Course title and number: ENGL/AFST 204.500 Introduction to African American Literature  
Term: Fall 2011  
Meeting times and location: M,W,F 9:10-10:00 am / 3XX LAAH  
Instructor: Dr. Larry Oliver  
Telephone: 979-574-5680  
E-mail address: l-oliver@tamu.edu  
Office hours: M 10-11, W 11-12, and by appt.  
Office location: 3XX LAAH  

Required texts:  
- Norton Anthology of African American Literature – 2nd edition  
- Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Nellie McKay  
- Toni Morrison, A Mercy (Random House, paperback)

ENGL 204: Introduction to the writings of African Americans from the 18th century to the present, emphasizing the major themes and traditions.

Course description:  
This course introduces students to the large and diverse array of works that form the African American literary tradition. Organized chronologically (as is the textbook) the course begins with the literature of slavery and ends with a sampling of contemporary African American writers. Particular attention will be given to the historical context of the works and how the writers both shaped and the ways in which the works “speak to” other works by other African American and “white” writers.

Learning Outcomes and Objectives:  
By the end of this course, students are expected to be able to:

1) Write an essay demonstrating a sound understanding of the major periods and themes of the African American literary tradition (e.g., quest for freedom, double consciousness, passing, black aesthetic).

2) Develop an appreciation of the rich diversity of themes, styles, and genres that form the African American literary tradition.

3) Explain and illustrate how African American texts are an integral part of and yet often challenge core themes, myths, and tropes of “mainstream” American literature.

Core Curriculum Objectives:  

Critical Thinking Skills (CTS): The course will enhance critical thinking skills through consistent reading and class discussion of key ideas in African American literature from the 18th century to the present.

Communication Skills (CS): The course enhances communication skills through small and large group discussion of ideas, issues, questions, and themes central to course reading.

Personal Responsibility (PR): The course will enhance personal responsibility through engagement with moral and thorny ethical issues that arise in class readings.
Social Responsibility (SR): The course enhances social responsibility by providing students with a cross cultural understanding of how history, region, and broader social forces have shaped the distinctive literary traditions from around the world.

Evaluation of Core Objectives

CTS: The evaluation of critical thinking skills will be based on exams and class participation and may include written work. Exams will be designed to allow students to demonstrate their ability to evaluate and synthesize key ideas from the assigned reading. Classroom discussion will focus on helping students better understand the nuances and complexities of African American literature from the 18th century to the present.

CS: The course will help students learn how to develop a greater understanding of African American literature from the 18th century to the present that may involve guided writing assignments in which they will receive feedback, exams in which students will be expected to effectively convey key ideas from the course succinctly and clearly, and classroom discussion in which students will learn how to express questions and thoughts about the subtleties of each text under examination. Material from this course will include written texts and such visual representations as photographs, illustrations, films, or theatrical performances.

PR: The course material throughout the semester will offer students an opportunity to reflect upon personal responsibility through such topics as slavery and the quest for freedom, equality, and human dignity, and the struggle for cultural survival and self-expression in the face of oppression. Students will explore these topics through group discussion, writing assignments, and exams.

SR: The evaluation of social responsibility will be based upon an end-of-the-semester short writing assignment in which students will be asked to reflect upon how their knowledge of literatures from previous historical periods and world cultures outside of their own has changed in light of the new information that they now possess. Students will be expected to demonstrate how key insights from the course have helped broaden their understanding of how history, culture, and philosophical outlooks have shaped the literary traditions of African American writers from the 18th century to the present.

Course requirements:

Unannounced quizzes on readings (5 x 4 points) 20 points
Essay #1 (1,000-1,200 words) 25 points
Essay #2 25 points
Out of class final exam (1,500-2,000 words) 30 points

All papers must be typed and delivered electronically by the deadline. You will write your three major essays out of class. I will provide questions for you to address. For the first and second essays, you may write on a topic of your own choosing, but you must clear the topic with me in advance. My evaluation of your papers is based on both content and expression (clarity, organization, grammar and usage). On the final out of class essay exam students will be asked to answer a question in which they will have to reflect upon how their knowledge of literatures from previous historical periods and cultures that may be different from their own has changed in light of the new information that they now possess.
Grading scale: A: 90-100, B: 80-89, C: 70-79, D: 60-69, F: <60

For Attendance policy see University Student Rules: http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07

Attendance: Discussing the reading assignments in class is a critical part of this course, so it is critical that you attend classes unless unable to do so. I will divide students into several discussion groups in order to stimulate class discussion and promotes critical thinking.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy Statement
The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Disability Services, in Cain Hall, Room B118, or call 845-1637. For additional information visit http://disability.tamu.edu.

