

**Aristotle University of Thessaloniki**  
**Dept. of American Literature and Culture**  
**Lit. 7-369 The Politics of Race and Gender in American Culture:**  
**African American Writers**  
**Prof. Domna Pastourmatzi**  
**Spring Semester 2010-2011**  
**Office: 308E**  
**Office Hours: Friday 11-14pm**

**Course description and objectives:** The course aims at introducing students to the African American literary tradition. It examines critically various texts (slave narratives, poems, short stories, novels, autobiographies, political documents and speeches) written in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. It probes into the diachronic experiences of African Americans and examines their racial identity and their relations with 'white' Americans. Particular attention will be given to the interrelation of the factors of race, gender, class, sexual identity and to their impact. The course also tackles the question of what it means to be 'black', 'colored', or a 'member of a minority'. Finally, it deals with the politics of skin color and the diachronic consequences of sexism and racism.

**Learning outcomes and competences:**

- Good knowledge of the institution of slavery, of the living conditions of slaves and of their struggle for liberation
- Understanding the racist theories and the laws that supported slavery
- Understanding the cultural concepts of race (blackness/whiteness), gender and sexual identity
- Understanding the consequences of sexism and racism on the psycho-emotional state of individuals and on interracial relations
- Understanding the impact of various forms of violence
- Good knowledge of the political and social context of the literary texts of significant Black writers

**Required Texts:**

*The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Toni Morrison  
*Billy* (1993) by Albert French  
*The Color of Water* (1996) by James McBride  
Packet of materials

**Relevant Films:**

*American History X* (see it at home)

**Achievement requirements:**

**a final examination** at the end of the semester on all assigned texts and a grade of five or better.

**Attendance policy:** although attendance is not compulsory by law, students must realize that literature courses require regular presence in the classroom and active involvement in the learning process. Students are expected to study the assigned material before coming to class. Classes lost due to students' absence or other reasons beyond the instructor's control will not be repeated at a later date but the texts remain part of the required material and are going to be included in the final examination. Classes lost due to the instructor's absence will be made up at a later date.

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SYLLABUS

- Week 1**  
**Feb. 21 M**                    **Introduction:** African American History and Culture  
**Read from packet**  
The Rise of African Slavery  
Developing the Concept of Race  
Racial Ideology and Theory of Race  
Chattel Slavery and Stereotypical Images of Blacks  
**Thomas Jefferson**, From *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785)  
**James Baldwin**, “On Being ‘White’ ... and Other Lies (1984)  
pages 177-80  
**Elma Stuckey**, “Enslaved” (1976)  
**Langston Hughes**, “White Man” (1936)
- Week 2**  
**Feb. 28 M**                    **Read from packet**  
Audrey Smedly, “‘Race’ and the Construction of Human Identity”  
(1998)  
**Olaudah Equiano**, From “The Interesting Narrative of the Life of  
Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African Written by Himself  
(1789)  
**Venture Smith**, *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture,  
A Native of Africa: But Resident above Sixty Years in the United  
States* (1798) pages 170-185.
- Week 3**  
**March 3-8**                    **NO CLASSES**
- Week 4**  
**March 14 M**                    **Read from packet**  
Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, pages 2067-2119 (Autumn)
- Week 5**  
**March 21 M**                    **Read from packet**  
Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, pages 2119-2171 (Spring)
- Week 6**  
**March 28 M**                    Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, pages 2171 -2184 (Summer)  
**Read from packet 2**  
Ruth Rosenberg, “Seeds in Hard Ground: Black  
Girlhood in *The Bluest Eye*” (1987)  
Thomas H. Fick, “‘Allegory of the Cave’: Movies, Consumption, and  
Platonic Realism in *The Bluest Eye*” (1989)
- Week 7**  
**April 4 M**                    Albert French, *Billy*, pages 1-128  
**Read from packet 1** material on Albert French

**Week 8**  
**April 11 M**

Albert French, *Billy*, pages 129-214

**Read from packet 1**

Sonja Darlington, "Capital Punishment for Juveniles:  
Albert French's *Billy*" (1998)

