

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN – MILWAUKEE  
DEPARTMENT OF AFRICOLOGY  
SPRING 2007

**AFRICOLOGY 210: THE AFRICAN AMERICAN NOVEL**

Class Meeting Time/Place Tues. & Thurs. 11:00AM-12:15PM AUP 189

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Office Hours: TR 1:30-2:30 & by appointment

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

The whole scope of this course is to introduce the recent literary writings of a variety of African American authors who have made outstanding contributions to the multicultural literary heritage of our country. In this course, we will focus on the unique voices, historical backgrounds, and socially illuminating themes of several contemporary African American writers: Derek Bell, Percival Everett, Charles Johnson, Edward P. Jones, Z.Z. Packer, Jewell Parker Rhodes, Dawn Turner Trice, Colson Whitehead, and Nicole Bailey-Williams. The readings comprise a diverse selection of novels, short stories, and essays that reflects differing life experiences, worldviews, and writing styles. Documentary films will provide background for discussion of major issues addressed in the writers' work. Each author has built upon the tradition of African American literary classics, including *Invisible Man* (Ralph Ellison), *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Zora Neale Hurston) and *Native Son* (Richard Wright), to explore issues of race, class, gender, and more.

This course will use a rhetorical approach to discuss fiction as an artistic form of persuasion. To understand possible aims of persuasion, we will consider historical, cultural, and social contexts in which African American literature has developed. Fundamental elements of fiction—such as point of view, characterization, and conflict—will be viewed in terms of their artistic interrelationship. Overall, our goals will be to develop enhanced skill in literary analysis, argumentation and expository writing. Topics we may explore include:

- the relation between memory, story, and history
- violence within and without the home
- themes related to culture, self-identity, family, and society
- issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality
- the uses of storytelling
- other subjects of continuing relevance.

**COURSE TEXTS & REQUIREMENTS**

Percival Everett, *Erasure*

Jewell Parker Rhodes, *Magic City*

Dawn Turner Trice, *Only Twice I've Wished for Heaven*

Colson Whitehead, *The Intuitionist*

Additional readings on library reserve.

E-mail Account: An active UWM e-mail account is required for receiving course announcements.

## Grade Distribution:

This course is aimed at cultivating intellectual curiosity, thoughtful engagement, careful reflection, and respectful interaction. In accomplishing these aims, the course requires extensive critical thinking—in the form of response papers, exams, and a final paper—in which you explore ideas and formulate inquiry, engage with the readings, reflect about in-class discussions, and interact with your peers. I reserve the right to give unannounced quizzes if students regularly come to class unprepared. Final grades will consist of:

Attendance & Participation	(5%)	*See university policy on grading
Response Papers, 5 total, 2 pp.	(20%)	scale distribution for letter grade
Mid-Term Exam	(20%)	distinctions.
Final Exam	(30%)	
Research Paper, 8-10 pp.	(25%)	

### 1. Response papers (20%)

During the semester you will be expected to write **FIVE (5)** response papers. Response papers should be limited to two to three pages each. They must be typed and double-spaced, on standard 8.5 x 11 paper, with appropriate margins. In these responses, you should identify the main theme(s) or argument of the article(s) and/or text(s) and discuss the merits, limits, and usefulness of the reading(s). Responses should demonstrate a thorough knowledge and understanding of the article(s) and/or /text(s). Credit will be given only to assignments turned in by the announced due dates.

For example, responses may aim to answer the following possible questions: a) What was the most interesting or significant aspect of the reading? b) What word or phrase from the reading sums up its point of significance? Please explain its relationship to the point of significance you have selected.

### 2. Research Paper (25%)

The research paper will be 8-10 pp. Since papers are announced far in advance of the due date and clearly indicated on the syllabus, **I will not accept late submissions** unless you have made arrangements with me at least two weeks in advance of the essay's due date. Extensions will be granted *only* in unusual circumstances. Full credit will be given only to assignments turned in by the announced due dates.

### 3. Exams (50%)

Two exams, a mid-term and a final, will consist of several short essays and short answer questions. The mid-term will cover all course materials up to the break. The final will consist of all course materials after the break until the end of the semester, but you will be responsible for the theoretical concepts learned in the first half of the course.