Academic Integrity: "An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal, or tolerate those who do." You are expected to be aware of the Aggie Honor Code and the Honor Council Rules and Procedures, stated at http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu

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CLASS- BY- CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

Note: PLEASE BRING YOUR TEXT TO EACH CLASS

THE LITERATURE OF SLAVERY AND FREEDOM

Week 1
Introduction to course.
Lecture on slavery and slave narratives /Spirituals and Songs (8 ff): "Go Down, Moses,"
"Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," "Steal Away, Jesus."
Whestley poems: "To the University of Cambridge" and "On Being Brought..." (219) and letters (225-266).

Week 2
Douglass: Narrative, chaps. 1-7 (395-414).
Douglass, Narrative, chap. 10 (421-40).
Narrative, chap. 11 and Appendix (440-52).

Week 3
Douglass, "What to the Slave..." (462-70) and Whitfield, "America" (484-87).
Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (280-93).
Finish Incidents (293-315).

LITERATURE OF THE RECONSTRUCTION TO THE NEW NEGRO RENAISSANCE

Week 4
Lecture and film clips: Birth of a Nation.
Souls, chap. 3 (699-708).

Week 5  Souls, chap. 13 (748-58) and “Afterthought” (765-66).
Dunbar poems (909ff.): “Worn Out,” “We Wear the Mask,” “Sympathy,” “Douglass.”
“Philosophy” and letter “Fourth of July” (927-28).

Week 6  Writing workshop and take home essay instructions distributed. On the final take home exam students will be asked to answer a question in which they will have to reflect upon how their knowledge of literatures from previous historical periods and cultures that may be different from their own has changed in light of the new information that they now possess.
Autobiography (822-83) ESSAY #1 DUE.

HARLEM RENAISSANCE

Week 7  Lecture and film / Locke, “The New Negro” (984-88).
Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (1311-14) and poems (1291 ff):
“Mulatto,” “Christ Is a Nigger.”

Week 8  Hughes poems: “Harlem,” and “Theme for English B” / McKay poems (1006 ff): “If We Must Die,” “America,” “The White House” / Toomer, from Cane: “Karintha.”
Larsen, Quicksand (1086-1099).

Week 9  Quicksand (1099-1120).
Quicksand (1120-60).
Finish: Quicksand (1160-67).

REALISM, NATURALISM, MODERNISM

Week 10  Hurston, “How it Feels to Be Colored Me” (1030-33), Wright, From Black Boy (1471-87)
Petry, “Like a Winding Sheet” (1497-1504) Brooks poems (1625ff): “kitchenette building,” “the mother,” “The Children of the Poor” Take-home exam instructions distributed.

Week 11  Baldwin, “Sonny’s Blues” (1728-49).
Hansberry, Raisin in the Sun, Act I (1771-96).
Raisin, Act II (1797-1820), Raisin, Act III (1820-30).
Essay #2 due.

BLACK ARTS ERA AND AFTER

Week 12  Baraka poems: “A Poem for Black Hearts” (1940-41) and “Black Art” (1943-44) /
Autobiography of Malcolm X (1864-76).
Sanchez, “homecoming” and “for our lady” (1964-65) / Lorded, “A Litany for Survival”
(1922-24).
Marshall, “Reena” (2169-82) and Morrison, A Mercy (1-51).

*A Mercy* (119-37).

*A Mercy* (137-67).

Week 14  Finish *A Mercy*. Final out of class essay exam distributed. On the final essay exam students will be asked to answer a question in which they will have to reflect upon how their knowledge of literatures from previous historical periods and cultures that may be different from their own has changed in light of the new information that they now possess.

Review.

Take home exam due.