



**ENG 444.001—African American Literature
“The Racial Mountain: African American Literature from
Venture Smith to Rick Ro\$\$”**

**Fall 2013
TR—9:30 am-10:45 am
Room: HL 306**

Instructor: (Christopher Gonzalez, PhD – Assistant Professor)
Office Location: Hall of Languages (HL) 225
Office Hours: MF 11:00 am-1:00 pm and by appointment
Office Phone: 903.886.5277
Office Fax: 903.886.5980
University Email Address: Chris.Gonzalez@tamuc.edu

NOTE: I reserve the right to revise the contents of this syllabus as I deem necessary.

COURSE INFORMATION

Materials – Textbooks, Readings, Supplementary Readings:

Textbooks Required:

The Norton Anthology of African American Literature, 2nd edition, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, Eds. ISBN 0-393-9778-1

The Anthology of Rap, Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois, Eds. ISBN: 978-0-300-14191-7

(ENG 444 catalogue description): A study of the literature surrounding the African American experience as expressed through poetry, drama, the short story, and the novel, and occasionally how it is represented in music and film. Readings will include diverse nineteenth- and twentieth century texts that will explore the ways in which writers have given narrative and poetic form to issues such as slavery, religion, urban migration, and social marginalization, and racial identity.

Course Description

ENG 444 is designed to take students through an overview of African American literary production from the mid-eighteenth century to the present. We will examine a range of literary texts, diverse in both content and form, in order that we might better understand African American literature as a vehicle for cultural expression. Thus, while we will study the various reading selections with an aim to recognize the

development of African American literature, we will always keep an eye on questioning our conception of what African American literature has been, is now, and will be in the future.

The selected readings are representatives of the idea of an African American canon of literature, though they do not represent African American literature in any definitive way. That is to say, in order to survey centuries of literary production of such a rich culture, choices were made that undoubtedly left out important texts from our reading selections. **Our reading selections are by no means definitive in terms of conceiving of African American literature.** At best, our readings form a kind of incomplete jigsaw puzzle. Necessarily, there will be gaps. But we will use the selections as well as the gaps in order to better understand African American literature. In order to do this sort of evaluation effectively, we must attend to the formal elements, thematic contents, historical meaningfulness, philosophical contributions, and cultural identities. Students should plan to engage regularly and productively in discussions; demonstrate knowledge and mastery of materials via class participation, reading responses, a poetry essay, a critical reading essay, and two exams (midterm and final).

Course Objectives:

- Students will become familiar with the development and major trends of African American literature from the mid-eighteenth century to the present.
- Students will demonstrate the skill of critical analysis of poetry.
- Students will demonstrate the skill of writing a book review for a general audience.

Student Learning Outcomes:

- Students will demonstrate their mastery of the development and major trends of African American literature from the mid-eighteenth century to the present as measured by two exams.
- Students will demonstrate the skill of poetry analysis as measured by the composition of an essay.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Instructional / Methods / Activities Assessments

This course consists of a series of activities and assessments to assist you in achieving the outcomes and objectives of this course and instructional units/modules. By the end of this course the class will read and discuss two novels, one novella, one play, and multiple short stories and poems. It is your responsibility to read closely and carefully the selections, and to prepare to engage with the material in the form of class discussion for every class meeting.

During the semester you will complete several major assignments designed to complement each other intellectually and conceptually. These assignments are:

Participation **10%**

You are expected to participate in class on a regular basis. This portion of your grade is holistic, meaning that you must appear to be an engaged member of class throughout the semester. You can demonstrate engagement to the professor by asking relevant questions and productively commenting on any given day's topics/readings. Absences, distracting behavior, and other forms of disengagement will lead to a reduction in this aspect of your course grade.

Reading Responses **10%**

At the end of every week, you will respond to a minimum of two of the assigned readings for that week (350 words). Responses should be quasi-formal and should strive to be both reflective and analytical. You are required to compose and submit your responses in the eCollege site for the course under the “Journal” tab. Your response must be submitted for grading before the beginning of the new week (8:00 am on Monday) in order to receive credit. Think of the Reading Responses as being a risk-free space to “think on the page” regarding what you consider to be the most engaging readings or topics of the week.

