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Fall 9-1-2021

### LIT 343.01: African American Literature - The African American Novel

Brady A. Harrison

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# *LIT 343-01:*

## *THE AFRICAN AMERICAN NOVEL*

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Office Hours: Tu/Ths 2:00-3:00 & by appointment

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

LIT 343 examines a limited number of extraordinary African American novels in their historical, cultural, and especially literary contexts. Beginning with Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859), we'll trace the evolution of the African American Novel from the era of sentimental fiction to after postmodernism, explore the impact of the blues on the genre, sound the energy and legacy of the New Negro Renaissance, and read in light of the arguments, disagreements, and cultural analyses of Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Ta-Nehisi Coates, among others. As the course progresses, we'll also have opportunities to discuss different critical theories and apply them to the primary texts. The course aims to deepen your sense of African American literary history and to deepen your interpretative skills. **Fair warning: this course requires constant, steady reading.**

Please note that this course fulfills both the requirements for Group V: Literary and Artistic Studies (L) and the requirements for Group I: Writing (W; Advanced College Writing).

### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. (Vintage.)  
Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. (Harper Perennial Modern Classics.)  
Petty, Ann. *The Street*. (Mariner.)  
Reed, Ishmael. *Mumbo Jumbo*. (Scribner.)  
Whitehead, Colson. *The Underground Railroad*. (Anchor.)  
Wilson, Harriet E. *Our Nig*. (Penguin Classics.)

### **COURSE OUTCOMES**

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Analyze works of art with respect to structure and significance within literary and artistic traditions, including emergent movements and forms. Specifically, students will:
  - a) understand the historical, cultural, critical, and especially literary contexts of the African American Novel;

b) understand the major characteristics of American literary sentimentalism, realism, naturalism, modernism, and postmodernism and will be able to utilize those characteristics to analyze individual African American novels;

2. Develop coherent arguments that analyze and critique these works from a variety of approaches, such as historical, aesthetic, cultural, psychological, political, and philosophical. Specifically, students will:

c) be able—while drawing on appropriate critical terms and concepts—to state clearly the central themes, concepts, and ideas at play in individual works;

d) be able to evaluate the literary and cultural importance and/or significance of individual African American novels;

e) be able to engage thoughtfully and openly with a range of critical and theoretical perspectives on literary and cultural (and even controversial) issues, including the ability to state clearly the assumptions and premises of their own positions;

f) be able to perform a literary close reading (both in class discussions, exercises, and assignments and in out-of-class writing assignments), demonstrating an ability to read and interpret literary works by thoughtfully integrating quoted passages into larger argumentative claims; and,

g) be able to write clear, grammatically correct, and rhetorically effective papers of literary analysis and interpretation (and perhaps even of critique), driven by a thesis and sustained by logic, textual and historical evidence, and a reasoned, ordered, and coherent argument.

## GRADING

Essay 1 (Proposal; 8-10+ pages):	20%
Essay 2 (Proposal; 8-10+ pages):	20%
Essay 3 (10+ pages; a revision of either Essay 1 or Essay 2):	25%
Final Exam:	25%
Participation:	10%

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Please note that you must complete **ALL** written work to pass LIT 343. **You must, in other words, turn in all three essays and take the Final Exam.** Essays will be deducted ONE letter grade for EACH class period they are late.

**E-mail correspondence:** Please use your UM e-mail account for electronic correspondence with the instructor. Faculty are NOT allowed to reply to messages from other email servers or accounts.

## DEPARTMENT AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES

**Department Assessment:** The Department of English's ongoing process of assessing its curriculum requires a committee of professors to read student papers (including exams) to learn how students in general are progressing through the program or course of studies. Thus, your

professor may choose a copy of one of your papers or ask for an electronic version of it to use in this assessment process. (All identifying information—such as name or ID number—will be removed and no evaluation of student work outside the boundaries of the course will play any role in determining a student’s grade.) If you do not want your work used in such a way, please inform your professor and she or he will not forward it to the Assessment Committee. Otherwise, the Department of English appreciates your tacit consent.