### 4. Participation & Attendance (5%)

Class participation will be an important factor in determining your final grade, especially as this class will be conducted as a discussion/seminar. Participation not only involves engaging in class discussion but also being well-prepared for each class, having completed all reading assignments on time. Everyone should try to contribute something to the discussion in every class. Since the course depends upon active participation, you are expected to attend all classes. Absences in excess of four will negatively affect your final grade. Mandatory attendance is required for screening of films. Students trying to earn a grade in the A or B range should not miss more than two classes. Attendance will follow university policy, with grades lowered (e.g., from B to B-) for each subsequent absence after the fourth absence. Please note that if you miss more than six classes, you cannot pass the course.

**Note: The use of cell phones, Blackberry's or electronic text devices MP3 players, PSPs, and inappropriate use of laptops will impact your grade negatively.**

### Special Needs

If you need special accommodations such as a sign language interpreter or have a documented need for accommodations for examinations or presentations, please notify the instructor at the start of the term.

### Policy on Plagiarism and Scholastic Dishonesty

Plagiarism and scholastic dishonesty are serious matters and will not be tolerated and will be dealt with according to university policies and procedures.

Potential infractions include:

- 1) Submitting papers written by (or in collusion) with others as your own.
- 2) Direct copying of another's language without proper citation.
- 3) False citation: material should only ever be cited from the source.
- 4) Submitting papers to multiple courses without prior permission of all professors/instructors involved.

### Week 1

T. Introduction to class. Review of course syllabus. Assignment expectations.

*Due:* -Carolyn Gerald, "The Black Writer and His Role"  
-Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain"  
-Joyce A. Joyce, "Reconstructing Black American Literary Criticism"  
-George S. Schulyer, "The Negro-Art Hokum"  
-Z.Z. Packer, "Drinking Coffee Elsewhere"  
-Nicole Bailey-Williams, "Between Black and White" (included in *Gumbo*, eds. Marita Golden and E. Lynn Harris; excerpted from *Floating* (New York: Harlem Moon, 2004))

R. What is the novel? What is the African American novel? What is an author? What do we mean by text? What is a critic?

*Due:* -Richard Wright, "Blueprint for Negro Writing"  
-Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Preface to Blackness: Text and Pretext"  
-Charles Johnson, "Sweet Dreams"  
-Edward P. Jones, "Bad Neighbors"

### Week 2

T -Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Tell Me, Sir,...What Is 'Black' Literature?" in *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars*  
-Toni Morrison, excerpt *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*

R -John K. Young, "Introduction," "Toni Morrison, Oprah Winfrey, and Postmodern Popular Audience," "Conclusion" in *Black Writers, White Publishers*  
-Derrick Bell, "Preface," "The Space Traders," Epilogue" in *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*

Response Paper Due

### Week 3

T -Percival Everett, *Erasure*, pp. 1-60

R -Percival Everett, *Erasure*, pp. 60-120

Note: Plan on attending the distinguished lecture by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

### Week 4

T -Percival Everett, *Erasure*, pp. 121-181  
-Margaret Russett, "Race Under *Erasure*"

R -Percival Everett, *Erasure*, pp. 182-288

Response Paper Due

### Week 5

T -Dawn Turner Trice, *Only Twice...*, pp. 1-75

R -Dawn Turner Trice, *Only Twice...*, pp. 75-150

Note: Begin thinking about research paper topics. Plan to schedule a brief meeting with me to discuss your paper ideas.

### Week 6

T -Dawn Turner Trice, *Only Twice...*, pp. 151-225

R -Dawn Turner Trice, *Only Twice...*, pp. 225-304  
-Reading on Reserve

Response Paper Due

### Week 7

T **CONFERENCE MEETINGS** \*Detailed discussion of paper topic(s), research methodology, and construction of arguments.

R -Film: *The Space Traders*

-Pearl Cleage, excerpt from *What Looks Like Crazy on an Ordinary Day*

-John Edgar Wideman, "Weight"

-Reginald McKnight, "Palm Wine"

-Charles Johnson, "Executive Decision"

Due: Abstract and Annotated Bibliography for Research Paper

## Week 8

T Exam review.

