Spring 1-15-2001

ENG 4750-001: African American Women's Novels

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African American Women's Novels

Course Policy

Goals: African American women have long been the subjects of what has been called "double jeopardy" (or sometimes "triple jeopardy"). In discussions of both race and gender, that is, the concerns of African American women have tended to be discounted in favor of the issues relevant to African American MEN or WHITE women. But the challenges African American women face cannot be understood as a simple addition of gender and race issues. For example, for American women, the problem of ancestry has centered on the erasure of women from history, the erasure of female imagery from spiritual traditions, and the exclusion of women from artistic enterprises, among other things. For African American men, the loss of history has been more extreme. Most African American people don't know the tribal group or the region of Africa their ancestors came from, and so they have lost all knowledge of the language, spiritual rituals, stories, art, and cultural practices of those ancestors. African American women have been doubly ignored and trick of finding, rebuilding, imagining, creating tradition is even more complicated.

In this course, we will focus on this question as it makes itself felt in African American women's narratives. We will ask several things of the literature we read: How do these novels reflect the specific concerns of African American women? How the authors use tone, style imagery, narrative voice, etc., to address these concerns? In what ways do these novels seek to find or rebuild a past? In what ways do they attempt to find or create a specific African American (women's) literary tradition?

Formal Papers, Presentations, and Exams: You will have two formal papers one three and one seven pages, one annotated bibliography, a final exam, and several in-class writings. I will be available to read drafts of your papers if you give them to me at least ten days in advance of the due date. Please be prepared to share your papers with classmates. Exams will include material from history lectures and will be made up primarily of essay questions and short answers. There will also be a formal presentation following your first paper and one informal presentation. The formal presentation grade will be figured into your first paper grade, and your informal presentation will be part of your classroom participation grade.

Attendance and Lateness: If you expect an A or a B for the course, you should have no more than four unexcused absences. I will not automatically dock your cumulative grade, but your absences will seriously affect your classroom participation grade and will almost inevitably affect your other grades. If lateness becomes a problem, I will consider latenesses as absences in determining your classroom participation grade.

Late work: I cannot get papers graded efficiently and keep track of everyone's work if late papers are coming in willy nilly under my door and in my box. In any case, you should leave the university with the ability to get professional-looking work in on time. I will, therefore, subtract half a letter grade per day from every late paper. If you know there may be a conflict, you should arrange to hand your paper in ahead of schedule.
Plagiarism: Taking the words or ideas of another person without crediting that person is a serious matter and will be treated as such. Cases of intentional plagiarism will result in an NC for the course. Unintentional plagiarism, however, is also serious. You are responsible for knowing how to properly cite other writers and will be penalized for failing to do so.

Grades:

15% first paper (including presentation)
20% second paper
5% annotated bibliography
30% final (I’ll give you a study guide)
30% classroom participation (classroom participation will also be used to determine borderline grades)

Problems: If you have any problems regarding scheduling, grades, papers, etc., please call me, come to office hours, or make an appointment. I’d be happy to talk to you about any of your concerns.

Students with Disabilities: Students with documented disabilities may receive help. Contact the coordinator of the Office of Disability Services at 6583.

Syllabus

T J 9
R J 11

introduction
history; Iola Leroy

T J 16
R J 18

Iola Leroy
Iola Leroy

T J 23
R J 25

Iola Leroy
Our Nig

T J 30
R F 1

Our Nig
Our Nig

T F 6
R F 8

Plum Bun
Plum Bun

T F 13
R F 15

Plum Bun
first paper due; presentations

T F 20
R F 22

presentations
presentations; Quicksand

T F 27
R M 1

Quicksand:
Their Eyes Were Watching God

T M 6
R M 8

Their Eyes Were Watching God
Their Eyes Were Watching God

BREAK