

**English\_OX 359: African American Literature**  
**SPRING 2016**

Monday/Wednesday, 2:30-4:20 pm

*This, then, is the end of [African American's] striving: to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to be husband and use his best powers and his latent genius.*  
~W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)

*Sometimes, I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. It merely astonishes me. How can any deny themselves the pleasure of my company?*  
~Zora Neale Hurston, "What It Feels Like to Be Colored Me" (1928)

*Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.*  
~Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (1964)

*This ability to hold on, even in very simple ways, is work black women have done for a very long time.*  
~Alice Walker, "In Search of Our Mother's Garden" (1974)

*For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.*  
~Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (1984)

*Fight the power.*  
~Public Enemy, "Fight the Power" (1989)

*So I feared not just the violence of this world but the rules designed to protect you from it, the rules that would have you contort your body to address the block, and contort again to be taken seriously by colleagues, and contort again so as not to give the police a reason. All my life I've heard people tell their black boys and black girls to be "twice as good," which is to say "accept half as much".... It seemed to me that our own rules redoubled plunder. It struck me that the perhaps the defining feature of being drafted into the black race was the inescapable robbery of time, because the moments we spent readying the mask, or readying ourselves to accept half as much, could not be recovered.*

~Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (2015)

**Required Texts**

- Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Valerie A. Smith, eds., *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, vols. 1 and 2 (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.)
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (2015)
- Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Harper edition, 2006)

**Instructor:** Dr. Molly McGehee

**Email:** [margaret.mcgehee@emory.edu](mailto:margaret.mcgehee@emory.edu)

**Office location:** Humanities Hall 205A

**Office phone:** 770.784.4532

**Office Hours:** Mondays and Wednesdays, 10-12, and other times by appointment

Copies of the required texts are available at the bookstore. If you buy the books elsewhere, be sure to purchase the same edition that we are using in class. **Always bring your book to class!**

### **Course Focus**

This course offers a survey of literary production by African Americans from the late eighteenth century to the early twenty-first century. Essays, autobiographies, speeches, poems, novels, short stories, plays, songs, and films will allow us to see the multiple ways in which African Americans have put into words and made sense of their diverse experiences within American society across the centuries. But such works also help us in 2016 understand and come to terms with the significance of race (as well as class, gender, sexuality, and religion) in this country's past and present. A few questions for you to consider throughout the semester:

- Why is African American Literature a course unto itself, and should it be?
- Who do you find to have been the most effective African American writers (and in many cases, activists) to date—those who used the “master’s tools” (e.g., European literary conventions; a certain tone or approach; etc.), those who adopted alternative modes of expression, those who fell somewhere in-between, or all of the above? Why?
- And lastly, how is African American literature relevant for understanding race relations in the U.S. today?

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

1. Read more critically
2. Produce analytical reflections and essays in which they clearly articulate and thoroughly support a central argument
3. Identify significant figures, texts, and ideas within the trajectory of African American literature from slavery to the present
4. Think more critically about the political, economic, and social issues that shape and influence African Americans' experiences living and working in the United States
5. Produce a clear, organized, and engaging research-based presentation on a musical genre or form of visual art produced by African American artists
6. Understand the value of African American literature within U.S. and World literature

### **Email**

I am always happy to speak with you in person about your coursework but am also happy to field your questions over email. When emailing me (or any professor or staff member, for that matter), please keep the following guidelines in mind:

1. Use an appropriate subject line for your message.
2. *Always* start your message with an appropriate greeting, such as “Dear Prof. McGehee” or “Dr. McGehee—” (as opposed to “Hey”).

3. Use a professional and respectful tone within your message.
4. Proofread your message before sending. (A good way to do that and to check tone is to read the message aloud before clicking Send.)

### Oxford College Writing Center

You may take your essays to the Writing Center at any stage in the writing process, but the Writing Center director and I strongly advise you not to wait until the day before the essay is due. You could go for help to get started, to organize and develop your ideas in a rough draft, or to learn to recognize and correct errors in grammar and punctuation in a revised draft.

