

Tel Aviv University
Faculty of Humanities
Department of English and American Studies
African American Literature
Spring 2017
Dr. Sonia Weiner

soni@post.tau.ac.il

Office: Web 503

Office Hours: By Appointment

Class: Sunday, Wednesday 12-14: Webb 102

Course Requirements:

In accordance with departmental policy, class attendance is compulsory.

Come Prepared to Class = READ

In-class Midterm (50%): Moed A: 12.5.17; Moed B: 2.6.17

Take Home Final Paper (50%)

Course Descriptions

How does a literary tradition emerge within an oppressed group deliberately kept illiterate? How do slavery, prejudice, discrimination and racism inform and influence the evolving tradition throughout the years? How are black writers influenced by: the ideologies, allure, expectations, criticism and gaze of the white world? We will explore these questions in reference to canonic texts of the African American literary tradition (slave narratives, autobiographies, short stories, essays, novels), while reflecting on identity and racism, blues and jazz, language and the vernacular, form and voice, gender and sexuality.

Additionally, the course will emphasize the visual aspects of African American culture, and will explore the manner in which African American writers dealt with diverse representations of 'blackness', both thematically, as they contended with the 'meanings' of images and the manner in which they could be 'used', and formally, as photography shaped the way they 'saw' and wrote about the world.

Syllabus

1. March 15: Introduction

- Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas* (2016). Segregation, Assimilation and Racism.
- Phillis Wheatley & The Question of Literacy

2. March 19: The Slave Narrative 1: Literacy, Identity and Freedom

Frederick Douglass, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845). Chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 & 10 (until "My term of actual service to Mr. Edward Covey ended on Christmas day, 1833).

- Houston Baker, "Autobiographical Acts and the Voice of the Southern Slave." *The Slave's Narrative*, ed. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates (1990)
- James Olney, "'I was born': Slave Narratives, their Status as Autobiography and as Literature." *The Slave's Narrative*, ed. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates (1990)
- Sarah Blackwood, "Fugitive Obscura: Runaway Slave Portraiture and Early Photographic Technology." *American Literature* 81:1 (2009)

3. March 22: The Slave Narrative 2: The Cult of True Womanhood
Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). Chapters 1-7 (from 'Childhood' to 'The Lover'), 10 ('A Perilous Passage..'), 21 ('The Loophole of Retreat')

- Hazel Carby, "Slave and Mistress." In *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (1987)
- Jean Fagan Yellin, "Text and Contexts of Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*." *The Slave's Narrative*, ed. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates (1990)

4. March 26: Reconstruction and the Rise of Jim Crow/Racial Segregation
Booker T. Washington, "The Atlanta Address," *Up From Slavery* (1901)
Charles Chesnutt, "The Wife of His Youth" and "The Passing of Grandison." *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line* (1898)

- John Edgar Wideman, "Charles Chesnutt and the WPA Narratives: The Oral and Literate Roots of Afro-American Literature." *The Slave's Narrative*, ed. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates (1990)
- Plessy vs. Ferguson 1896

5. March 29: Redrawing the Color Line
W.E.B Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, Chapter 1, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," Chapter 13, "Of the Coming of John," Chapter 14, "The Sorrow Songs"

- Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), "African Slaves, American Slaves and Their Music," in *Blues People: The Negro Experience in White American and the Music that Developed from It* (1963)
- Shawn Michelle Smith, "The Art of Scientific Propaganda." *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B Du Bois, Race and Visual Culture* (2004).

6. April 2: Passing & Racial Identity

James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912)

- Werner Sollors, "Passing," *Neither Black Nor White Yet Both* (1997)
- Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), "Afro-Christian Music and Religion;" "Primitive Blues and Primitive Jazz," "Classic Blues," in *Blues People: The Negro Experience in White American and the Music that Developed from It* (1963)

7. April 19: Passing & Racial Identity

James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912)

8. April 23: The Harlem Renaissance: Ideological Confluences

Alain Locke, The Survey Graphic, Harlem Issue, "Harlem" & "Forward to The New Negro" 1925; "Art or Propaganda" (1928)

George Schuyler, "The Negro-Art Hokum" (1926)

W.E.B. DuBois, "Criteria of Negro Art" (1926)

