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ENG 4750-001: Studies in African American Literature-Bluesology: The Blues and its Literary Legacy

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English 4750.001: Studies in African American Literature—Bluesology: The Blues and Its Literary Legacy

Course description: Ralph Ellison describes the blues as "an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically." This course explores, through both musical and literary texts, how that vernacular expression blossoms into literary achievement. We'll listen to blues artists from the Mississippi delta to urban Chicago, and we'll read a variety of literary selections from Frederick Douglass and Du Bois to Amiri Baraka and Sonia Sanchez.

Course format: We'll work as much as possible in seminar discussion: reading, watching video, listening to songs and to each other's research and reflection. Opportunity exists for independent research, both bibliographical and analytical. Indeed, whenever you find information useful to our common pursuit—say, a blues website, a journal, or an article in one, an upcoming performance or a news report—then share it with us all. We'll define ourselves and our work, insofar as possible, as we discover where heart and head are keeping time together to chase the blues away with the blues.

Course texts:
Amiri Baraka [LeRoi Jones], Blues People, 1963

Course requirements: Discussion (20%), short essay [3-4 pages] (15%), midterm essay examination (15%), long essay [10-12 pages] (25%) and final essay examination (25%), or grading by contract (further discussion to follow) in some combination of writing and proposed projects.

* Phone: 6312 Office: CH3361 (314D)
TR 1:00-2:00; or, by appointment; Email: mdloudon@eiu.edu
In African American Studies, Blair 3165: Phone: 581-5719 or 581-6433; MW 10-12; 3-4; or, by appointment.

(Please check before coming unannounced: frequent meetings require missing office hours, unexpectedly, too often.)
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Course Syllabus (tentative and subject to revisions):

January
T 9: Course introduction: Video: Feel Like Going Home (Sony DVD 55804, 2003)

T 16: (continued)—and discussion; Robert Santelli’s “A Century of the Blues” (12-59) and “Feel Like Going Home” (60-97) in ... the Blues: A Musical Journey


Background readings: The Norton Anthology of African American Literature: “Introduction: Talking Books” and “The Vernacular Tradition” (1-8); peruse the lyrics and “oral texts” from 8-148, especially 8-77, for an overview of what lyrics are readily available to you in print.

Read, or re-read, the following, especially if you have never encountered these texts: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, especially chapter two (400-401) in the last three paragraphs; The Souls of Black Folk, chapter 14 (758-765) and “Criteria of Negro Art” (777-784).

In addition, the brief introductory sections in ... African American Literature offer a rather succinct but useful overview of African American historical and literary developments—“The Literature of...” sections: 151-162; 541-554; 953-962; 1355-1368; 1831-1850; 2127-2139. Please have these required readings completed by February 20; I’ll assume you’ve done so by then, and the material from that point on will belong to your repertoire.


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