Spring 2016 hours are Sunday-Thursday, 3-11 pm. The center is located on the second floor of the library. To make an appointment, visit:

<http://oxford.emory.edu/academics/centers-institutes-programs/writing-center/>

When you go to your appointment, make sure that, in addition to your draft, you have a copy of your assignment with you, as well as the book(s) you are using in that assignment. **Ask the tutor for assistance on specific issues—s/he is not there (and is not allowed) to proofread your work but to guide you towards a clearer expression of your ideas.**

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class participation	100 possible points
Weekly reading responses	70 possible points
Midterm Exam (objective and essay)	150 possible points
Final Exam (objective and essay)	150 possible points
Group Presentation	100 possible points*
<b>Total</b>	<b>570 possible points*</b>

*\*The possible point total may change over the course of the semester due to schedule changes.*

### GRADING

The grading system for this course relies on a point system, meaning that **you start with a 0 in this course**. The only way to go is up, in other words! Each component of the course is worth a certain number of points (see Course Requirements below). Your grade will be determined by dividing the number of points *you earned* by the total number of *possible* points (not including extra credit), which totals **570** for this semester. The grading scale is as follows: A 100-92; A- 91-90; B+ 89-88; B 87-82; B- 81-80; C+ 79-78; C 77-72; C- 71-70; D+ 69-68, D 67-60, F 59 and below.

### DISCUSSIONS & ATTENDANCE

- **Class participation:** The success of this class depends on you (and a little bit on me). You are responsible both for attending each class session and for participating in the lively and informed discussions that will no doubt result from

your having thoroughly and thoughtfully completed the assignments for each day.

- If you tend to be a less vocal participant in classroom discussions, send your thoughts or questions to me via email, talk to me after class, etc.
- Participation also involves “active” listening, including eye contact, nodding, smiling, raising eyebrows, and taking notes.
- In general, if you are disruptive in class (talking while I am talking, sleeping, or engaging in any other form of distracting behavior), I will ask you to leave, and you will be marked absent for that day.
- If you miss class, you are responsible for obtaining notes from a classmate.
- Please don’t email me with the following question: “Did I miss anything important in class today?” My answer will always be “yes.”
- **Absence/Tardy Policy:** You are allowed **2 absences without penalty**.
  - For each absence beyond 2, you will lose 1 point off your final grade average. For example, you have a 90 average at the end of term, but you were absent 5 times total. Because of the 3 excessive absences, you would lose 3 points on that average, leading to an 87 for the course.
  - That said, please talk to me in advance about **accommodations for religious holidays/observances**.
  - Be on time. If you come to class more than 10 minutes late, you will be counted as absent.
- **Technology: ALL CELL PHONES SHOULD BE TURNED OFF DURING CLASS!**
  - Texting during class automatically negates any participation points earned during class that day.
- **Grading:** At midterm and again at the end of the semester, you will receive a participation grade out of 50 points. The two grades combined will equal your class participation grade for the semester. **Possible points: 100 points**

### WEEKLY RESPONSES

- You will write **7 semi-formal reading responses** in this course.
- There are 9 opportunities to complete a response, but you need to submit only 7 responses. Therefore, you may skip 2 responses, or if you complete all 9, I will simply drop the two lowest response grades from your point total.
- The handout at the end of this syllabus (also on Blackboard) will give you a clearer sense of what I expect and will give you the response due dates.
- Each response is worth a maximum of 10 points. **Total possible points: 70 points maximum (7 responses x 10 points max each).**

### MIDTERM EXAM & FINAL EXAM OBJECTIVE TESTS

These objective portions will consist of 50 multiple choice/fill-in-the-blank questions related to the material covered in the first half of the course and latter half of the course, respectively. You should take thorough notes in class and review the material

discussed to prepare for each test. More info to come as we get closer to those dates.  
**Each exam is worth 50 points.**

### **MIDTERM AND FINAL EXAM ESSAYS**

- You will write **two** essays in this class—one for the Midterm Exam and one for the Final Exam.
- I will provide a detailed handout for each paper assignment a couple of weeks in advance of the due dates (see syllabus).
- **Late papers will not be accepted.**
- Papers should be double-spaced, with 1-inch margins, and typed in 12-point Times New Roman font. (No crazy fonts or margins—I know the tricks!)
- You should include your name, the course title, my name, and the date in the top left-hand corner of the first page of the essay. Also provide a title for the essay, centered on the first page.
- Each essay is worth a maximum of 100 points. **Total possible points: 200 points maximum.**