Marcus Garvey, "Speech to the Second International Convention of Negroes," August 14, 1921

- Jeffrey B. Ferguson, "The Harlem Renaissance and History, Memory and Myth," *The Harlem Renaissance a Brief History with Documents*
- Martha Nadell, "Introduction" & "Fy-ah," *Enter the New Negroes: Images of Race in American Culture*

9. April 26: Langston Hughes and the Blues Aesthetic

Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1926)

Langston Hughes, "The Blues I'm Playing," *The Ways of White Folk* (1933)

Langston Hughes, "Selected Poetry"

10. April 30: Jean Toomer

Jean Toomer, *Cane* (1923), "Karintha," "Carma," "Bona and Paul"

- Robert Arbour, "Figuring and Reconfiguring the Folk: Women and Metaphor in Part I of Jean Toomer's *Cane*."
- Werner Sollors, "Jean Toomer's *Cane*: Modernism and Race in Interwar America"

11. May 3: Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)

Alice Walker, "Looking for Zora"

Zora Neale Hurston, "Introduction," *Mules and Men* (1935)

Zora Neale Hurston, Rendition of a Folktale: "How to Write a Letter"

Zora Neale Hurston, "Characteristics of Negro Expression"

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "The Signifying Monkey and the Language of Signifyin'(g): Rhetorical Difference and the Orders of Meaning" *The Signifying Monkey* (1988)

Carla Kaplan, "The Erotics of Talk: 'That Oldest Human Longing' in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*"

12. May 7: [Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*](#)

13. May 10: [Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* \(1937\)](#)

ALL OF THE ABOVE MATERIAL WILL BE INCLUDED IN THE MIDTERM

14. May 14: The Warmth of Other Suns

[Richard Wright, *Black Boy, Selections* \(1945\)](#)

- Ralph Ellison, "Richard Wright's Blues"
- Richard Wright, "Blueprint for Negro Writing (1937)"
- Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (2010).

15. May 17: Lynching

[Richard Wright, "Big Boy Leaves Home" \(1938\)](#)

[Ralph Ellison, "Down By the Square" \(circa 1940\)](#)

- Shawn Michelle Smith, "Spectacles of Whiteness: The Photography of Lynching." *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B Du Bois, Race and Visual Culture* (2004)
- Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940*

16. May 21: The 13th Amendment Today

[Ava DuVernay, *13th* \(2016\)](#)

An American documentary on race in the US criminal justice system, titled after the Thirteenth Amendment to the US constitution.

17. May 24: James Baldwin Speaks

[Raoul Peck, *I Am Not Your Negro* \(2016\)](#)

An American documentary based on James Baldwin's unfinished manuscript *Remember This House* and narrated by actor Samuel L. Jackson.

18. May 28: A Dream Deferred

[James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues" \(1957\)](#)

- Amiri Baraka, "The Modern Scene," *Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music that Developed from It*

19. June 4: Visualizing Civil Rights

Martin Luther King, "I Have a Dream" (1963)

- Leigh Renee Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle* (2011)
- Martin A. Berger, *Seeing Through Race: A Reinterpretation of Civil Rights Photography* (2011)

20. June 7: The Nation of Islam & Malcolm X

Malcolm X, "Saved," *Autobiography of Malcolm X*; "The Ballot or the Bullet"

- Manning Marable, "Prologue: Life Beyond the Legend" & "Epilogue: Reflections on a Revolutionary Vision." *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (2011)

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21. June 11: Black Power: Black Nationalism and Black Art

Larry Neal, "Black Arts"

Amiri Baraka, "Black Art"

Etheridge Knight, "The Idea of Ancestry," "Hard Rock Returns to Prison from the Hospital of the Criminally Insane," "For Black Poets who Think of Suicide"

Mari Evans: "Status Symbol," "I am a Black Woman"

22. June 14: Rememory, History and Race

Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987)

- bell hooks, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness." *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*

23. June 18: Rememory, History and Race

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

24. June: 21:

John Edgar Wideman, *Brothers and Keepers* (1984)

- Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010).
- Ta-Nahisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*

25. June 25: Reimagining History

Coleson Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad* (2016)

- Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*

26. June 28

Coleson Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad* (2016)

THE SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE