

## LIT 2081: CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

Instructor: Phil Grech

Course: LIT 2081-02

Email: pgrech@fsu.edu

Days: Mon-Thur

Office: WMS 331

Time: 3:00-4:30PM

Office Hours: Tue/Wed 1-3PM, and by appt.

Room: WMS 121

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

Contemporary Literature encompasses the period from WWI to the present. It includes fiction, nonfiction, poetry, drama, and more. This course will examine fiction and nonfiction by authors of color. Historically, authors of color have been marginalized by various educational institutions. As a result, these authors' literary talents and cultural importance are frequently obscured. Yet, you may recognize some of the authors on our reading list: Toni Morrison won a Nobel Prize in Literature, a Pulitzer, and was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom; Ta-Nahesi Coates writes for *The New York Times* and *The Atlantic*, and won the 2015 National Book Award for Nonfiction; and, James Baldwin has been profoundly influential to both (among his own numerous personal successes).

Of course, our semester is a fast six weeks in length and our syllabus must sadly abbreviate the long list of qualified authors whom we can read. While thousands of authors are eligible to round out our reading list, the authors selected for us were chosen for their eminent voices in inspiring and being inspired by writers of color writ large. This course looks to explore and discuss these authors' literary talents and creativity, their portrayals of people of color in American society, and whatever *you* bring up in class discussion. This narrow focus allows us to concentrate a specific set of key cultural issues, ideas, and interpretations.

This course aims to teach students to identify tone, narration, form, theme, characterization, and other formal aspects of literature. Students will be encouraged to formulate their own interpretation of the assigned works based on their developing ability to recognize the decisions each author has made in constructing the text.

Students will be introduced to a variety of meaningful social and cultural contexts and asked to read the stories in each unit with an awareness of the social and cultural situations informing our understanding of the story's thematic meanings. A central goal of this course is to not only have students understand how the cultural and social milieu in which writers are writing within (or are revisiting) are shaping their work, but in turn, how we as readers are being shaped by these authors' vision of social, cultural, and historical events. An examination of any theme in a text is not just a literary investigation, but also an examination of human nature. Concepts such as characterization, setting, symbolism, history, culture, and so forth will be the platform from which we will explore. This course will revolve around decoding meaning from the latent and manifest content of literary works and connect that analysis to larger social, cultural, political, or economic issues particular to the works' historical and modern contexts.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, students will demonstrate the ability to:

- compare and interpret a variety of intellectual and/or artistic works within their cultural milieu.
- compare, interpret, and create or model cultural artifacts that function as widely varied reflections of human perspectives and/or practices.
- select, critically evaluate, and apply relevant areas of scholarship to produce an original analysis, project, creative work, performance, or other scholarly work that reflects a body of knowledge relevant to the course.
- select, critically evaluate, and apply relevant areas of scholarship to produce an original analysis, project, creative work, performance, or other scholarly work that reflects a body of knowledge relevant to the course.
- articulate the process of producing a work, from initial plan, to critique, revision, and completion.
- critique existing applications of scholarship in order to learn from past success and failures.

## REQUIRED TEXTS:

James Baldwin – *The Fire Next Time*

Ta-Nehisi Coates – *Between the World and Me*

Toni Morrison – *A Mercy*

Paul Beatty – *The Sellout*

Junot Díaz – *Drown*

Other assigned readings are on Blackboard (Course Library)

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### *Reading*

Assignments should be read and/or written prior to class meetings on the date assigned. The amount of reading for this course is considerable. There is no excuse for not reading. If you do not read, you will discover that passing this course is impossible. A failing grade is great for making you wish you could go back in time and do the reading. Note: If a Bb reading is scheduled bring a hard copy or electronic copy to class.

### *Student Participation*

Learning about composing requires you to be actively engaged participants. I do expect you all to be engaged in discussions and readings and to attend class regularly. One of the most important benefits of taking a college level literature class is the opportunity to interact within an intellectual community, test your ideas with your peers, and receive feedback to sharpen your ability to analyze and articulate. This is impossible without taking an active role in class.

Participation involves taking an active role in class discussions and in-class writing assignments. Here are four ways to be a good participator: (1) ask questions and make comments that further the discussion in a meaningful manner; (2) actively take notes; (3) bring the required book to every class meeting; and (4) participate in all classroom activities and exercises. Consistently doing these things will demonstrate your engagement with the material and maximize your experience of the course.

### *Attendance and Lateness*

Attendance is required. More than three absences is eligible for failure of the course. Being late to class three times equals one absence. If you arrive more than fifteen minutes late to class, you will be counted as absent. Excused absences include documented illness, deaths in the family and other documented crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holy days, and official University activities. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid excuse. Consideration

will also be given to students whose dependent children experience serious illness. Each absence *after* the permitted amount of excused absences will deduct half a letter grade from your final grade. For example, if your final grade is a B, but you have four absences, your final grade will end up being a B-; or, if you have five absences, your final grade will be a C+.

All students are expected to abide by this class attendance policy. Students must also provide, when possible, advance notice of absences as well as relevant documentation regarding absences to the instructor as soon as possible following the illness or event that led to an absence. Regardless of whether an absence is excused or unexcused, the student is responsible for making up all work that is missed.

### GRADING

For the sake of transparency, consider the percentages listed below as part of an overall total number of points. In other words, your final grade in the class is determined out of one hundred (100) possible points.