Poetry Essay

20%

You will select one poem and the lyrics of one rap song to compose the “Poetry Essay” (3-4 pages). Ideally you will select a poem and song that share something in common such as topic, theme, or formal characteristics. The key here is to explore the poetic form of both texts as a means of elucidating the meaning of the poem and song so that your essay explores something that is not obvious with a cursory reading of the material. Your essay must express more than “they are similar yet different” argument. Do not consult external material.

Critical Essay

20%

You will draft and compose a short essay (3-4 pages) in which you will produce a critical response to *one* short reading selection (excluding poetry and rap). For example, you may respond to one short story, one chapter from a novel, one act from a play, and so forth. The goal here is **analysis** rather than summary. Moreover, you will not use any outside sources for the assignment. The objective is to hone your skills of literary analysis and interpretation of a literary narrative.

Midterm Exam

20%

The midterm exam is a take-home exam and will consist of several short answer questions related to course readings as well as class lectures.

Final Exam

20%

The final exam will **not** be comprehensive and will consist of the material covered since the midterm exam. It will follow the same format as the Midterm Exam.

Grading

Students’ assignment and course grades will be determined by the following:

Participation	10%
Reading Responses	10%
Poetry Essay	20%
Critical Essay	20%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	<u>20%</u>
Total:	100%

Scale used to compute final letter grades:

Percentage

A: 100-90

B: 89-80

C: 79-70

D: 69-60
F: 59-0

Technology

This course meets face to face (f2f). However, certain aspects of the course (e.g., grades, dropbox, doc sharing) are accessed via eCollege, the Learning Management System used by TAMUC. The majority of your assignments will be submitted through eCollege, so it is essential to your success that you be able to access eCollege in a relatively convenient manner. Because the university provides students access to computers and other technologies, please make use of these items if you do not have a computer of your own. If you have technical questions, please contact Technology Services at 902-468-6000 or at helpdesk@tamuc.edu. Do not allow a technological problem or question keep you from a successful outcome in this course. Technology is designed to *facilitate* your learning experience in this class, not to hinder it.

*There **may** be the opportunity for extra credit. As a rule, I do not accept late work.*

COURSE AND UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES/POLICIES

Course Specific Procedures:

Academic Honesty Policy

Texas A&M University-Commerce and the Department of Literature and Languages do not tolerate **plagiarism** and other forms of **academic dishonesty**. Conduct that violates generally-accepted standards of academic honesty is defined as academic dishonesty. “Academic dishonesty” includes, but is not limited to, plagiarism (the appropriation or stealing of the ideas or words of another person and passing them off as one’s own), cheating on exams or other course assignments, collusion (the unauthorized collaboration with others in preparing course assignments), and abuse (destruction, defacing, or removal) of resource material. Instructors uphold and support the highest academic standards, and students are expected to do likewise. Penalties for students guilty of academic dishonesty include disciplinary probation, suspension and expulsion (Texas A&M University-Commerce Code of Student Conduct 5.b[1, 2, 3]). Cheating, including plagiarizing papers in whole or part, **will result in a grade of zero (0) on the assignment AND no credit for course participation** for the first offense and failure of the course for any subsequent offenses.

Attendance Policy

Attendance in this class equates to participation in the discussions and is important to the success of this class and to your development as a writer. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that you notify me of potential conflicts with course expectations. The expectation is that you will do more than simply show up for class. Your active participation, in the form of discussion questions and comments, is vital for success in this course. Deadline extensions and other allowances can often be accommodated before they are required, but this requires advance notice. Related to this, SEE ASSIGNMENT POLICY

Assignment Policy

Student work must be completed and submitted on time. All assignments should be turned in during the class period when they are due. Students who know they will miss class when an assignment is due must contact the instructor as soon as possible in advance of class to arrange for submission of the assignment.

