

AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

ENGLISH 589/Spring Quarter 2000

LISBETH GANT-BRITTON	Class meets:	T-Th	12:40-2:30, Library 210
Humphrey House: 213	Office hours:	T	2:30-4:00
Office phone: 7036		Th	2:30-4:00
English Dept. 7043		Fri	2:00-5:00

Email: lbritton@kzoo.edu And by appointment

Course Description:

This course will familiarize us with some of the highlights of African American literature from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. In the first half of the course, we begin by considering African Americans, not as slaves but as already civilized peoples forced into capture. In so doing, we will address the relationship between the overtly bleak circumstances of slavery under which African American literature was born and the determination for authority on the part of this country's early black writers. In particular, we will consider themes which include early black voices in the new republic; self-discovery and authority in slave narratives, and the "double consciousness" which stems from attempts to reconcile what it means to be "African" with what it means to be "American."

The course continues with an exploration of the self-help "uplift" that characterized African Americans' struggle to overcome the frustrations of the Nadir after Reconstruction. We then examine the working class migrating north to seek a better life in its cities. Their experience explodes into the "revolution" of cultural nationalism in the sixties, eventually developing into a complex set of cultural, economic, and political issues with which contemporary black Americans are still grappling today. The themes in the second half of the course encompass: The Harlem Renaissance, The New Negro from "object" to "subject," issues of the poor and working classes during World War II and after, black nationalism in the 1960s, and contemporary urban issues.

Required Texts:

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Ed.	<i>Norton Anthology of African American Literature</i>
Toni Morrison	<i>Song of Solomon</i>
Octavia Butler	<i>Dawn</i>

Course Webpage

Library Homepage Web Study Guide and selected Internet webpages

Go to: K College Library Home Page/Research Guides/Course Research Guides/Course No.

(Note: Websites change or disappear without notice. These are intended as examples only. If need be, find a similar site to fulfill assignment.)

COURSE SCHEDULE

(Please read all material before class date indicated. Bring appropriate book(s)/handouts to each class. Also, as you read, please note on paper significant themes, metaphors, issues, etc. Bring notes to class as the basis for your participation.)

Week One-

Frederick Douglass

Week Two-

Douglass cont'd

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents*; Octavia Butler, "Bloodchild"

Week Three-

Due: Response Paper #1, Mon. April 10, 5 p.m.

The New Negro

Fri. April 14 - Detroit, Lucille Clifton (Carpool; drivers needed)

You **must** attend either Clifton talk or Ringgold exhibition.

Week Four-

Harlem Renaissance

Tues. April 18 - Faith Ringgold art exhibit, Kalamazoo Institute of the Arts - 6-7 p.m. (led by docent)

Wed. April 19- Faith Ringgold booksigning 6-7 p.m. Kalamazoo Public Library;
presentation, KIA - 8:00-9:30 p.m.

Week Five

Due: Mon. April 24, 5 p.m. response paper #2

Song of Solomon

Week Six-

Malcolm X

Due: Fri. May 5, 5 p.m. response paper #3

Week Seven-

Short stories

Week Eight -

Due: Outline, thesis statement, tentative bibliography for research paper, 5 p.m.

Fences

Week Nine –

Poetry

Due: Tues. May 23, in class- Draft research paper - Peer Review in class

Week Ten

Octavia Butler, *Dawn*

Due: Tues. May 30, 5 p.m. Final Research Paper- Late papers will be graded down.

Final Exam- TBA

EXPLANATION OF TEAM ACTIVITIES

- Kick-off class discussion by posing questions

Before assigned day--

- a. Read material in advance
 - b. Make reading notes and mark pages in book with appropriate passages
 - c. Develop three discussion questions (could be more but does not have to be)
 - d. Very brief meeting with Dr. Gant-Britton
- Examples of discussion questions --

(They may include but are not limited to the following –Use your imagination!)

