English 3613/4713: African American Fiction

Dr. Kinitra D. Brooks       Office: MB 2.480
Email: kinitra.brooks@utsa.edu       Office Hours: by appt.

Course Purpose
In this course we will critically analyze ten texts from major and minor 20th and 21st-Century African American novelists, short story authors, film directors and comic book creators. We will work towards defining the parameters of African American fiction in its many variations. We will consider the following questions: How have African American writers expressed themselves artistically through literature and film? What is mainstream African American literature? How do different textual formats (novels, film, comic books) aid in these authors’ examination of the intersections of race, gender, and class?

Course Goals
1. Identify and analyze the major themes of African American texts.
2. Identify and analyze how gender and sexuality complicate these texts.
3. Identify and define the different textual formats in regards to African American literary expression.
4. Critically analyze the class texts using multiple secondary sources in the MLA format.
5. Research and evaluate the quality of textual criticism.

Course Texts

*Dawn*, Octavia Butler
*Astonishing X-Men: Storm*, Eric Jerome Dickey
*Skin Folk*, Nalo Hopkinson
*Black Panther: Back to Africa*, Reginald Hudlin
*Black Panther: Civil War*, Reginald Hudlin
*Black Panther: Vol. 1: Who is Black Panther*, Reginald Hudlin
*Let the Dead Bury Their Dead*, Randall Kenan
*Do The Right Thing*, dir. Spike Lee
*Eve’s Bayou*, dir. Kasi Lemmons
*Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, Scott McCloud
*Song of Solomon*, Toni Morrison
*Redefining Black Film*, Mark A. Reid

NOTE #1: I will also post critical literature on Blackboard for which you are responsible. You are expected to check your UTSA email on a daily basis except for weekends.
Absence Policy
Class attendance is mandatory. You are expected to arrive promptly and there are no early departures. Three tardy arrivals count as one absence. If you decide to leave class early, it will count as an absence. If you miss more than three classes, you will receive an F as your final grade. All absences count towards this number, both excused and unexcused. I do not distinguish between the two. Yes, I am anal about this.

Grade Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflection Papers</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annotated Bibliography</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Paper</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Grade</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quizzes
There will be a daily reading quiz at the start of class. Answers will be graded on a five-point scale. I will drop your lowest grade.

Class Presentations
Class presentations will also initiate the start of each text. You will provide handouts that feature a short biography of the author, major genre themes the text fulfills and/or complicates, and at least five in-depth discussion questions. A finalized draft of this document is due to ME by 10:00 pm the night before class. Most importantly, you will provide an annotated bibliography on at least THREE critical articles centering on your chosen work. We will sign-up for specific works will take place the first day of class. Group members are also expected to keep an individual journal of group meetings.

Reflection Papers
Too often, when we read the words on a page we do not fully integrate that new information into our existing knowledge structure, and so we fail to gain new understanding of the world around us. Research in cognitive science and learning tells us that “deep learning” requires that the learner reflect on new knowledge and create personal meaning from it.

To help us reflect more deeply on readings in this course, we will use reading reflections. These reading reflections are designed to help the reader engage with the material in a deeper way, and to construct new meaning from it. The reflections also have the advantage of providing me with detailed information about your learning in this course. This not only helps guide my daily preparation of course activities, but also helps connect us as a community of learners.
You will write four (3) reading reflection papers. These papers should be 2-3 pages in length and must be turned in electronically via Blackboard Assignment Box by 10 a.m. the morning of class. You decide which six classes you wish to write responses for, but they must be days in which readings/film are due. It is your responsibility to keep track of your responses. This is meant to be an activity that allows you to digest and process everything you have read over the past week. This also prepares you for group and class discussion.

Your response must clearly indicate careful reading and thoughtful reflection. After completing the reading/viewing assignment, respond to the following questions:

1. What is the main point of this reading?
2. What information did you find surprising? Why?
3. What did you find confusing? Why?

What is the Main Point?
Reading assignments often contain a lot of information. What is the main concept that the author is trying to get across? This may, or may not, have been explicitly stated in the reading. Why did the author choose to emphasize this point, and not some other? Your response is not a summary of the chapter, but an analysis of it in a way that creates new meaning for you.

What is Surprising?
Your response to this question should be reflective. Did you learn something that is in conflict with your previous notions of the world? Did something make you feel uncomfortable? Did you learn something that fascinates you in a way that you didn’t expect? How does this new knowledge connect with material in other courses, or with other parts of your life? Responses must also clearly explain “why.”

What is Confusing?
Responses to this question require careful reading and reflection; it is only through the process of reconciling new information within our existing knowledge structure that we become aware of inconsistencies, or “gaps” in our understanding. Responses to this question should be specific and actionable—that is they should outline a clear path to understanding. Responses must also clearly explain “why.”