**University Assessment:** Students should also note that this course may require an electronic submission (via Moodle) of an assignment stripped of your personal information to be used for educational research and assessment of the university’s writing program. Your paper will be stored in a database. A random selection of papers will be assessed by a group of faculty and staff using a rubric developed from the following writing learning outcomes:

- a) Compose written documents that are appropriate for a given audience or purpose;
- b) Formulate and express opinions and ideas in writing;
- c) Use writing to learn and synthesize new concepts;
- d) Revise written work based on constructive feedback;
- e) Find, evaluate, and use information effectively;
- f) Begin to use discipline-specific writing conventions (MLA); and,
- g) Demonstrate appropriate English language usage.

This assessment in no way affects either your course grade or your progression at the university. Your work is used anonymously.

**Plagiarism, Academic Integrity, and the Student Conduct Code:** *Plagiarism: the use of someone else’s ideas or words as if they were your own.* To avoid this contravention of the fundamental values of the academy, you *must* acknowledge, by citation of name, title, and page number, work that has influenced your thinking. For more on matters of Academic Integrity, see the Student Conduct Code available on the web:

<https://www.umt.edu/student-affairs/community-standards/student-code-of-conduct-2020-pdf>

**Accommodation:** Students with disabilities will receive reasonable accommodation for coursework. To request accommodation, please contact the professor as soon as possible. For more information, visit the Disability Services website:

<http://www.umt.edu/disability-services/default.php>

## COVID

Adapted from the Office of the Provost, University of Montana (and, as always, subject to change as the pandemic warrants); in short, we will all do our best in the face of these challenging times:

1. Mask use is REQUIRED with the classroom or laboratory;

2. If you feel ill and/or are exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, please DO NOT come to class and contact the Curry Health Center at (406) 243-4330;
3. If you are required to isolate or quarantine, instructors will do their best to support your continued academic progress;
4. UM recommends students get the COVID-19 vaccine. Please direct your questions or concerns about vaccines to the Curry Health Center;
5. Where social distancing (maintaining a consistent 6 feet between individuals) is not possible, specific seating arrangements will be used to support contact tracing efforts;
6. Class attendance will be taken in order to support contact tracing efforts; and,
7. Drinking liquids and eating food is DISCOURAGED within the classroom.

## SYLLABUS

- Tu Aug 31: Introduction  
Th Sept 2: Lecture: Autobiography, Sentimental Fiction, Slave Narratives, Captivity Narratives, & Seduction Novels: Historical & Cultural Contexts  
Wilson vii-xxiii, Original Title Page-40 (plus corresponding Explanatory Notes)  
**Essay 1: Assigned**
- Tu Sept 7: Wilson 41-86 (plus corresponding Explanatory Notes)  
Th Sept 9: Lecture: Realism & Modernism: Historical & Cultural Contexts  
Hurston 1-62
- Tu Sept 14: Hurston 62-128  
Th Sept 16: Hurston 129-93, 195-205 (Afterword)
- Tu Sept 21: Lecture: Late Naturalism: Historical & Cultural Contexts  
Petry 1-84  
Th Sept 23: Lecture: The Blues/The Blues Novel: Historical & Cultural Contexts  
Petry 85-162
- Tu Sept 28: Petry 163-256  
**Essay 1: Due**  
Th Sept 30: Petry 257-350  
**Essay 2: Assigned**
- Tu Oct 5: Petry 351-436  
Th Oct 7: Lecture: Modernism/High Modernism: Historical & Cultural Contexts  
Ellison epigraphs-83
- Tu Oct 12: Ellison 83-166  
Th Oct 14: Ellison 166-250
- Tu Oct 19: Ellison 251-332  
Th Oct 21: Ellison 333-417
- Tu Oct 26: Ellison 417-512  
Th Oct 28: Ellison 513-581
- Tu Nov 2: Lecture: Postmodernism: Historical & Cultural Contexts  
Reed 3-71  
Th Nov 4: Reed 72-140
- Tu Nov 9: Reed 140-218  
**Essay 2: Due**  
Th Nov 11: **\*\*No Class: Veterans Day\*\***

Tu Nov 16: Whitehead 1-61  
**Essay 3: Assigned**  
Th Nov 18: Whitehead 62-120  
  
Tu Nov 23: Whitehead 121-192  
Th Nov 25: **\*\*No Class: Thanksgiving\*\***  
  
Tu Nov 30: Whitehead 193-257  
Th Dec 2: Whitehead 258-313  
  
Tu Dec 7: **\*\*Review for Final Exam\*\***  
**Essay 3: Due**  
Th Dec 9: **\*\*Review for Final Exam\*\***