All papers should conform to the MLA style guidelines.

Late Work

I will not accept any assignment after its due date. Assignments submitted after the due date may receive a score of zero (0).

Drop a Course

A student may drop a course by logging into his/her myLEO account and clicking on the hyperlink labeled “Drop a class” from among the choices found under the myLeo section of the Web page.

Incompletes

Incompletes (grade of “X”) are granted only under rare and extraordinary circumstances.

Administrative Withdrawal

I reserve the right to drop a student from the course administratively for excessive absences or violations of student conduct codes.

University Specific Procedures:*ADA Statement***Students with Disabilities:**

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 have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

Office of Student Disability Resources and Services**Texas A&M University-Commerce****Gee Library****Room 132****Phone (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835****Fax (903) 468-8148****StudentDisabilityServices@tamuc.edu***Student Conduct*

All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment. It is next to impossible to explore ideas in a classroom setting if students and instructors do not feel safe or otherwise supported. I will not tolerate discrimination in all its forms. Likewise, rudeness has no place in any classroom, and I will ensure that my classroom remains a rudeness-free environment. (See *Code of Student Conduct from Student Guide Handbook*).

Responsibility

You are responsible for understanding all of the material contained in this syllabus, as well as any announced changes to this syllabus. You are also responsible for understanding instructions and directives related to assignments, exams, and grades. This means visiting your professor during office hours if instructions and/or directives remain unclear. Unless you state otherwise, I will assume that you have understood what is expected of you in this class.

COURSE OUTLINE / CALENDAR

The following course schedule is subject to revisions and other modifications as the instructor deems necessary for the course. Any changes to the course schedule will be announced on the course website in advance of the week in which the change will occur.

Fall 2013

N.B. Whenever a new author is introduced in class, it is the students' obligation to read the biographical headnote for that author in the *Norton Anthology (NA)* as well as the *Anthology of Rap (AR)*.

BRING YOUR ANTHOLOGY OF RAP EVERY CLASS MEETING. WE WILL BEGIN EACH CLASS WITH AN ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF ONE OR MORE SONGS.

Date	Agenda
Week 1	8/27 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions and syllabus overview • “Introduction: Talking Books” (<i>NA</i>: xxxvii-xxlvii) • “Introduction” (<i>AR</i>: xxviii-xxlvii)
	PART I: THE LITERATURE OF SLAVERY AND FREEDOM
	8/29 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Venture Smith, “A Narrative of the Life and Adventure of Venture, A Native of Africa: But Resident above Sixty Years in the United States of America” (pp. 168-85) • Olaudah Equiano, “The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself” (pp. 187-213)
Week 2	9/3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phillis Wheatley, All selections (pp. 213-26) • Sojourner Truth, All selections (pp. 245-49) • Maria W. Stewart, All selections (pp. 249-55)
	9/5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Martin R. Delaney, All selections (pp. 255-78) • Harriet Jacobs, All selections (pp. 279-315) • William Wells Brown, All selections (pp. 315-45)
Week 3	9/10 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victor Séjour, “The Mulatto” (pp. 352-65) • Frederick Douglass, “My Bondage and My Freedom” (pp. 452-61); “<i>From What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?: An Address Delivered in Rochester, New York, on 5 July 1852</i>” (pp. 462-73)
	9/12 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frances E. W. Harper, All selections (pp. 491-521) • Harriet E. Wilson, All selections (p. 521-40)
Week 4	PART II: RECONSTRUCTION TO RENAISSANCE
	9/17 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Booker T. Washington, “Up From Slavery” (pp. 570-602) • W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Souls of Black Folk”—I, III, IV, V, VI, X, and XI (pp. 692-