Rubric for Evaluation
10 points Responses to the questions are labeled and clearly indicate careful reading and deep reflection. Responses submitted by 10 a.m.
5 points Responses are not specific, do not clearly indicate reflection, or are submitted soon after (by 12 p.m.) deadline.
0 points No response, or response submitted more than one class period late.
**Class Organization**

Please come to class on time and prepared, having read all assignments and viewed the films listed as due for the day. Also, come to class ready to speak and move around the classroom! We will do lots of small and large group discussion and everyone is expected to enthusiastically participate!

**Annotated Bibliography**

An annotated bibliography is a bibliography that includes brief explanations or notes for each reference. This is to aid in your research for your final paper ensuring you are on the right track before you turn in your finished final paper. This also aids in your assessment of the adequacy of your research materials. Each entry will be in MLA format and contain a summary and evaluation of the worth of the article/chapter/book to your paper’s stated thesis. You will research and compile a four to five (4-5) page annotated bibliography. I will provide more specific information at a later date.

**Late Paper Policy**

I prefer to have all papers turned in to me on time. Unfortunately, I do realize that life happens. I have instituted a strict policy for turning in a paper past its due date. I must have 24 hours notice if your paper will be late. Your grade will decrease by one letter grade each day it is late. I will not accept a paper after two (2) days / forty-eight (48) hours. You may only use this service once during the Maymester, so choose wisely.

**Final Paper**

You will critically analyze the works of at least two different authors we have read in class in an 8-10 page paper.

**Final Exam**

There will be one cumulative exam in this course. My exams are composed of any mixture of three question types: identification, short answer and essay. Please note that my exams are rigorous but there are no tricks involved. I want you to do well on these exams, but it will take hard work. There will be an in-depth review session before the exam. Course exams are taken individually and they are not open book.

Your final exam takes place on **Saturday, May, 28 at NOON** in this room. **YOU MUST BE PRESENT TO TAKE THIS EXAM. YOU MAY NOT MAKE UP THIS EXAM BECAUSE OF ABSENCE.** I urge you to consider these dates **before** making travel plans.

**Participation**

Being an active participant is an important component of the grade for this course. A literature classroom is not a place where one simply sits passively and takes notes; you will be sorely disappointed if you expect that. I expect everyone to engage enthusiastically with the readings/viewings (even the ones you don’t like!) This means: coming to class having carefully read or viewed the assigned material and being ready
and willing to talk about it, in class and in small groups. You will get so much more out of this course, and it will be a lot more fun if you are fully here with us.

**Classroom Policies**

To be decided by the class on the first day. What policies should we have toward the following:

- Classroom Decorum
- Group Work
- Good Citizenship in Class
- Discussing Complicated Topics

**University Academic Dishonesty Policy**

Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, and the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or part to another person. Plagiarism is using someone else’s words or ideas without acknowledging the source. It is essentially stealing. Don’t do it. Any student who commits an act of scholastic dishonesty is subject to discipline. Unpleasant, painful, and potentially embarrassing happenings shall ensue. Outside sources you consult for assignments in this course (including your papers and your discussion leading material) must be properly cited in MLA style. If at any time you have any question whatsoever about how to attribute something, or even when to attribute something, *please, please, ask!* Which leads me to…

**Office Hours/Email**

My office hours are listed above. During those times, you will find me in my office waiting to help you. Please do not hesitate to come by with concerns about your writing or the class, or if you just want to discuss the readings. You won’t need an appointment during that time; however, if you’d like to make one I’d be glad to do so. Remember, I’m here to help you, so don’t be shy about stopping by!

Everyone will have a conference with me the second week of class to discuss the final paper project.

You are also welcome to email me with concerns or questions, with one condition: **do not expect a same-day response after 9 PM.** Late night inquiries will be handled sometime the next day.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 9</td>
<td>Introduction to Class – <em>Ethnic Notions</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 10</td>
<td><em>Dawn</em> – Part I &amp; Part II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 11</td>
<td><em>Dawn</em> – End</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 12</td>
<td><em>Let the Dead Bury Their Dead</em> – This Far; Or, A Body in Motion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 13</td>
<td><em>Let the Dead Bury Their Dead</em> – End</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 16</td>
<td><em>Redefining Black Film</em> &amp; <em>Do The Right Thing</em> <strong>ABSTRACTS DUE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 17</td>
<td><em>Song of Solomon</em> – Chapters 1 – 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 18</td>
<td><em>Song of Solomon</em> – End <strong>ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 19</td>
<td><em>Skin Folk</em> – Half</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 20</td>
<td><em>Skin Folk</em> – End <strong>REVISED ABSTRACT &amp; OUTLINE DUE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 23</td>
<td><em>Redefining Black Film</em> (finish) &amp; <em>Eve’s Bayou</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 24</td>
<td>Finish Film Discussion – <strong>FINAL PAPER DUE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 25</td>
<td><em>Understanding Comics</em> <strong>Blackboard Chat Discussion</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 26</td>
<td>Black Panther &amp; Storm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 27</td>
<td>Finish Comics, Exam Review Session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 28</td>
<td><strong>FINAL EXAM</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Dates are subject to change*