**Week 9**  
**April 16-1 May**

**EASTER BREAK**

**Week 10**  
**May 2 M**

James McBride, *The Color of Water*, pages 1-83

**Week 11**  
**May 9 M**

James McBride, *The Color of Water*, pages 85-176

**Week 12**  
**May 16 M**

James McBride, *The Color of Water*, pages 177-229

**Week 13**  
**May 23 M**

James McBride, *The Color of Water*, pages 231-285 and  
Afterword 287-295

**Read from packet** "Susan Saulny "Black? White? Asian?  
More Young Americans Choose All the Above" (2011)

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**BOOKS ON RESERVE**

**GENERAL ON AFRICAN AMERICANS**

- Awkward, Michael. *Inspiriting Influences: Tradition, Revision and Afro-American Women's Novels*. New York: Columbia UP, 1989.
- Carby, Hazel V. *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of Afro-American Woman Novelist*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.
- Christian, Barbara. *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers*. New York: Pergamon, 1985.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Gates Henry Louis Jr. *Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology*. New York: Plume, 1990.
- Graham, Maryemma. *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel*. Cambridge UP, 2004.
- Guy-Sheftall, Beverly, ed. *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought*. New York: The New Press, 1995.
- Henderson, Carol E. *Scarring the Black Body: Race and Representation in African American Literature*. 2002.
- Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death*. 1982.
- Massey, Douglass S., and Nancy A. Denton. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. 1993.
- Wade-Gayles, Gloria. *No Crystal Stair: Visions of Race and Sex in Black Women's Fiction*. New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1984.

**Books on RACE and GENDER**

- Campbell, James T. et al, eds. *Race, Nation, and Empire in American History*. 2007.
- Gates, Henry Louis Jr., and Cornell West. *The African American Century: How Black Americans have Shaped our Country*. 2002.
- Goldfield, David R. *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture 1940 to the Present*. 1990.
- Harris, Trudier. *Saints, Sinners, Saviors: Strong Black Women in African American Literature*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.
- hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press, 1992.
- Massey, Douglas S., and Nancy A. Denton. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. 1993.
- Richardson, Riche. *Black Masculinity, from the Uncle Tom US South to Gangsta*. 2007.
- Roediger, David R., ed. *Black on White: Black Writers on What It Means to Be White*. New York: Schocken, 1998.
- . *How Race Survived U.S. History: From Settlement and Slavery to the Obama Phenomenon*. 2008.
- Shipler, David. *A Country of Strangers: Blacks and Whites in America*. 1998.
- Taylor, Gary. *Buying Whiteness: Race, Culture and Identity from Columbus to Hip Hop*. New York: Palgrave, 2005.
- Wilson, Charles E. Jr. *Race and Racism in Literature* (2005)

**Books on reserve (page 2)**

**Books on TONI MORRISON**

- Conner, Marc C., ed. *The Aesthetics of Toni Morrison: Speaking the Unspeakable*. 2000.
- Denard, Carolyn C. *Toni Morrison: Conversations*. 2008.
- Furman, Jan. *Toni Morrison's Fiction*. 1996.
- Heinze, Denise. *The Dilemma of "Double-Consciousness": Toni Morrison's Novels*. Athens: Georgia UP, 1993.
- Iyasere, Solomon O. *Critical Insights: Toni Morrison*. 2010.
- Kubitscheck, Missy Dehn. *Toni Morrison: A Critical Companion*. Westport: Greenwood, 1998.
- McKay, Nellie Y., ed. *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison*. Boston: Hall, 1988.
- Middleton, David L. *Toni Morrison's Fiction: Contemporary Criticism*. 1999.
- Otten, Terry. *The Crime of Innocence in the Fiction of Toni Morrison*. 1989.
- Peach, Linden. *Toni Morrison*. 1995.
- Samuels, Wilfred, and Clenora Hudson Weems. *Toni Morrison*. Twayne, 1990.
- Tally, Justine, et al., eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison*. 2007.
- Taylor-Guthrie, Danille. *Conversations with Toni Morrison*. 1994.