- a. Theoretical issue related to one of the themes in the novel (e.g. What role does this text suggest that war plays in the American imaginary?)
- b. Sociocultural issue (e.g. What do we think about the fact that women are largely silent in this novel?)
- c. Reader response issue (e. g. How did the narrator’s voice and tone affect your reading-- before the Historical Notes section? After?)
- d. Relate to one of your own personal issues or interests (e.g. If you are really into sports, for example-- You could ask how it might feel to have the Ku Klux Klan urge that lynchings be a spectator sport.)
- e. Bonus fun or provocative question of your choice. (Not one of your main three questions.)

Note: You must have a range of questions.

- Come up with your own answer for each question. Do some very brief literary, historical, or sociocultural research re your questions.
- Brief meeting with Dr. Gant-Britton before class

You make the appointment. Plan to meet me at least two days before class. (Remember, I do **not** have Wed. office hours.) Bring with you:

1. Reading notes and book passages
2. Discussion questions or ideas
3. Brief preliminary research

Day after class, turn in your material (by 5 p.m., unless a paper is due that day, in which case you have an extra 24 hrs.)

1. Turn in reading notes (typed and stapled)
 2. Turn in typed discussion questions
 3. Turn in one paragraph of research re each question with citations
 4. Comment on how you think the discussion went and what was learned
- How you will be graded on team questions
1. Preparation and research
 2. Quality of questions (more credit goes to thought-provoking rather than superficial questions that only ask for basic information (e.g. Why did Antonio’s brothers leave home?))
 3. Presentation of questions in class and in writing.
 4. Unless notified otherwise in writing, I will assume team members have participated equally.

Note: Everyone’s participation grade includes responding to as well as asking questions. So hopefully, we will have lively, thoughtful, and considerate responses.

GRADING POLICY:

• Participation/Discussion Questions	10%	100
• 3 short critical paper(s) @ 15%	45%	450
• Final research project includes:		
Annotated Bibl., prelim. background research, thesis statement	10%	100
Research paper	20%	200
• Final Exam	<u>15%</u>	<u>150</u>
	100%	1000 Possible points

OTHER GRADING CONSIDERATIONS:

- **Lateness/Absence:** If you are absent **two (2) times without prior notification and a suitable explanation** or if you are **habitually late**, you will receive a lower grade. I take attendance at 8:30 sharp, based on the library clock. Make sure you synchronize with your own clocks. If you are late and have been marked absent, it is your responsibility to see me after class and let me know. (You will still be marked late.)
- Keep track of your attendance. Even if you forget an absence early in the quarter, it still counts. Keep in mind, people may get sick unexpectedly at the end of the quarter. These measures are not meant to be punitive. We need everyone to make the class work and time management is a valuable skill to master.
- **Papers:** You will write three short critical papers (2-3 pp.) and one research paper (6 pp.) during the quarter. Details of options will be specified in class.
- **Examination:** There will be a final in-class exam.
- **Preparation:** Complete the reading *before* each class period. Part of your grade is based on your class participation (or lack thereof). If you have a verifiable condition that prevents you from actively participating, it is your responsibility to notify me at the beginning of that class.
- **Participation:** Your final grade will be lower if your class participation is extremely meager or disrespectful of others. (If speaking in class is a severe challenge for you and the Dean has been notified, see me at the beginning of the quarter to arrange alternative ways to fulfill participation requirement.)
- **Deadlines:** All written work must be turned in on the date due. Late papers will be graded down unless there is an emergency verified by the College. It is your responsibility to see that I get immediate official verification *in writing*.
- **Plagiarism:** If you use another's ideas or words in your papers, you must acknowledge the source in writing. You will be graded down severely or otherwise penalized if you plagiarize. If you are unclear about plagiarism, please consult the K Honor Code in your K academic planner and the MLA style sheet in the web course guide.
- **Disabilities:** If you have or suspect you might have a disability or any impairment which may affect your class work, please see me and the Dean of Experiential Education right away. I will do my best to work with you.