

English 154

Ethel Morgan Smith, ENGL 154, Spring 2004, African American Literature

Spring 2004

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY Department of English

Professor Ethel Morgan Smith

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Office Hours-Mon 4-5 and by appointment

African American Literature-English 154

This course is a historical introduction and survey in the literature of African Americans. We will examine issues of subjectivity and agency (ability to assert life), multiple consciousness and experience by looking at topics such as gender relations, family life, work patterns, organizational activities, and cultural production. In a way this is an interdisciplinary course in that we will draw upon the writings of fiction (novels) and nonfiction (memoirs).

Student participation is essential to the development of competency in analyzing these literary works, thus students are expected to be prepared for class by completing the readings prior to class discussion, and further to participate in class orally. This is a demanding course. Reading is a must!

CLASS OBJECTIVES

To stimulate the understanding and enjoyment of African-American literary works in relation to their historical period and their relationship to experience and culture

To develop the ability to read literary texts for meaning, structure and style

To develop critical reading, writing, and thinking skills through the analysis of literary works of African Americans

To deepen your understanding of American literature and culture through the specialized study of and focus on works by African Americans as important components of American literature, culture, and aesthetics

To recognize and critically analyze selected African-American works through genre, predominate themes, literary movements, and relationship to historical and social contexts.

CLASS PROCEDURES

1. Attendance is very necessary! If you cannot attend class for some reason, you are responsible for finding out from a classmate what you have missed, and what the assignment is for the next class meeting. Please do not call me at home for assignments you've missed. You are expected to be prepared to participate fully in the class discussion on the day you return to class, and to hand in any assignment that is due.

Quizzes, homework, and writing inclass assignments cannot be made up if you're absent on the day they're due. Don't expect an A if you miss ONE day of class.

2. Class participation will be an important portion of your grade, not that it will be equivalent in value to all of the written work and discussion. I will assume that each of you would have read the assignment, and I will, therefore, feel free to call on you.

3. To prepare yourself for class discussions, mark what you read by underlining passages, or by writing the page and paragraph number down so that you can easily refer to materials. What I mean by that is, material that strikes you as important or interesting, or part of the text that you simply do not understand. This is a time to raise questions as well.

4. Assignments must be turned in as a minimum requirement for passing this course. Assignments are due at the end of the class on the due date. They should be placed in my hand. Late papers will be penalized one grade for each day they are late, and will receive a failing grade! In cases where illness or absences from campus has made it impossible for you to hand in your work on schedule, you must present a properly authorized excuse in order to avoid a late penalty.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Class Participation 20%

Two Quizzes 20%
(Unannounced)

Midterm Examination 30%

Final Examination 30%

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Kindred by Octavia Butler

A Lesson Before Dying by Ernest Gaines, Jr.

The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman by Ernest Gaines, Jr. (film)

Leaving Atlanta by Tayari Jones

The Big Sea by Langston Hughes

Brown Girl Brownstones by Paula Marshall

The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison

Linden Hills by Gloria Naylor

Plum Bun by Jesse Fauset 15,

The Harlem Reader, ed. Herb Boyd

CLASS SCHEDULE:

Week of:

Jan 12th Introduction-Review of Syllabus-Discussion on Expectations

Jan 19th Recess: Martin Luther King's Birthday

Jan 26th Letter From a Birmingham (handout from professor)

Feb 2nd The Big Sea

Feb 9th The Harlem Reader

Feb 7th **West Virginia Day**

Feb 16th Plum Bun

Feb 23rd Brown Girl Brown Stones

Feb 27th **Midterm Examination Week**

March 1st The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman (film)

March 8th A Lesson Before Dying

March 15th LindenHills

March 22nd Spring Break

March 23rd The Bluest Eye

March 26th Last Day to Drop Classes

March 30th LeavingAtlanta

April 5th Kindred

April 30th **The Last Day of Class**

May 3rd **Final Exam Week (your specific time will be announced) West Virginia University is committed to social justice. The instructor of this course, with WVU's commitment, expects to maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication and mutual respect. Any suggestions as how to further such an environment will be appreciated.**