- 9/19
- Charles W. Chesnutt, All selections (pp. 602-35)
 - Pauline Hopkins, All selections (pp. 650-75)
 - **Poetry Essay Due**
- Week 5 9/24
- James Weldon Johnson, “The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man” (pp. 803-83)
- 9/26
- Paul Laurence Dunbar, All selections (pp. 905-28)
- Week 6
- PART III: HARLEM RENAISSANCE
- 10/1
- Arthur Schomburg, “The Negro Digs Up His Past” (pp. 962-67)
 - Anne Spencer, All selections (pp. 970-74)
 - Jessie Redmon Fauset, All selections (pp. 975-83)
- 10/3
- Alain Locke, “The New Negro” (pp. 983-93)
 - Marcus Garvey, “Africa for the Africans”; “The Future as I See It” (pp. 995-1003)
- Week 7 10/8
- Claude McKay, All selections (pp. 1003-19)
 - Zora Neale Hurston, “Mules and Men” “Their Eyes Were Watching God”; Dust Tracks on the Road” (pp. 1053-85)
- MIDTERM EXAM**
- 10/10
- Nella Larsen, “Quicksand” (pp. 1085-1167)
- Week 8 10/15
- Jean Toomer, All selections (pp. 1168-1219)
- 10/17
- Langston Hughes, All selections (pp. 1288-1339)
- Week 9
- PART IV: REALISM, NATURALISM, MODERNISM
- 10/22
- Richard Wright, “Blueprint for Negro Writing”; The Ethics of Living Jim Crow, an Autobiographical Sketch”; “Long Black Song”; “Black Boy” (pp. 1399-1436; 1471-1487)
- 10/24
- Robert Hayden, “Homage to the Empress of the Blues”; “Middle Passage”; “Those Winter Sundays” (pp. 1519-1525)
 - Ralph Ellison, “Richard Wright’s Blues”; “Invisible Man” (pp. 1535-1570)
- Week 10 10/29
- James Baldwin, “Notes of a Native Son”; “Sonny’s Blues” (pp. 1713-49)
- 10/31
- Lorraine Hansberry, “A Raisin in the Sun” (pp. 1768-1830)
 - **Critical Essay Due**
- Week 11
- PART V: THE BLACK ARTS ERA
- 11/5
- Malcolm X, “The Autobiography of Malcolm X” (pp. 1859-76)
 - Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (pp. 1895-1908)
 - Etheridge Knight, All selections (pp. 1908-11)
- 11/7
-

-
- Week 12 11/12
- Gayle, “The Black Aesthetic” (pp. 1911-18)
 - Audre Lorde, All selections (pp. 1919-36)
- 11/14
- Amiri Baraka, All selections (pp. 1937-63)
- Week 13 11/19
- Eldridge Cleaver, “Soul on Ice” (pp. 2006-14)
 - June Jordan, All selections (pp. 2016-30)
 - Ishmael Reed, All selections (pp. 2051-70)
 - Toni Cade Bambara, All selections (pp. 2075-85)
 - Nikki Giovanni, All selections (pp. 2096-2101)

PART VI: LITERATURE SINCE 1975

- 11/21
- Maya Angelou, All selections (pp. 2155-67)
 - Toni Morrison, “Song of Solomon” (pp. 2210-85)
- Week 14 11/26
- Ernest J. Gaines, “The Sky is Gray” (pp. 2322-44)
 - John Edgar Wideman, “Brothers and Keepers” (pp. 2376-86)
 - Samuel R. Delany, “*From Atlantis: Model 1924*” (pp. 2392-2411)
- 11/28
- **Thanksgiving Holiday (No Class)**
- Week 15 12/3
- Alice Walker, “The Color Purple” (pp. 2454-57)
 - Octavia Butler, “Bloodchild” (pp. 2515-29)
 - Gloria Naylor, “The Women of Brewster Place” (pp. 2584-2611)
- 12/5
- Walter Mosley, “Equal Opportunity” (pp. 2624-35)
 - Edwidge Danticat, “Breath, Eyes, Memory” (pp. 2662-77)
 - Colson Whitehead, “John Henry Days” (pp. 2677-94)
-

Final Exam: Thursday, December 12, 8:00 am-10:00am