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ENG 2705-001: Introduction to African American Literature

Tim Engles
Eastern Illinois University

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2705-001

Introduction to African American Literature
English 2705 — Fall, 2013
(Tues/Thurs, 2:00 – 3:15, Coleman 3170)

Instructor: Tim Engles
Office: CH 3831

Instructor's e-dress: tdengles@eiu.edu
Office hours: 11:00-12:00, Tues & Thurs and
by appointment

Textbook Rental Books:

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)
Kyle Baker, *Nat Turner* (2008)
Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929)
Langston Hughes, *The Ways of White Folks* (1934)
Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1970)
Percival Everett, *Erasure* (2001)
Sister Souljah, *The Coldest Winter Ever* (1999)

James Weldon Johnson, *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912)
Octavia Butler, *Bloodchild and Other Stories* (1995)
Tayari Jones, *Leaving Atlanta* (2002)
Walter Dean Myers, *Monster* (1999)

COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Read the following sections carefully! These words constitute our contract, and participation in this course will require your written agreement to them.

Course Objectives and Goals: The two primary goals of this course: (1) to enhance your skills in the art of textual analysis (which are skills that any university student should fully develop), and (2) to introduce you to important African American authors and their literature's themes, techniques, and subject matter. Topics, ideas, and words that some consider sensitive or off limits may arise in our readings and discussions, so you will need to approach this course with a mature, open mind and a willingness to consider viewpoints expressed from different perspectives. This course will require *dedicated* daily work, including reading and class participation; regular quizzes, which are meant to be easy *if* you do the reading, which you *must do daily* to succeed in this course; two formal essays; and two examinations.

Regarding Reading: Again, a primary purpose of this course is to help you develop your skills in the art of textual analysis. Consequently, you must give the readings more than a quick skimming over. Instead of wolfing them down right before class, set aside enough time to read carefully—decide for yourself, before coming to class, what each author is trying to describe and bring to light. Also, to ensure that your final grade reflects your reading effort, I will give frequent “pop” quizzes at the beginning of class on required readings. These quizzes will not be announced and they cannot be made up. Basically, if you try to get by with only doing some of the reading listed on our “Daily Schedule,” you won’t do well at all in this class.

Grades: Your final course grade will be determined in the following way:

10-minute Presentation	5%
First essay (5-6 pages)	15%
Exam 1	20%
Second Essay (7-8 pages)	25%
Final exam	25%
Participation/quizzes/attendance	10%

Regarding Writing: The two exams will be written exams, with questions that ask for short and long essay answers, quotation IDs, and character-matchings. The two formal essays will be graded on how thoughtful, well-developed, and insightful they are. Clean, careful writing counts as well, and essays that have errors and problems in them that distract from the content will be downgraded accordingly. Both writing assignments are to be turned in at the beginning of the class period on the day they are due. Papers are due at the beginning of class on the due date whether the student is in class or not. Late papers will be penalized fifteen points (15%) each day they are late, beginning at the end of the class period of the day on which they are due. Finally, be mindful of the dire consequences of plagiarism, as described below—some previous students have failed this class for plagiarizing other people’s writing.

Missed Quizzes/Exams, and Late Papers: Again, because the answers to unannounced quizzes come up in class after they are taken, quizzes cannot be made up (even if you come to class late). These quizzes are one way to reward those who attend class regularly and on time. At the end of the semester, the average grade on these quizzes will constitute a major portion of your class participation grade (in order to account for the possibility that a day will arise when you *must* be absent, I will drop your lowest quiz score before figuring the average grade). There will be no make-up exams—students who miss the first exam will substitute a 6-8 page major essay in response to questions written by Dr. Engles. Students who miss the final exam will receive an automatic “Zero” on it, unless arrangements are made ahead of time regarding an essay substitution. Again, papers are due at the beginning of class on the due date whether the student is in class or not. Late papers will be penalized fifteen points each day they are late. You may turn in papers before their due dates if you know you must miss class that day.

