

# BLACK LITERATURE, 1930 TO THE PRESENT

## African-American, Ethnic American, or Global Anglophone



Instructor: Ryan Kernan ([ryanjameskernan@gmail.com](mailto:ryanjameskernan@gmail.com))  
 Course Assistant: Abbie Reardon ([abbie.reardon@gmail.com](mailto:abbie.reardon@gmail.com))  
 Class Meetings: Mondays & Wednesdays, 1:10 – 2:30 p.m. in Murray Hall 204  
 Office Hours:  
     Kernan: Monday, 2:30 – 4:30 p.m. in Murray Hall 024   
             Wednesday, 12:00 – 1:00 p.m. in Murray Hall 024  
     Reardon: Monday, 4:30 – 5:30 p.m. in Honors College South Lounge  
             Wednesday, 4:30 – 5:30 p.m. in Honors College South Lounge

NOTE: Students who cannot make one of these times may make appointments, provided they can prove that their schedule prohibits them from attending regularly scheduled office hours.

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will offer a rigorous exploration of the works of five seminal African American novelist, playwrights, poets and essayists: Zora Neale Hurston, Gwendolyn Brooks, James Baldwin, Lorraine Hansberry, and Alice Walker. Although the works on our syllabus differ in how they deploy form, content, and form as content, they all share a commitment to social justice that gives voice to a heterogeneous discourse about the relationships between subaltern sexualities and identities, on the one hand, and discourses of patriarchy, state domination and white supremacy on the other. Our lectures and supplementary readings will prompt us to pay special attention to how national and imperial power structures (as well as black counter-cultures) articulate themselves through discourses about white and black sexuality, as well as through discourses about interracial sex and gender relations more generally. Our job will thus be to engage the texts on our syllabus with questions like these in mind: 

- How might “primitivist” portrayals of black sexuality work as counter-discourses to global race capitalism?
- How have black authors used the idea of homosexuality as a counter-discourse to white hegemony?
- How does the specter of black male rape, for instance, legitimate certain discourses of white “womanhood” and “manhood”?
- How have black authors in the 20th century invoked, manipulated, and reshaped discourses about black women’s sexuality and matriarchy (and politics) to offer pointed commentary on the working of white power, the nation state, Empire, and the formation of black subjectivities?

## DEPARTMENTAL LEARNING GOALS

1. Gain knowledge of literatures in English, as well as their historical, cultural, and formal dimensions and diversity.
2. Develop strategies of interpretation, including an ability to use critical and theoretical terms, concepts, and methods in relation to a variety of textual forms and other media.
3. Develop the ability to engage with the work of other critics and writers, using and citing such sources effectively.
4. Develop the ability to write persuasively and precisely in scholarly and, optionally, creative forms.

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students and instructors have a duty to each other and to our community to abide by norms of academic honesty and responsibility. To present something as your own original writing when it is not is plagiarism. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating are serious violations of trust. Academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, will have severe consequences, in accordance with the University Policy on Academic Integrity and the Code of Student Conduct. For details about the University's academic integrity policies, please see <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>.

## REQUIREMENTS

### PARTICIPATION (35%)

Includes attendance, regular quizzes, and discussion. Students are expected to attend each class session ready to participate. This means not only having done the assigned reading, but also being prepared and willing to contribute. Discussion requires every student to take the intellectual risk of offering observations, ideas, and arguments in class in response to one another and to the instructor. Lateness, lack of preparation, or disruptive behavior – including non-class use of computers or phones – will affect your participation grade. Failing to bring the assigned texts to class will impact your participation grade for that day. Attending office hours also counts toward participation.

Remember, you are not supposed to know all the answers in advance. You are, however, required to make your best effort to figure things out as we go along, and to work with your classmates to help them do so as well.

### EXERCISES (15%)

Short writing assignments are due three times throughout the semester. The typical assignment is a one-page paper answering a specific question with textual evidence, but there will be some variation.

### PAPER 1 (20%)

Three to four pages on a single text. Topics distributed in advance.