R **Midterm Exam**

## Week 9

T Spring Break

R Spring Break

## Week 10

T -Colson Whitehead, *The Intuitionist*, pp. 1-65 (Part One)

-Madhu Dubey, "Introduction," in *Signs and Cities*

R -Colson Whitehead, *The Intuitionist*, pp. 66-140 (Part Two)

## Week 11

T -Colson Whitehead, *The Intuitionist*, pp. 141-217 (Part One)

R -Colson Whitehead, *The Intuitionist*, pp. 218-272 (Part Two)

Response Paper Due

## Week 12

T -Jewell Parker Rhodes, *Magic City*, pp. TBA

R -Jewell Parker Rhodes, *Magic City*, pp. TBA

## Week 13

T -Jewell Parker Rhodes, *Magic City*, pp. TBA

-Magic Mining, Mining Dreams

R -Jewell Parker Rhodes, *Magic City*, pp. TBA

Response Paper Due

## Week 14

T -Film: *TBD*.

**Research Paper Due.**

R -Film: *TBD*.

## Week 15

T -Discussion of the film in relation to readings.

-Handouts.

R -Exam Review. Concluding Remarks to class. Course evaluations.

**Week 16**  
**T Final Exam**

**University Policies**

1. *Students with disabilities.* Verification of disability, class standards, the policy on the use of alternate materials and test accommodations can be found at the following:  
<http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/DSAD/SAC/SACltr.pdf>
  
2. *Religious observances.* Policies regarding accommodations for absences due to religious observance are found at the following:  
[http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin\\_policies/S1.5.htm](http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S1.5.htm)
  
3. *Students called to active military duty.* Accommodations for absences due to call-up of reserves to active military duty should be noted.  
<http://www3.uwm.edu/des/web/registration/militarycallup.cfm>
  
4. *Incompletes.* The conditions for awarding an incomplete to graduate and undergraduate students can be found at the following:  
[http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin\\_policies/S31.pdf](http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S31.pdf)
  
5. *Discriminatory conduct (such as sexual harassment).* Definitions of discrimination. Harassment, abuse of power, and the reporting requirements of discriminatory conduct are found at the following:  
[http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin\\_policies/S47.pdf](http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S47.pdf)
  
6. *Academic misconduct.* Policies for addressing students cheating on exams or plagiarism can be found at the following:  
<http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/OSL/DOS/conduct.html>
  
7. *Complaint procedures.* Students may direct complaints to the head of the academic unit or department in which the complaint occurs. If the complaint allegedly violates a specific university policy, it may be directed to the head of the department or academic unit in which the complaint occurred or to the appropriate university office responsible for enforcing the policy.
  
8. *Grade appeal procedures.* Procedures for student grade appeal appear at the following:  
[http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin\\_policies/S28.htm](http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S28.htm)
  
9. *Final examination policy.* Policies regarding final examinations can be found at the following:  
[http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin\\_policies/S22.htm](http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/acad%2Badmin_policies/S22.htm)

## SUGGESTED PAPER TOPICS

- 1.) How does Colson Whitehead's *The Intuitionist* function as a postmodernist text? For example, how does it use the elevator as a postmodern structure of architecture to examine issues of space?

How does Fulton's missing manuscript encapsulate his history and that of both philosophies of Empiricism and Intuitionism? Consider the contents of the manuscript. Consider also Lila Mae Watson's experience both within the Department of Elevator Inspectors and during her academic pursuit of at the Institute. How does the manuscript relate to the Lila Mae Watson's position as a "fugitive"? How does the manuscript inform Lila Mae Watson's (and possibly other characters') identity?

- 2.) Perform a theoretical examination of Percival Everett's *Erasure* using one or more theoretical methods, for example, the significance of literary publishing on the reception of a text.

What is the role of the editor in relation to the novel? What is the role of author in relation to the reading audience? Think about editorial censorship and consider how that affects the writer's intended meaning.

- 3.) Compare or contrast two texts or films, for example, Rhode's *Magic City* and Trice's *Only Twice I've Wished for Heaven*, possibly exploring individual identity and community identity. Incorporate the theoretical articles to discuss how the structure of community functions in the text.
- 4.) Discuss the ways the theorist studied during the semester understand social practices (such as writing) and customs (such as class, gender, etc.) as constructs, rather than as "natural" formations. Consider how ideology shapes social practices and the beliefs and traditions of individual subjects, according to each type of theory. You might examine how a specific ideology shapes a specific practice to focus your discussion.