Regarding the Writing Center: If you are aware of chronic problems with your writing, I strongly recommend that you make use of the English Department’s Writing Center. Tutoring services there are free, and students are welcome to drop in, or schedule appointments during working hours (Room 3110 of Coleman Hall, <http://www.eiu.edu/~writing>). While I will pay close attention to each student’s particular writing problems, I may advise some students to seek additional help at the Writing Center.

Writing Center consultants will not proofread your papers; they instead will work with you on a number of important tasks, such as these:

- Understanding and analyzing writing assignments
- Moving past writer’s block
- Brainstorming topics and ideas
- Revising for stronger content and adapting to audience
- Developing focus and thesis statements

- Organizing ideas and support
- Developing evidence, examples, and supporting details
- Revising for stronger development of and work with source materials
- Guiding writers to effectively integrate source materials
- Providing guidance on using citation systems
- Offering assistance on how to effectively and ethically summarize, paraphrase, and quote source materials
- Implementing strategies for strong paragraphing
- Improving cohesion through transitions and organization
- Revising for sentence-level clarity, precision, and emphasis
- Creating sentence variety for emphasis and cohesion
- Offering strategies for efficient and effective proofreading and editing
- Helping students find their own process for proofreading and editing

As you can see, the Writing Center helpers can be *very* helpful. And of course, if you ever need help with any aspects of an essay, I will be available during my office hours to consider ideas or a rough draft with you. It's also okay to email me about a paper in progress with specific questions or issues.

E-mail activity: Enrollment in this class requires an e-mail account, and you must check it frequently for messages pertaining to the course (that is, several times per week, at least). You already have an EIU account; you're welcome to use another type of account, but just be sure you use one for this course that you tend to check frequently, and be sure that messages pertaining to this course do not end up in your "Junk Mail" folder. We will use our course listserv (or "e-mail discussion list") for announcements and for extension of in-class discussion. E-mail is also the quickest, easiest way to reach me, especially since faculty in the English Department do not have office telephones; I welcome any and all e-mailed questions and comments, and I usually reply quickly.

Using e-mail is crucial for this course—if you do not send me an e-mail message (tdengles@eiu.edu) by Friday, August 23 at 3:00 p.m., I will assume that you have chosen against fully participating in the course, and I will therefore drop you. In that message, (1) tell me which course you're in (English 2705); (2) describe yourself in whatever way you choose, including your career aspirations; (3) write a statement to the effect that you have read and agree with (or perhaps in part disagree with, which is fine, if you explain why) these course policies and requirements, and (4) as with all academic and professional emails, sign this email by including your name at the end of it. Sending me this message will also constitute your "signature" of our course contract, that is, these policies and procedures that you are reading.

Attendance Policy: I will take attendance, and I expect you to attend class every day, on time, and prepared to discuss the material listed for that day on the "Daily Schedule." If you have more than three absences this semester, your course grade will drop a full letter grade for each absence beyond three.

Classroom Environment: I do not plan to lecture in this class; instead, we should all contribute together to a positive, challenging, interesting learning environment. I expect all of you to participate in class discussions (class participation will be figured into your final grade). The best way to demonstrate that you are an active, engaged, and interested reader is by contributing

regularly to class discussions, and by paying close, respectful attention to what everyone else has to say.

As noted above, be aware that sensitive issues sometimes arise within a course on multicultural material, so we must respect the opinions of others—try to respond to ideas, rather than to the person stating them. In my experience, it's okay for discussions to become "heated," as long as we respect each other.

If you have questions, no matter how simple or complicated, go ahead and ask me, either in class or via e-mail—chances are that other students will have the same question.

Also, in the interests of keeping everyone in class undistracted and focused, ***please do not read outside materials or eat food in class (drinking beverages is okay), and do not use a computer in class.*** Also, if you have a cell phone, ***be sure to silence it ahead of time, and do not check or write text messages during class.*** If you happen to be expecting an important or emergency call or text, be sure to let me know before class begins. Finally, please refrain from "packing up" during the last few minutes of class; I will signal when the discussion is finished, and I promise to end by the time the period is over.

