The Course:
This is a survey of African American literature and culture with a special emphasis on the 20th-century. We shall go over the oral foundation of African American literature in folk tales, myths, and other forms of "orature," such as work songs, spirituals, speeches, and narratives; quickly move through the 18th and 19th centuries; then concentrate on a selection of 20th-century writers of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and drama.

Objective:
Acquire knowledge of the literary achievements of African American writers and expand understanding of the historical and socio-political conditions out of which African Americans have written -- and continue to write.

Outcomes:

a) Read, discuss, and write about African American writers with literary and historical understanding.

b) Gain an appreciation of the literary and intellectual achievements of African American writers.

c) Acquire knowledge of African American contribution to socio-political thought and activism in the United States.

Teaching/Learning method:
Participatory. You'll be expected to contribute thoughtfully to discussions and write engagingly on issues raised by the works we read.

Grade distribution:

a) Essay/Journal on Select Readings (6 or so pages; due May 3)* ………… 30%
b) Quizzes (announced and unannounced)…………………………………… 20%
c) Take-home Exam (due the Thursday of the Finals Week)**……………… 30%
d) Class presentation and participation .............................................. 20%
* See more details below.
** Questions and instructions will be made available to you.

Attendance Policy:
Attendance and consistent effort are crucial to success in this class. Hence regular attendance is required. The 4th absence lowers your grade by a full letter (example: B = C)
The 5th or more equals F for the class.

Plagiarism:
Using someone else’s paper as your own, or having someone else write for you, or lifting parts of other people’s work without properly acknowledging them, is a serious intellectual offense and can result in your failing this class, or worse, including disciplinary action by the Student Affairs office.

Disability Policy
If you need disability-related educational accommodation, please let me know after you’ve contacted the ADA Compliance Officer at 963-2171.

Schedule (numbers in parenthesis refer to pages in the Norton):
March 29

Introduction.

Read through the “Timeline: African American Literature in Context” (2695-2705)

30

The Oral tradition in African-American literature. “The Vernacular Tradition” (3-8); Folktales (130-149).

April

04

Folktales .... Contd.

05

Spirituals (8-19); Gospel (19-25); The Blues (48-64).

06

Secular Rhymes & Songs (25-31); Ballads (31-41), and Work Songs (41-43).

07

Songs of Social Change (44-48); “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing” (James Weldon Johnson, Black National Anthem) (794)

11

Sermons and Prayers (94-106).

12

Jazz (64-69); Rhythm and Blues (69-78); Hip Hop (78-82);

The Literature of Slavery and Freedom, 1865-1919 (541-554); Charlotte Forten Grimke (554-555) Journals (556-569); Booker T. Washington (570-572).

18

Realism, Naturalism, Modernism, 1940-1960 (1355-1368); Melvin Tolson (1368-69), “An Ex-Judge at the Bar” (1270); The Birth of John Henry & Satchmo (1380-1381).

19

Richard Wright (1399-1402). “Long Black Song” (1419-1436); Ann Petry, “Like
“a Winding Sheet” (1496-1504).
24 Baldwin, “Sonny’s Blues” (1728-1749)
25 The Black Arts Era, 1960-1975 -- (1831-1850); Mari Evans (1850-1852); Amiri Baraka (1937-1946); Audre Lorde, “Poetry is Not a Luxury” (1919-1920; 1924-1925).
26 Larry Neal, The Black Arts Movement (2038-2050); Addison Gayle, The Black Aesthetic (1911-1918); Maulana Karenga, Black Art (2086-2090).
30 Memorial Day Holiday
31 Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (1895-1908)

June 01 Literature since 1975 -- (2127-2139); Toni Morrison (2210-2214), “Rootedness” & “The Site of Memory” (2286-2299)
02 Maya Angelou (2155-2167); Class Evaluation.
09 Final Paper is due

Note: African American Drama (Film versions of two plays recommended for private viewing):


The Essay/Journal on Selected Readings will address the topic, “What I learned about early African American Literature, from orature to the slave narratives.” It will be a discursive essay on a select number of readings. Select a few texts from the readings, put them in proper historical context, summarize the key ideas, discuss the significant features in them, and say what they mean to you as a student with your intellectual and personal background. Write the essay as though it were for publication in a college student journal. Feel free to use your personal voice, but aim for a quality of content, a tone, and a language that are at least semi professional. Be creative in your organization of the material.

Generic questions for reading, discussing, and writing about African American writers and texts:

1. How does the writer/work reflect or respond to the intellectual, cultural, socio-political conditions of the period?
2. How are the conditions different from the mainstream ones or those you are know or are used to?
3. Why and how does the writer/work attempt to influence both sets of conditions (African American and mainstream), and with what results?
4. What definition/role of literature, or what aesthetic/creative objective, drives the writer/work?
5. How does the writer’s work resemble, revise, or anticipate the works of other writers -- past or future?

Class presentation (10 minutes per student): You’ll be graded on a) how well you introduce the subject/reading; b) coverage and quality of the material; c) effectiveness of your communication.

Note: There may be slight changes in the schedule/assignments as we work into the quarter.

The very best to each and every one of you! PP