

**Tel Aviv University**  
**Faculty of Humanities**  
**Department of English and American Studies**  
**BA Seminar: *New York and the African American Literary Imagination***

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Class: Sunday-Wednesday 2-4, Webb 501  
Office: Webb 503  
Office Hours: By Appointment

Many African American novels take place in New York City and have been written by authors who have lived within the metropolis. A hub of African American culture from the early twentieth century onward, New York serves more than a backdrop for these narratives. This seminar will explore ways in which cityscapes (spaces, places, and cultures) inform the novels and shape their meanings: ideologically, conceptually, and metaphorically.

Course Requirements and Grade Breakdown

Attendance is mandatory and will be taken regularly. Be punctual.  
Absence of more than 4 classes will jeopardize the student's status in the class.

\* Active Participation: 35%

- a. You must come prepared = complete all the reading assignments and prepare a critical question that emerges from the readings.
- b. Each student will be asked to launch a class discussion; the theme/question/idea will be pre-circulated on-line by the student on the evening before class.
- c. Each student must have the reading material accessible during class – either in electronic or printed format.

\* 3 Written responses (one page): 3 X 5 = 15%

The responses will include one theoretical response (due by November 12), one close reading of a literary text (due by December 20), and one application of theory to text (due by January 14).

\* Seminar paper: 50%

Length: 4500 words =18 pages  
Minimum 6 substantial secondary sources  
Due: May 6, 2018

## **Introduction & Theoretical Grounding**

Gates, Henry Louis Jr. "Harlem on Our Minds." *Critical Inquiry* 24:1 (1997): 1-12.

Jackson, John L. Jr. *Harlemworld: Doing Race and Class in Contemporary America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

Wirth-Nesher, Hana. "Introduction: Reading Cities." *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996. 1-26. (or revised version from Handbook of Urban Studies)

Soja, Edward W. "Introduction/Itinerary/Overture." *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996.

de Certeau Michel. "Walking in the City." *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkley: University of California Press,

## **Claude McKay, *Home to Harlem* (1928)**

### Harlem Renaissance:

McKay, Claude, *Harlem: Negro Metropolis* (1940). Excerpts.

De Jongh, James. "The Legendary Capital." In *Vicious Modernism: Black Harlem and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge University Press, 1990. 5-14.

Fabre, Genevieve and Michael Feith, " 'Temples for Tomorrow': Introductory Essay." In *Temples for Tomorrow: Looking Back at the Harlem Renaissance*. Genevieve Fabre and Michael Feith, eds. Indiana University Press, 2001. 1-30.

Lobbermann, Dorothea. "Harlem as a Memory Place: Reconstructing the Harlem Renaissance." In *Temples for Tomorrow: Looking Back at the Harlem Renaissance*. Genevieve Fabre and Michael Feith, eds. Indiana University Press, 2001. 210-221.

### Home to Harlem:

Pedersen, Carl. "Tropics in New York: Claude McKay and the New Negro Movement." In *Temples for Tomorrow: Looking Back at the Harlem Renaissance*. Genevieve Fabre and Michael Feith, eds. Indiana University Press, 2001. 259-269.

Charras, Françoise. "The West Indian Presence in Alan Locke's *The New Negro*." In *Temples for Tomorrow: Looking Back at the Harlem Renaissance*. Genevieve Fabre and Michael Feith, eds. Indiana University Press, 2001. 270-287.

Brown, Dillon J. "Escaping the Tropics through New York: Eric Walrond and Claude McKay in the American Grain." *The Global South* 7:2 (2014): 37-61.

Heise, Thomas. "Degenerate Sex and the City: The Underworlds of New York and Paris in the Work of Djuna Barnes and Claude McKay, 1910s-1930s." In *Urban Underworlds: A Geography of Twentieth Century American Literature and Culture*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010. 77-126.

### **Ann Petry, *The Street* (1946)**

De Jongh, James. "The Emerging Ghetto." In *Vicious Modernism: Black Harlem and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge University Press, 1990. 73-81.

Andrews, Larry R. "The Sensory Assault of the City in Ann Petry's *The Street*." In *The City in African American Literature*. Ed. Yoshinobu Hakutoni and Robert Butler. Madison: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1995. 196-211.

Williams, Piper Kendrix and Brian Norman, "Introduction: To Lie Steal, and Dissemble: The Cultural Work of the Literature of Segregation." In *Representing Segregation: Toward an Aesthetics of Living Jim Crow, and Other Forms of Racial Division*. Ed. Piper Kendrix Williams and Brian Norman. NY: SUNY Press, 2012. 1-10.