For students with disabilities: If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, and if you have not already contacted the Office of Disability Services (581-6583), please do so as soon as possible.

Academic Honesty: I expect you to act honestly and do your own work in this class, and so does Eastern Illinois University. If you are uncertain whether something you have written is an example of plagiarism, just ask me to look it over before you turn it in. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the English Department's policy on plagiarism: "Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—'The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work' (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office."

**ENGLISH 2705 : DAILY SCHEDULE
FALL, 2013**

*This schedule may be subject to change; BE SURE to bring the listed readings to class
if a reading assignment is listed for that day;*

*students who show up without a copy of the day's reading
assignment may be marked absent*

- T AUG 20 Introduction to the course; Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, "Bury Me in a Free Land" (1845); Tim Wise, "The Creation of Whiteness" and "What Would You Do?" segment (2008, 2010 videos)
- R AUG 22 *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), 9-45
- F AUG 23 3 p.m. **Deadline** for sending Dr. Engles (tdengles@eiu.edu) the e-mail described above on Page 3
- T AUG 27 *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 45-85
- R AUG 29 *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 85-116
- T SEP 3 *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 116-end
- R SEP 5 Kyle Baker, *Nat Turner* (2008), 6-132
- T SEP 10 Finish *Nat Turner*; also print out, read and bring to class "The Passing of Grandison," Charles Chesnutt (1899; emailed short story)
- R SEP 12 J. Ronald Green, "Oscar Micheaux's Interrogation of Caricature as Entertainment" (print out from Booth e-reserves—see email from Dr. Engles for instructions); in-class film-screening: *Body and Soul* (1925), written, produced, distributed and directed by Oscar Micheaux
- T SEP 17 Continue watching and discuss *Body and Soul* and read for today Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (handout, 1926)
- R SEP 19 Larsen, *Passing* (1929)
- T SEP 24 *Passing*
- R SEP 26 *Passing* and Richard Wright, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow" (1937; emailed essay—print out, read carefully, and bring to class)
- T OCT 1 Hughes, *The Ways of White Folks* (1934)
- R OCT 3 *The Ways of White Folks*
- T OCT 8 **Mid-term Exam** (Reminder: There are no make-up exams in this course—students who miss this exam will substitute a 6-8 page major essay in response to questions written by Dr. Engles.)

R OCT 10 Excerpt from Isabel Wilkerson's *The Warmth of Other Suns* (2011; handout), *The Bluest Eye* (1970); discussion of Paper One topics

F OCT 11 **Fall Break**

T OCT 15 *The Bluest Eye*

R OCT 17 *The Bluest Eye*

T OCT 22 *The Bluest Eye*

- **Paper One due at the beginning of class**

R OCT 24 Toni Morrison, "Recitatif" (1983; emailed short story—print out, read carefully, and bring to class)

T OCT 28 handouts to read for today: bell hooks, "Artistic Integrity: Race and Accountability" (1996) and Lynn Hirschberg, "Core Values: Welcome to Planet Mumblecore, Where a New Generation of Lo-fi Filmmakers Want a Piece of the Pie" (2009); in-class film-screening: *Medicine for Melancholy* (2008), written and directed by Barry Jenkins

R OCT 31 Continue watching *Medicine for Melancholy* and read for today an interview with John A. Powell (handout)

T NOV 5 Everett, *Erasure* (2001)

R NOV 7 *Erasure*; discussion of Final Paper

T NOV 12 *Erasure*

R NOV 14 *Erasure* and Nick Chiles, "Their Eyes Were Reading Smut" (handout from Tuesday)

T NOV 19 Sister Souljah, *The Coldest Winter Ever* (1999)

R NOV 21 *The Coldest Winter Ever*

NOVEMBER 25 – 29 **Thanksgiving Break!**

T DEC 3 *The Coldest Winter Ever*

R DEC 5 finish *The Coldest Winter Ever* for today; last day of class – **Final Paper due at the beginning of class**

Final Exam: Monday, Dec. 9, 2:45-4:45 p.m. (Reminder: Students who miss the final exam will receive an automatic "zero" unless arrangements are made ahead of time.)