### PAPER 2 (30%)

Seven to eight pages, developing your first paper into a comparative analysis.

## GENERAL POLICIES

### ATTENDANCE

Attendance at all classes – with the texts we are discussing in-hand – is expected. You may miss two classes without penalty. If you miss three classes, your overall grade for the semester will drop by half a letter (i.e. if you are absent three times, the best grade you could receive is a B+). If you miss six classes, you automatically fail the class regardless of work completed. Lateness of twenty minutes or more will count as half an absence. Lateness of forty minutes or more will count as a full absence. If you expect to miss one or two classes, please use the RU absence reporting website, which automatically sends an email to the instructors. The site can be found here: <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/>.

### DISCUSSION & OFFICE HOURS

Class discussion offers you a place for exploration, a space where – if you come prepared – all can benefit from your insights and from those of others. Exploring texts can be difficult, and fascinating discussions depend on a variety of opinions. Discussion is also meant to clear up any confusion you might have about lectures, our texts or the essays we'll be writing. You should NEVER be afraid to ask a question. There are stupid professors, but there are no stupid questions.

Most of the time, we'll be able to stay after lecture to answer brief questions, and you should also (in all of your classes for the rest of your academic life) take advantage of our office hours! Office hours allow you to get one-on-one help with any difficulties you may encounter, and your visitation keeps professors from getting too lonely and spiteful in their offices.

### ETIQUETTE

Your classmates are your colleagues, and therefore we expect you to behave toward each other in a professional, courteous, and helpful manner. Mutual respect will better enable us to discuss and develop diverse opinions and create a dynamic intellectual community.

### LATE WORK

Essays submitted after the due date will lose half a letter grade for every day they are late. We will consider extensions on a case-by-case basis, provided you have a compelling reason for requiring the extension and you speak to one of us at least 72 hours before the essay is due.

### FORMATTING

Work should be formatted according to MLA standards. If these are unfamiliar, refer to MLA guidelines as explained via the [Purdue OWL](#) style guide. Ensure that your margins are set to 1" on all sides; that you do not exceed 12-point font; that you use between one-and-a-half and double spacing; that you provide page numbers; and that you use a clear, legible typeface (such as Garamond, Palatino, or Times New Roman). All written work will be submitted via the "Assignments" tab on Sakai, in Word document format (.doc or .docx) when possible. Otherwise, submit via PDF. Other formats (.pages, Google doc links, etc.) are not acceptable.

## STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

All reasonable accommodation will be given to students with disabilities. Students who may require accommodation should speak with one of us at the start of the semester. You may also contact the [Office of Disability Services](#) (848.445.6800).

## GRADING STANDARDS

A range:	Outstanding. The student's work demonstrates thorough mastery of course materials and skills.
B range:	Good. The student's work demonstrates serious engagement with all aspects of the course but incomplete mastery of course materials and skills.
C range:	Satisfactory. The student's work satisfies requirements but shows significant problems or major gaps in mastery of course material.
D:	Poor or minimal pass. The student completes the basic course requirements, but the student's work is frequently unsatisfactory in several major areas.
F:	Failure. Student has not completed all course requirements or turns in consistently unsatisfactory work.

The final grade will be based on a numerical score but is subject to instructor discretion. Unsatisfactory work in all areas of the course will result in an F even if the numerical score corresponds to a passing grade. It is not possible to pass the course without completing all response papers and essays.

## REQUIRED READINGS

Print readings for this course are available at the Rutgers bookstore at Barnes & Noble; you are free to acquire them elsewhere. We have given ISBN numbers of the editions we have ordered so that you can search for the books on Amazon, AbeBooks, etc. Because of the nature of this course, which is devoted to the close reading and discussion of our texts, it is important for us all to be working from the same editions. For this reason, electronic copies are not permitted. The remaining readings for the course will be available via Sakai.

