SYLLABUS - ANG 1500
African-American Literature

Professor Caroline Brown
Autumn 2017
Course Meeting Times: Wed, 1-4pm
Office: C-8117
Office Hours: Wed, 4-5pm (or by appt.)
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Course Description
What is African-American literature? Why is it so important a part of American history and literature? What does it tell us about the United States? About the status of people of African descent within its borders? Of the role of race, class, region, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity in their lives? Of political movements, cultural traditions, and artistic trends? In this course, we will read diverse forms of literature—the slave narrative, novels, plays, essays, poetry, and short stories—by black American writers, using them to investigate these issues and, in so doing, gain a better sense of the United States as a nation and the African-American presence within it.

We will begin by reading pre-Civil War literature with its keen consciousness of the contradictions of slavery in a land of freedom. 18th and 19th century writers pointedly demanded that their readers acknowledge their humanity. Embracing literacy, they used the written word as a tool to push for their political goals, namely enfranchisement of the black population. One question that we will ponder: how did this precedent serve as a foundation for later African-American literature? The course will then segue into the Reconstruction, a time of promise for social justice for blacks that remained unfulfilled. Though slavery ended, racism and reactionary political movements led to violence, legal segregation, and socioeconomic marginalization. How did literary texts reflect the lived experiences of individuals? What was the role of artistry in literary production and engagement? We will proceed to the early and mid-twentieth century with works that trace the migration of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North and beyond. Central to this are the consequences of this movement: shifting definitions of self and culture; more material opportunities yet the continuing specter of racial discrimination; a sociopolitical awareness that challenged the denial of African-American personhood in increasingly sophisticated prose forms and poetics. What were the effects of these events on the greater body of literary works? Finally, we will examine texts of later 20th century (post-1960). From the angry demand for racial equality to multifaceted musings on shifting forms of racial and personal identification, writers demanded the acknowledgment of the complexity and cultural wealth of the African-American experience. How are artistic experimentation and identity politics reshaping the discourse around blackness and literary production?

Required Texts (Available at UdeM Bookstore)
Hansberry, Lorraine
Jacob, Harriet
Larsen, Nella
Morrison, Toni
Wilson, August

A Raisin in the Sun
Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl
Passing
Beloved
The Piano Lesson

*[ALL OTHER COURSE READINGS CAN BE ACCESSED VIA STUDIUM]*
Course Objectives
1. To allow students to appreciate the diversity that is African-American identity and literature while providing a framework to examine how race is used as a tool in the construction of American national identity.
2. To permit students to read and understand important works of literature, placing them within a specific historical and cultural context. In this manner, we will relate works to contemporaneous social and political concerns as well as literary movements.
3. To enable students to recognize the evolving format of the literary text and the literary devices, including plot and character development, language, dialogue, and symbolism, which affect the text as a work of art.
4. To help students improve their writing and interpretive skills through textual analysis.
5. To permit students to present and examine their ideas in a public forum. By participating in class and small group discussions, students will be able to articulate and share ideas, as well as respectfully challenge others, thus maturing as thinkers and improving their public speaking skills.

Course Mechanics
- Class participation is a must. It improves the quality of discussion and is graded for both content and frequency.
- All essays must be typed. Each should be double-spaced and have a one-inch margin. Please use a standard font. Remember to title your essays and include page numbers. Staple all pages together.
- Plagiarism, the uncredited use of another’s words, research, and thoughts, is forbidden. Please document your sources appropriately. Students are advised to familiarize themselves with the policies of the FAS: www.fas.umontreal.ca/plagiat. Please document your sources appropriately.
- You are responsible for collecting any materials or assignments handed out during an absence, including graded essays.
- Turn off cellphones and pagers while class is in session.

Course Requirements
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<th>Requirement</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>Reflection Papers</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>Essay (Due: 11/15)</td>
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<td>Mid-term Exam (10/18)</td>
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<td>Final Exam (12/13)</td>
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SCHEDULE
WEEK 1 (9/6)
   Introductions

ANTEBELLUM
WEEK 2 (9/13)
   Alice Walker, “In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens” (essay)
   June Jordan, “The Difficult Miracle of Black Poetry in America or Something Like a Sonnet for Phillis Wheatley” (essay)
   Phillis Wheatley (poetry)
   “To the University of Cambridge, in New England”
   “On Being Brought from Africa to America”
   “On Imagination”
   “To S.M., a Young African Painter, on Seeing His Works”
WEEK 3 (9/20)
Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (slave narrative)

**POSTBELLUM/RECONSTRUCTION**
WEEK 4 (9/27)
Paul Lawrence Dunbar, “We Wear the Mask” and “Sympathy” (poetry)
Charles Chesnutt, “The Passing of Grandison” (short story)
W.E.B. DuBois, (from *The Souls of Black Folk*) “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” (essay) and “The Coming of John” (short story)

**HARLEM RENAISSANCE**
WEEK 5 (10/4)
Langston Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (essay)
Georgia Douglass Johnson, Claude McKay, Gwendolyn Bennett, Sterling Brown, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Helene Johnson (poetry)

WEEK 6 (10/11):
Nella Larsen, *Passing* (novella)

WEEK 7 (10/18): **MID-TERM EXAM**

WEEK 8 (10/25): Reading Week

WEEK 9 (11/1): **REALISM**
James Baldwin, “Sonny’s Blues” (short story)
Ann Petry, “Like a Winding Sheet” (short story)
Margaret Walker and Gwendolyn Brooks (poetry)

WEEK 10 (11/8)
Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (play)

**REVISING THE RECORD: THE BLACK AESTHETIC AND BEYOND**
WEEK 11 (11/15) **(DUE: ESSAY, 4-5pp)**
LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka; Sonia Sanchez; Nikki Giovanni (poetry)

WEEK 12 (11/22)
Wilson, *The Piano Lesson* (play)
Film excerpts based on Wilson’s play

WEEK 13 (11/29)
Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (novel)

WEEK 14 (12/6)
Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

WEEK 15 (12/13) **FINAL EXAM**