Machian, Elizabeth Boyle. "Diseased Properties and Broken Homes in Ann Petry's *The Street*." In *Representing Segregation: Toward an Aesthetics of Living Jim Crow, and Other Forms of Racial Division*. Ed. Piper Kendrix Williams and Brian Norman. NY: SUNY Press, 2012. 149-163.

Wesling, Meg. "The Opacity of Everyday Life: Segregation and the Iconicity of Uplift in *The Street*." *American Literature* 78:1 (2006): 117-140.

### **Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952)**

Ellison, Ralph. "Harlem is Nowhere (1948)." *Shadow and Act*. New York: Vintage, 1964. 294-302.

Blair, Sara. "Ellison, Photography, and the Origins of Invisibility." *Cambridge Companion to Ralph Ellison*. NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 56-81.

Wirth-Nesher, Hana. "Ralph Ellison's New York, *Invisible Man*." *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. 85-107.

Scruggs, Charles. "The Ever-Emerging City in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*." *Sweet Home: Invisible Cities in the Afro-American Novel*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993. 100-136.

## **James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953)**

Baldwin, James. "The Harlem Ghetto." *Baldwin: Collected Essays*. 42-53.

Scruggs, Charles. "The Tale of Two Cities in James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*." *American Literature* 52: 1 (1980): 1-17.

Scruggs, Charles. "The Watchman on the Wall in James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*." *Sweet Home: Invisible Cities in the Afro-American Novel*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993. 137-166.

## **Langston Hughes and Roy DeCarava, *The Sweet Flypaper of Life* (1955)**

Ings, Richard. "A Tale of Two Cities: Urban Text and Image in *The Sweet Flypaper of Life*." In *Urban Space and Representation*. Ed. Maria Balshaw and Liam Kennedy. London: Pluto Press, 2000. 39-54.

## **Toni Morrison – *Jazz* (1992)**

Scheiber, Andrew Joseph. "Jazz and the Future Blues: Toni Morrison's Urban Folk Zone." *Modern Fiction Studies* 52:2 (2006): 470-494.

Paquet-Deyris, Anne-Marie. "Toni Morrison's *Jazz* and the City." *African American Review* 35:2 (2001): 219-231.

Barnes, Deborah H. "Movin' on Up: The Madness of Migration in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*." In *Toni Morrison's Fiction: Contemporary Criticism* Ed. David L. Middleton. NY: Garland, 1997. 283-295.

## **Colson Whitehead – *Zone One* (2011)**

Whitehead, Colson. *The Colossus of New York* (2003)

Gauthier, Tim S. "Zombies, the Uncanny, and the City: Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*." In *The City Since 9/11: Literature, Film, Television*. Ed. Keith Wilhite. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2016. 109-125.

[https://www.academia.edu/31063164/Zombies\\_the\\_Uncanny\\_and\\_the\\_City\\_Colson\\_Whiteheads\\_Zone\\_One](https://www.academia.edu/31063164/Zombies_the_Uncanny_and_the_City_Colson_Whiteheads_Zone_One)

Fain, Kimberly. "Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*: Postapocalyptic Zombies Take over in the Age of Nostalgia, Despair and Consumption." In *Street Lit: Representing the Urban Landscape*, Ed. Keenan Norris. Plymouth, UK: Scarecrow Press, 2014. 173-187.

Schedule:

October 22 – Intro – The City and its Spaces I

October 25 – Intro – The City and its Spaces II

October 29 – Intro – The City of Refuge: Harlem Renaissance

November 1 – McKay

November 5 – McKay

November 8 – McKay

November 12 – WWII, The Emerging Ghetto, Harlem Riot 1943

November 15 – Petry

November 19 – Petry

November 22 – Petry

November 26 – Hughes/DeCarava

November 29 – Ellison – Prologue, Chapter 7 (journey north), 10 (Liberty Paints), 13 (Yams & Eviction), 14 (Enter the Brotherhood)

December 3 – Ellison – chapters 15 (Jolly Nigger Bank), 16 (Rally), 17-19

December 6 – Ellison – Chapters 20 (Sambo Dolls & Clifton), 21 (funeral) -25 (Harlem Riot) & Epilogue

December 10 – Interlude: Film TBA

December 13 – Baldwin

December 17 – Hanukah Vacation

December 20 – Baldwin

December 24 – Baldwin

December 27 – Interlude: Black Arts

December 31 – Morrison

January 3 – Morrison

January 7 – Morrison

January 10 – Interlude: Hip Hop

January 14 - Whitehead

January 17 – Whitehead

January 21 – Whitehead

\* The Syllabus is Subject to Change