### **PRESENTATION ON AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSIC OR VISUAL ART**

- Each of you will participate in one group presentation at some point in the semester. Each presentation will focus on either a musical category—Spirituals/Gospel; the Blues; Jazz; Soul/R&B; or Rap/Hip Hop—or a particular era of visual art and artists. (See syllabus for topics and dates.)
- Each group will have 2-3 members, though this number may change depending on course enrollment.
- The presentation dates are scattered throughout the semester—first come, first served on selecting a date.
- Your group will collaborate on a Powerpoint or Prezi presentation and a group handout for the class that includes a group bibliography. However, each group member should research and present on a specific part of the project. Therefore, you should find logical ways to divide up the work—for example, for a musical genre, one person may provide an overview of that genre while other group members focus on specific musicians or themes within that genre.
- Each member is to contribute slides to the presentation, properly formatted citations for the group bibliography, and information for a group handout.
- The content from these presentations may appear on your midterm or final objective exam.
- **Worth 100 points.**

### **NOTE ON STUDENT WORK**

Student work submitted as part of this course may be reviewed by Oxford College and Emory College faculty and staff for the purposes of improving instruction and enhancing Emory education.

## EXTRA CREDIT

Throughout the semester, I will give you opportunities to raise your point total by attending and writing up a summary of outside events—such as lectures, films, performances, or exhibitions—that relate to the topics and themes of this course. If you have suggestions for such events, email your ideas to me, and I will post them to Blackboard. Most events will be worth **3 points**, and you may get up to **6 points max**.

## HONOR CODE

<http://oxford.emory.edu/academics/student-services/student-honor-code/>

The Honor Code applies to all assignments, in and out of the classroom. **All work in this course must be entirely your own.** The bottom line: don't use someone else's ideas or words without proper citation. (This includes websites like Sparks Notes!) I am always happy to discuss with you when something needs to be acknowledged and properly cited, but it is up to you to see me before your written work is due to ask your questions about documenting sources.

## OFFICE OF DISABILITY SERVICES (ODS):

<http://www.ods.emory.edu/students/index.html>

ODS will offer qualifying students academic accommodations such as alternative testing, note-taking, interpretation, etc. **Students must register and request those services.** To do so, contact the Office of Disability Services at Emory University or Oxford College.

## COUNSELING AND CAREER SERVICES (CCS): <http://oxford.emory.edu/counseling/>

CCS provides many services at no cost to help address students' personal and career development needs, including personal counseling, career counseling, and psychiatric services. To schedule an appointment, call 770.784.8394.

## Tentative\* Schedule of Reading and Assignments

[\*This reading schedule is subject to change should we need more time on a text; I will not change due dates of assignments except when it might be helpful to you.]

### Slavery and Freedom (1770s-1865)

W 1/13      Introductions/ Review of Syllabus and Requirements

M 1/18      No Class—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

W 1/20      **Olaudah Equiano**, Ch. 1 from *The Interesting Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (1789) (115-24)

Reading Response #1 due for all  
on W 1/20

**Phillis Wheatley**, from *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773)

- Preface and letters, 139-41
- "To the University of Cambridge, in New-England," 143
- "On Being Brought from Africa to America," 143-44

**Sojourner Truth**, *Ar'n't I a Woman?* (1851), 178-80

M 1/25      **Solomon Northup**, from *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853), 190-98

**Harriet Jacobs** (aka, Linda Brent), *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), 224-36, 241-46

**Frederick Douglass**, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" (1852), 402-13

Reading Response #2 due

### Literature of Reconstruction to the "New Negro" Renaissance (1865-1919)

W 1/27      **Booker T. Washington**, listen to Atlanta Exposition Address (on Bb) and follow along in anthology, 572-75

