand & Passing* by Nella Larsen

*Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison

“A Letter From a Birmingham Jail” (handout)

**Note: Many of these texts can be accessed in PDF online.**

## **Films**

*Ethnic Notions*

*The Untold Story of Emmett Lewis Till*

*The Great Debaters*

**By the end of the semester, students will be able to read and analyze literary texts of African American literature for meaning, structure, style, culture, and history. Furthermore, students should also be able to discuss and explore the unique experiences of African Americans and apply knowledge from the texts to contemporary issues faced by African Americans. Skills acquired in the classroom can also be applied to other literary works as well.**

**CLASS SCHEDULE (subject to change)****Week of:**

<b>Jan 12<sup>th</sup></b>	Introduction of Syllabus; <i>Ethnic Notions</i> ; Assignment: “A Letter From a Birmingham Jail”
<b>Jan 18<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Martin Luther King’s Birthday Recess</b>
<b>Jan 19<sup>th</sup></b>	Discussion of <i>Ethnic Notions</i>
<b>Jan 26<sup>th</sup></b>	Discussion of “A Letter From a Birmingham Jail”

**The month of February is Black History Month-Pay close attention to activities around campus and on media outlets.**

<b>Feb 2<sup>nd</sup></b>	<i>Quicksand &amp; Passing</i>
<b>Feb 9<sup>th</sup></b>	Continue Discussion of Q&P
<b>Feb 16<sup>th</sup></b>	Complete Discussion of Q&P
<b>Feb 23<sup>rd</sup></b>	<i>Song of Solomon</i>
<b>Feb 29<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Reading: Christa Parravani &amp; Carolina Randall Williams-Robinson Reading Room-Downtown Library 7:30 pm</b>
<b>Mar 1<sup>st</sup></b>	Continue Discussion of <i>Song of Solomon</i>
<b>Mar 8<sup>th</sup></b>	Complete Discussion of <i>Song of Solomon</i>
<b>Mar 9<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Semi-annual pizza party</b>
<b>Mar 10<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Midterm Exam (Exact Date TBA)</b>
<b>Mar 11<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Writing Contest Deadline</b>
<b>Mar 15<sup>th</sup></b>	<i>The Great Debaters</i>
<b>Mar 19<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Spring Recess</b>
<b>Mar 25<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Friday Before Easter Recess</b>
<b>Mar 29<sup>th</sup></b>	<i>Nobody Knows My Name</i>
<b>April 3<sup>rd</sup></b>	<i>Nobody Knows My Name</i>

<b>April 10<sup>th</sup></b>	<i>The True Story of Emmett Lewis Till</i>
<b>April 13<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Department of English Awards Luncheon Gold Ballroom-Mountainlair-11:30-1:00 pm</b>
<b>April 19<sup>th</sup></b>	<i>White Boy Shuffle</i>
<b>April 21<sup>st</sup></b>	<b>Calliope Reading-130 Colson Hall-7:30-9:00 pm</b>
<b>April 26<sup>th</sup></b>	<i>White Boy Shuffle</i>
<b>April 28<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>MFA Reading-Rhododendron Room Mountainlair 7:30-9:00</b>
<b>April 29<sup>th</sup>-Friday</b>	<b>Last Day of Classes</b>
<b>May 2<sup>nd</sup>-May 7<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Final Exams</b>

## **HONOR CODE**

Any work that you submit must be your own. In addition, any words, ideas, or data you borrow from another source (individual, website, and 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 other academic sanctions. Please see the WVU Undergraduate Catalog section on Academic Integrity/Dishonesty for a full explanations and procedures.

## **LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

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 non-discrimination. I welcome suggestions for furthering such an environment. Our University does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veterans' status, religion, sexual orientation, color or national origin. If you are a person 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-304.293.6700.