ENG 5010-001: Studies in Twentieth-Century American Literature: Paradigm Shifts in Multiculturalism

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Studies in Twentieth-Century American Literature:  
Paradigm Shifts in Multiculturalism  
English 5010—Fall, 2010  
(Thursday, 7:00-9:30—CH 3159)

Instructor: Tim Engles  
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Course listserv: 5010f2010@lists.eiu.edu

E-dress: tdengles@eiu.edu  
Office hours: 1:45-2:45, Tues/Thurs & by appointment

Required Texts

- The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man, James Weldon Johnson (1912)
- Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987)
- The Bluest Eye, Toni Morrison (1970)
- M. Butterfly, David Henry Hwang (1988)
- Native Speaker, Chang-rae Lee (1995)
- Life in the Iron Mills, Rebecca Harding-Davis (1861)
- Erasure, Percival Everett (2001)
- Under the Feet of Jesus, Helena Maria Viramontes (1995)

Course Description

When the term "multiculturalism" gained so much scholarly and pedagogical currency in the 1990s, what did it really mean, and what does that term mean now? How could it be, as some critics have claimed, that multiculturalism is bad for women? How does "critical whiteness studies" relate to a field largely defined in opposition to white power? What holds together a concept (multiculturalism) that is fundamentally defined by fragmented multiplicity? If multiculturalism is a “field,” what is that field’s assumptions and “paradigms,” and how have these been added to or challenged? And what, amidst all of that, was and is "multicultural literature"? These matters will form the backdrop for our discussion of major works of what has come to be known as multicultural literature.

Our course will be conducted as an inquiring conversation on these matters, with your active participation central to our work. Because the success of our conversations will depend so heavily on everyone’s participation, it is crucial that you keep up with the reading, and that you do so with careful attention. By way of encouragement and reward, we will begin each session with a reading quiz, primarily intended to insure that you do maintain attentive reading habits. Also, the rule regarding attendance is: be here. If you have more than two absences this semester, your course grade will drop a full letter grade for each absence beyond two.
Course Requirements

1. **Written response and oral presentation:** Each student will choose one day on the syllabus. For this class session, you will write an at most two-page, single-spaced summary of a related secondary source (chosen by the instructor). You will duplicate and hand out copies to the rest of us on the day of your presentation, and it will function as your guidelines for summarizing the secondary source’s main or most useful points, and for leading class discussion for a significant portion of the session on how those points apply to the work of literature we’ve all read for that evening. The written response should end with at least two questions whose answers could provide, as you see it, keys to understanding the primary text under discussion. Don’t plan on talking by yourself for long—your main goal is to stimulate discussion. After the discussion of the text, you will then revise your response (into something no more than three pages, single spaced, including the handout itself) on the basis of your reaction to how class discussion changed (or verified) your response to the secondary source, and describing also how well you think your presentation and the class discussion went. This revision will be due one week after the in-class presentation. (15%)

2. **5-7 page critical essay:** This paper will focus on any one of our syllabus readings from the first half or so of the semester. Focus your interpretation of the work in any way you choose, taking your reader beyond what most readers are likely to realize when first reading the text. You are welcome to incorporate points and insights raised during class discussion, but if you do so, be sure to add further insight. Like the longer essay, this one will follow traditional conventions for academic essays (e.g., unity, coherence, proper formatting and MLA-style documentation, and so on). You are welcome to use any secondary sources, but they are not required for this paper. Because this essay is due near midterm, you can think of it as a kind of take-home midterm. (20%)

3. **12-15 page research essay:** This paper will focus on one or two of the other literary texts on our syllabus (in other words, you may not write about the same text in both essays). This essay will be an analysis of this work or works in relation to our broader course theme of “multicultural paradigm shifts,” and/or theoretical concepts we have discussed. A 250-400 word proposal will be required beforehand. The essay must reflect your close attention to and understanding of insights and interpretive concepts that will have arisen throughout the semester, and of course, it must be an entirely new essay (not something you wrote for a previous course). (25%)

A bit more about essays: All writing assignments are due at the beginning of the class period on the day they are due, whether the student is in class or not. **Late-paper penalty:** fifteen points each day late.

4. **Final exam (take home—details coming later in the semester)** (25%)

5. **Active, thoughtful class participation and good reading-quiz grades:** I will not deliver lectures in this class; because we are a relatively small group, we must all contribute to a positive, challenging, interesting learning environment. Doing so will call for your
careful concentration before class on each assigned reading, and your willingness to share your thoughts, questions, and feelings with others about what you read and hear.

Again, because your careful preparation for class is so crucial, I will begin each session with a reading quiz. I know that because you are graduate students I can trust most of you to keep up with our heavy reading load, but past experience has demonstrated that reading quizzes are the best way to ensure that everyone is prepared to participate in class discussion. Quiz questions can also function at times as a good lead-in to class discussion. Because the answers to unannounced quizzes tend to arise during class discussion, and because one purpose of the quizzes is to encourage punctual class attendance, these quizzes cannot be made up (even if you come to class late). These quizzes also function as a reward for those who attend class regularly and on time. On the other hand, I recognize that students must miss class at times and therefore might miss a quiz through no fault of their own, so at the end of the semester I will drop your lowest quiz grade when calculating your grades. Be aware that most of our works are intense, concentrated, demanding readings, and schedule your study time accordingly. (15%)

Other Matters

E-mail: Enrollment in this class requires an e-mail account, and I strongly recommend that you use your free EIU account or another account (be aware that Yahoo, Hotmail, and other free accounts are sometimes too limited for professional purposes). E-mail is the quickest, easiest way to reach me if I am not in my office; I welcome any and all questions and comments.

You also have an email assignment: By Tuesday of next week at 3 p.m., send an e-mail message to Dr. Engles (tdengles@eiu.edu), who will use your edress to subscribe you to the class listserv. In your message, (1) identify which course you’re in (English 5010); (2) describe yourself in whatever way you choose, including your career aspirations; and (3) write a statement to the effect that you have carefully read and agree with the above course policies and requirements (or perhaps that you disagree with some of them—which is okay, if you explain why).

Academic honesty: I expect you to act honestly and do your own work in this class, and so does Eastern Illinois University. It is your responsibility (once again) to familiarize yourself with the English Department’s policy on plagiarism: “Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—‘The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one’s original work’ (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.”
ENGLISH 5010: DAILY SCHEDULE
(this schedule may be subject to change)

Note: This schedule may change; any changes will be announced in advance. Reading assignments are to be completed by the dates on which they appear on the syllabus. BE SURE to bring the appropriate book and any handouts to class that are listed for that day.

R AUG 26 Introduction to the course

T AUG 31 3 p.m. Deadline for sending Dr. Engles (tdengles@eiu.edu) the e-mail that’s described above

R SEP 2 The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man

R SEP 9 Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza

R SEP 16 The Bluest Eye

R SEP 23 The Bluest Eye, excerpt from Playing in the Dark (Toni Morrison; 1992)

R SEP 30 M. Butterfly

R OCT 7 Native Speaker

W OCT 13 Semester Mid-term

R OCT 14 Native Speaker; paper one due at the beginning of class

R OCT 21 The Kite Runner

R OCT 28 The Kite Runner

R NOV 4 Life in the Iron Mills; final-paper proposal due at the beginning of class

R NOV 11 Erasure

R NOV 18 Erasure; Final Essay due at the beginning of class

NOVEMBER 22 - 26: THANKSGIVING BREAK

R DEC 2 Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic

R DEC 9 Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic

Our Final Exam Period: Thursday, December 16, 7:30-9:30 p.m.