**W.E.B. Du Bois**, excerpts from *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), 687-702

M 2/1      **Charles W. Chesnutt**, "The Wife of His Youth" (1899), 602-10

**Pauline E. Hopkins**, "Talma Gordon" (1900), 635-45

**James Weldon Johnson**, "O Black and Unknown Bards" (1908), 783-84

**Paul Laurence Dunbar**, "We Wear the Mask" (1895), 906

Reading Response #3 due for all  
on M 2/1

W 2/3      **Library Information Session—location TBA**

**Ida B. Wells-Barnett**, from *The Red Record* (1895), 670-79

### Harlem Renaissance (1919-1940)

M 2/8      **Alain Locke**, "The New Negro" (1925), 973-81

**Claude McKay**, "If We Must Die" (1919), 1005; "To the White Fiends" (1919), 1005; "The White House" (1922), 1006-7

**Langston Hughes**, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1921); "Mother to Son" (1922); "I, Too" (1925,

Reading Response #4 due

1959); "Ballad of the Landlord" (1940, 1955); "Harlem" (1951, 1959);  
within pp. 1305-19  
W 2/10 **Zora Neale Hurston**, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, ch. 1 through 6

M 2/15 Hurston, *Their Eyes*, ch. 7 through 14  
W 2/17 Finish *Their Eyes*

Reading Response #5 due

**M 2/22 Presentation on Spirituals/Gospels**  
**Presentation on the Blues**

**W 2/24 Presentation on Jazz**  
**Presentation on Harlem Renaissance Era Visual Art**

**Sunday 2/28 EXTRA CREDIT: Rita Dove Reading on Emory Campus, 4 p.m.**

**Realism, Naturalism, Modernism (1940-1960)**

M 2/29 **Richard Wright**, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow"  
(1937), 132-40  
**Ralph Ellison**, excerpt from *The Invisible Man* (1952),  
264-74

Reading Response #6 due

**James Baldwin**, TBD  
W 3/2 **Gwendolyn Brooks**, excerpts from *Maud Martha* (1953)—Chs. 1, 2, 5,  
12, 14, 15, 19, 22, 25, 30, 33 (found within pp. 344-89)

M 3/7-F 3/11 **Spring Break**

**M 3/14 MIDTERM OBJECTIVE TEST IN CLASS**

W 3/16 Come to class having watched the 1961 film adaptation of Lorraine  
Hansberry's play, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) → the original play is available in  
your anthology

**F 3/18 MIDTERM ESSAY DUE BY 9am to Blackboard**

M 3/21 Guest Speaker: Dr. Lloyd Pratt, Oxford University  
**Extra Credit: Dr. Pratt's lecture, 7:30 pm, Williams Hall**

**Black Arts Movement & Civil Rights-Era Writing (1960-1975)**

W 3/23 **Martin Luther King, Jr.**, "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (1964), 594-607  
Listen to **Malcolm X's** speech, "The Ballot or the Bullet" (1964) (on Bb)

M 3/28 **Amiri Baraka**, "Black Art" (1969), 703  
**Sonia Sanchez**, "Summer Words of a Sistah Addict" (1969), 712  
**Alice Walker**, "In Search of Our Mothers'  
Gardens" (1974), 1180-94

Reading Response #7 due



**Reflections on the Present (late 20<sup>th</sup>/early 21<sup>st</sup> c.)**

W 3/30      **Toni Morrison, (1)** "Unspeakable Things Spoken" (1989), 1078-91,  
1099-1101; **(2)** excerpt from Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) [on Blackboard]

**M 4/4      Presentation on R&B/Soul**

**Presentation on Black Arts Era Visual Art**

**W 4/6      Presentation on Contemporary Visual Art**  
**Presentation on Rap and Hip Hop**

M 4/11      **Spike Lee's** *Do The Right Thing* (1989) in class

W 4/13      Finish film and discuss

M 4/18      **Ta-Nehisi Coates**, *Between the World and Me*  
(2015), read to p. 71

W 4/20      *Between the World and Me*, 75-132

Reading Response #8 due

M 4/25      Finish *Between the World and Me*  
Wrap Up

Reading Response #9 due for all  
on M 4/25

Monday, May 2, 2:00 PM

FINAL EXAM

Bring the finished essay with you to the exam and post  
to Blackboard by the exam time.