Books to purchase (in the order in which we will read them):

Hansberry, Lorraine. <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> . 1959. (Modern Library, 1995)	ISBN: <a href="https://www.isbn-international.org/details/9780679601722">9780679601722</a>
Walker, Alice. <i>Meridian</i> . 1976. (Harcourt, 2003)	ISBN: <a href="https://www.isbn-international.org/details/9780156028349">9780156028349</a>
Hurston, Zora Neale. <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> . 1937. (Harper, 2006)	ISBN: <a href="https://www.isbn-international.org/details/9780061120060">9780061120060</a>
Baldwin, James. <i>Giovanni's Room</i> . 1956. (Vintage, 2013)	ISBN: <a href="https://www.isbn-international.org/details/9780345806567">9780345806567</a>

## LIST OF DUE DATES

Exercise 1:	Friday, September 23
Exercise 2:	Friday, October 21
Paper 1:	Friday, October 28
Exercise 3:	Friday, December 2
Paper 2:	Wednesday, December 21

**SCHEDULE OF READINGS****WEEK 1            Wednesday, September 7**

- Introduction

**WEEK 2            Monday, September 12**

- Essays
  - Richard Wright, “Blueprint for Negro Writing” (1937) [SAKAI]
  - James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel” (1949) [SAKAI]
- Poems
  - Richard Wright & Langston Hughes, “Red Clay Blues” (1939) [SAKAI]
  - Margaret Walker, “For My People” (1942) [SAKAI]

**Wednesday, September 14**

- Reread and review texts from Monday, September 12

**WEEK 3            Monday, September 19**

- Michel Foucault, text TBD (19xx) [SAKAI]

**Wednesday, September 21**

- Michel Foucault, text TBD (19xx) [SAKAI]

—*Exercise 1 due on Friday, September 23*—

**WEEK 4            Monday, September 26**

- Gwendolyn Brooks, *A Street in Bronzeville* (1942), pp.x-xx [SAKAI]

**Wednesday, September 28**

- Brooks, *A Street in Bronzeville*, pp.xx-xxx [SAKAI]

**WEEK 5            Monday, October 3**

- Brooks, *A Street in Bronzeville*, pp.xxx-xxx [SAKAI]

**Wednesday, October 5**

- Brooks, *A Street in Bronzeville*, reread & review [SAKAI]



## WEEK 6

**Monday, October 10**

- Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, pp. 1-59 (through Act I)

**Wednesday, October 12**

- Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, pp. 60-114 (through Act II)

## WEEK 7

**Monday, October 17**

- Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, pp. 115-135 (complete)

**Wednesday, October 19**

- Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*, reread & review  
—*Exercise 2 due on Friday, October 21*—

## WEEK 8

**Monday, October 24**

- Alice Walker, *Meridian*, pp. 1-98 (through “The Driven Snow”)

**Wednesday, October 26**

- Walker, *Meridian*, pp. 99-132 (through “The Recurring Dream”)  
—*Paper 1 due on Friday, October 28*—

## WEEK 9

**Monday, October 31**

- Alice Walker, *Meridian*, pp. 133-198 (through “Lynne”)

**Wednesday, November 2**

- Walker, *Meridian*, pp. 199-242 (complete)

## WEEK 10

**Monday, November 7**

- Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, pp. 1-75 (through chap. 6)

**Wednesday, November 9**

- Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, pp. 75-99 (through chap. 10)
- Hurston, “Characteristics of Negro Expression” (1934) [SAKAI] 

## WEEK 11

**Monday, November 14**

- Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, pp. 99-193 (complete)

**Wednesday, November 16**

- Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, reread & review

## WEEK 12

**Monday, November 21**

- Writing Workshop

**Wednesday, November 23**

- NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Break

## WEEK 13

**Monday, November 28**

- James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, pp. 3-71 (through part I)

**Wednesday, November 30**

- Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, pp. 72-102 (through part II, chap. 2)  
—*Exercise 3 due on Friday, December 2*—

## WEEK 14

**Monday, December 5**

- Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, pp. 103-169 (complete)

**Wednesday, December 7**

- Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, reread & review

## WEEK 15

**Monday, December 12**

- Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, reread & review

**Wednesday, December 14**

- Conclusion

—*Paper 2 due on Wednesday, December 21*—