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ENLT 324.01: African-American Women Writers

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The University Of Montana

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English 324: African-American Women Writers
TR 3:40 – 5:00, LA 204

Professor Bergman
Office: LA 128
Office phone: 243-5352
Email: bergman@selway.umt.edu
Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:00-2:00, Wednesdays 1:00-2:00, and by appointment

Course Description:

In this course we will read a range of novels by nineteenth- and twentieth-century African-American women. Examining these novels in the historical and literary contexts from which they were written, we will study the way these writers have used narrative forms and conventions to respond to their cultural contexts and to reflect upon issues of identity and literary power. We will explore the ways class, race, and gender intersect in works of fiction, and how African-American women writers construct black female subjectivity in a world which has often regarded them primarily as objects.

Course Objectives: To familiarize students with some of the range and diversity of writing by African-American women; to study and discuss the effects of race and gender on writing; to review African-American history in the context of literary study; to deepen students' interpretative and critical skills, both by discussing literary critical practice and by engaging in it; to improve students' verbal skills of argumentation and articulation of ideas through large and small group discussion; to improve students' skills of written argumentation through writing and revising essays.

Texts:

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)
Frances Harper, *Iola Leroy* (1892)
Pauline Hopkins, Magazine Novels (1902-1904)
Nella Larsen, *Quicksand* (1920s)
Ann Petry, *The Street* (1946)
Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987)
Murfin and Ray, *Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*
Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual* (Both in the bookstore at ENLT 000)

Grading:

Essay #1 (5 pp.)	20%
Essay #2 (5 pp.)	20%
Revision Essay (8 pp.)	30%
Final exam	20%
Participation	10%

Requirements:

Writing assignments: You will have several opportunities to work on your critical writing in this course. You will write two short essays, exploring and interpreting a text from a list of possible topics. In a third essay, you will revise and expand one of the earlier papers. For this essay, you will incorporate critical sources, several of which I have put on reserve. (See below.) We will read three critical essays in class and discuss them along with the novels as a means of complicating our understanding of the novels and of familiarizing you with the ways of engaging with critical scholarship.

Students must complete all written work in order to pass English 324. Assignments may be submitted to me in class or placed in my campus mailbox (in LA 133) by 5:00 p.m. on the due date. Late assignments will be penalized, unless arrangements are made with me prior to the due date.

Participation: Students should come to class every day prepared to discuss the day's reading. I will help you in your preparation by providing extensive discussion questions for each novel. (These questions are meant to provide starting points for your thinking, but are not intended to be exhaustive. I welcome any ideas you have that do not come up in the questions.) Think about the questions prior to class and be prepared to contribute your thoughts to the discussion.

As part of your participation, I will ask each of you to be responsible for the biographical introduction of one of our writers. This will be very informal – oral only, nothing written – but it will require you to look up some information on your writer in the library. I recommend the following sources:

Shockley, *Afro-American Women Writers, 1746-1933* (on reserve)
Dictionary of Literary Biography series, volumes such as *Afro-American Writers Before the Harlem Renaissance* (in reference)
Nineteenth Century Literature Criticism series (in reference)
Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism series (in reference)
Other biographical sources in the reference section

Reserve Materials: You will find two of the required articles on reserve. I have put them on both traditional reserve and electronic (ERES). You will need to get copies of these articles, read them, and bring them with you to class.

I have also put several books on reserve in order to insure that you have access to some of our library's resources on the topic of African-American women and African-American women writers (see list below). I encourage you to explore these resources throughout the semester. You will need to consult several sources for your revision essay, so these reserve books will be useful to you then as well.

Attendance: Obviously, to participate regularly, you'll need to be here. This is a discussion-based course, and I'm a stickler for attendance. More than 3 absences will

adversely affect your grade in the course. More than 6 absences will result in failure. If extreme circumstances arise, do talk to me.

Students with disabilities: If you have a disability and will need accommodation, please see me early in the semester.

Reserve Reading:

Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*

Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism*

Gates, ed. *Reading Black, Reading Feminist*

Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*

hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*

Huggins, Kilson, and Fox, eds., *Key Issues in the Afro-American Experience*

Lerner, ed., *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*

Patton, *Women in Chains: The Legacy of Slavery in Black Women's Fiction*

Shockley, *Afro-American Women Writers, 1746-1933*

Wade-Gayles, *No Crystal Stair: Visions of Race and Gender in Black Women's Fiction*

Course Schedule:

9/4 Course Introduction

9/6 Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (5-66, chs. I-XIV)

9/11 *Incidents* (66-125, chs. XV-XXX)

9/13 *Incidents* (125-158, chs. XXXI-Appendix)

Burnham, "Loopholes of Resistance: Harriet Jacobs' Salve Narrative and the Critique of Agency in Foucault" in *Incidents*, 278-294

9/18 Harper, *Iola Leroy* (7-108)
Essay #1 assigned

9/20 *Iola Leroy* (109-174)

9/25 *Iola Leroy* (175-245)

9/27 Class cancelled
7 pm screening of *The Color Purple*

10/2 *Iola Leroy* (246-282)

McDowell, "'The Changing Same: Generational Connections and Black Women Novelists'" (on reserve)

10/4 Workshop Essay #1. Bring four copies of your essay to class.

- 10/9 Hopkins, *Of One Blood* (441-504, chs. I-VIII)
- 10/11 Essay #1 Due
Exploring the *Colored American Magazine*
- 10/16 *Of One Blood* (504-563, chs. IX-XVI, part one)
- 10/18 *Of One Blood* (563 – 621, chs. XVI part 2 - end)
Essay #2 assigned
- 10/23 Larsen, *Quicksand* (1-46)
- 10/25 *Quicksand* (47-93)
- 10/30 *Quicksand* (94-135)
- 11/1 Workshop Essay #2
- 11/6 Petry, *The Street* (1-84)
- 11/8 *The Street* (85-162)
- 11/13 *The Street* (163-256)
Essay #2 Due
- 11/15 *The Street* (257-350)
- 11/20 *The Street* (351-436)
Pryse, “‘Pattern against the sky’: Deism and Motherhood in Ann Petry’s *The Street*” on reserve
- 11/22 THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY
- 11/27 Morrison, *Beloved* (3-73)
- 11/29 *Beloved* (74-134)
- 12/4 *Beloved* (135-165)
- 12/6 *Beloved* (169-229)
[Informal workshop on final papers?]
- 12/11 *Beloved* (230-275)
- 12/13 Wrap Up
Discuss final exam
Final Essay Due

FINAL EXAM: Wednesday, Dec. 19, 3:20 – 5:20, in our usual room