## Guidelines to Reading Responses in English 359

Reading responses are due to Blackboard by class time on the dates listed below.

You will submit the responses through Blackboard:

- Type your response on Microsoft Word, check the Word Count, and save as a .doc or .docx file.
- Log into Blackboard at classes.emory.edu.
- Select our course, ENG\_OX 359.
- Go to Assignments and click on the link to the Reading Response due that week.
- Your response will be run through SafeAssign.
- **Be sure to click Submit.**
- Check back within a week or so after posting to view your grade and to read my comments.

You will write a total of **7 responses** throughout the semester. You have 9 opportunities to write reading responses, but **you may skip 2 responses during the semester without penalty**. The skipped responses may appear as a 0s in the online gradebook, but rest assured that I will drop the two lowest response grades when calculating your final grade for the course. With each response you can earn a maximum of **10 points** for a total of 70 possible points.

Below, you will find the list of due dates for these responses.

- Students whose last names begin with A to L typically submit responses on Mondays, with the exception of Response 1.
- Students with last names M to Z typically submit responses on Wednesdays, with the exception of Responses 3 and 9.
- **If you prefer to switch due dates one week, you must let me know by Saturday, 10pm, of the week that it is due.**

**You will not have a response due the same week that an essay or presentation is due!**

<b>Due Dates</b>	<u>Last name A-L</u>	<u>Last name M-Z</u>
Response 1	*W 1/20	W 1/20
Response 2	M 1/25	W 1/27
Response 3	M 2/1	*M 2/1
Response 4	M 2/8	W 2/10
Response 5	M 2/15	W 2/17
Response 6	M 2/29	W 3/2
Response 7	M 3/28	W 3/30
Response 8	M 4/18	W 4/20
Response 9	M 4/25	*M 4/25

### Objectives

The responses are meant to accomplish the following:

- 1) get you writing on a regular basis,\* and
- 2) ensure that you are not only completing the readings assignments but thinking about them critically before coming to class.\*\*

\*Just like with exercise, it's important to write on a regular basis. If you don't, then your writing weakens. If you do, then you not only become a stronger writer, but writing becomes easier and less daunting. Furthermore, the more writing assignments you have, the more chances you have to get an A!

\*\*Because this is a discussion-heavy course, I want to make sure you are doing the reading in a way that will allow us to have lots to talk about when we meet each day. I also want to make sure that each of you is able to participate even if you are one of the less vocal members of the class.

### ***How do I get 10 out of 10 on each response?***

To get 10 points, your response should:

- be at least 350 words in length. Suggestion: Type your response in Word; check the word count using "Word Count" under Tools; and then cut and paste into Blackboard.
- reflect upon the reading due in class the day your response is due. On the days that you have more than one essay or article to read, you may write about only one of the readings without penalty.
- have a main idea in your response and support that idea with analysis and textual evidence.
- contain minimal grammatical mistakes.
- be turned in on time. Late responses will not be accepted.

These responses should be very thoughtful and reflective. They should show that you understand the main points or premises of the reading. But they are also meant to provide you with a more relaxed space in which to play with your ideas and to make connections to your personal experiences. You can use humor and colloquial language, but your response should be intelligent and articulate...and of course, grammatically correct. **What you choose to write about is essentially up to you, but I have provided some prompts for you below. You can respond to one of these, or you can choose to write about a single idea, metaphor, phrase, or fact that piqued your intellectual curiosity.**

**The response should relate in some way to the reading that is due in class the following day, not about something you just pulled out of the air.**

**Some prompts** (but feel free to come up with your own!):

- The most interesting or powerful or surprising or [insert adjective] moment in the reading was: (include reasons)
- One moment [identify that moment] reminded me of something we read previously... (discuss the parallels you see)
- This reading troubled me because: (include reasons but avoid ranting)
- This reading raised a central question for me: (include the question and your thoughts about it)
- This reading brings to light the theme(s) of: (include theme(s) and a discussion of the ways in which the theme appears)
- This reading showcases the author's ability to: (identify author's strengths or weaknesses and discuss)