Grading breakdown:

Participation: 15%  
 Close Reading Paper: 25%  
 Final Paper: 30%  
 Final Exam: 30%

All assignments are due on the date specified. *If late, I deduct half a letter grade for every class period until the assignment is turned in.*

Recommendation on backing up: *I will not allow you to turn assignments in late due to any computer failure.* Your work should always be backed up and saved. I strongly recommend that you all back up your work regularly throughout the semester, for all of your classes, including this one.

### FINAL GRADES

A	93 – 100	C	73 – 76
A-	90 – 92	C-	70 – 72
B+	87 – 89	D+	67 – 69
B	83 – 86	D	63 – 66
B-	80 – 82	D-	60 – 62
C+	77 – 79	F	0 – 59

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**College-level  
 Writing  
 Requirement**

To demonstrate college-level writing competency as required by the State of Florida, the student must earn a “C-” (2.0) or higher in the course, and earn at least a “C-” average on the required writing assignments. If the student does not earn a “C-” average or better on the required writing assignments, the student will not earn an overall grade of “C-” or better in the course, no matter how well the student performs in the remaining portion of the course.

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## COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

## Close Reading Assignment:

The purpose of this assignment is to familiarize yourself, through practice, with close reading to base your interpretation and analysis of a particular text. We will be discussing this throughout the semester and practicing close readings in class, so you will be well-prepared for this assignment. Paper should be approximately 2-3 pages using MLA formatting and should be no less than 1 ¾ pages (papers failing to meet this minimum requirement will not receive credit). Use one text from our syllabus. **Due Thursday, July 13<sup>th</sup> in class.**

## Final Exam:

At the end of the semester you will take a cumulative final exam in which you will demonstrate your ability to analyze particular passages, connect themes and tropes across texts, and articulate your knowledge of the social issues encoded in the texts. Thus, the final exam will consist of passage identification/analysis and short essays. **Final exam scheduled for Thursday, August 3<sup>rd</sup>.**

## Final Paper:

The purpose of this assignment is to make and support an argument based on one of the texts we have read in class using textual evidence and support from two secondary scholarly sources. You may use more than one text for this assignment (e.g. if your argument extends across multiple texts). Research and scholarly sources are allowed, but not required for this assignment. Paper should be approximately 5-7 pages using MLA formatting. **Due Tuesday, August 1<sup>st</sup> in class.**

## CIVILITY CLAUSE

This class will tolerate neither disruptive language nor disruptive behavior. Disruptive language includes, but is not limited to, violent and/or belligerent and/or insulting remarks, including sexist, racist, homophobic or anti-ethnic slurs, bigotry, and disparaging commentary, either spoken or written (offensive slang is included in this category).

While each of you have a right to your own opinions, inflammatory language founded in ignorance or hate is unacceptable and will be dealt with immediately. Disruptive behavior includes the use of cell phones, pagers or any other form of electronic communication during the class session (email, web-browsing). Disruptive behavior also includes whispering or talking when another member of the class is speaking or engaged in relevant conversation (remember that I am a member of this class as well). This classroom functions on the premise of respect, and you will be asked to leave the classroom if you violate any part of this statement on civility. Remember that you will send me an email that indicates you have read and understand this policy.

## PLAGIARISM

Academic Honor Policy: The Florida State University Academic Honor Policy outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of students' academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Students are responsible for reading the Academic Honor Policy and for living up to their pledge to "...be honest and truthful and...[to] strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University." (Florida State University Academic Honor Policy, found at <http://fda.fsu.edu/Academics/Academic-Honor-Policy>.)

If you submit work that has been copied without attribution from some published or unpublished source (including the Internet), or that has been prepared by someone other than you, or that in any way misrepresents someone else's work as your own, you will face severe discipline by the university. The minimum penalty for plagiarism is a failing grade for the course; the maximum is expulsion from the university. You are responsible for citing sources fully and correctly according to MLA style guidelines.

#### DISABILITY SERVICES

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: (1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; and (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. Please note that instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodation to a student until appropriate verification from the Student Disability Resource Center has been provided. This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request.

For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact the:

Student Disability Resource Center - 874 Traditions Way - 108 Student Services Building

Florida State University - Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167

(850) 644-9566 (voice) - (850) 644-8504 (TDD) - [sdrc@admin.fsu.edu](mailto:sdrc@admin.fsu.edu) - <http://www.disabilitycenter.fsu.edu/>

#### MLA REMINDERS

Here are some basic MLA requirements:

- All papers must be entirely and thoroughly double-spaced and in Times New Roman font, size twelve (12).
- Paper should be in "No Spacing" format (Word defaults this to "Normal," so select 'Home' tab in Word. Then, on right half of header, select "No Spacing"—make sure this setting is consistent throughout your entire document).
- Last name and page number in upper right-hand corner (e.g. Grech 1).
- In upper left-hand corner, put: Name, instructor name, class, date. For example,

Your name

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- One inch margins on all sides.
- Leave only one space after periods or other punctuation marks.
- Indent the first line of paragraphs one half-inch from the left margin.
- Paper titles are centered and creative.
- Staple your paper.

## SUPPORT

### Reading Writing Center (RWC)

The Reading/Writing Center, located in Williams 222-C, is devoted to individualized instruction in reading and writing. Part of the English Department, the RWC serves Florida State University students at all levels and from all majors. Its clients include a cross-section of the campus: first-year students writing for composition class, upper-level students writing term papers, seniors composing letters of applications for jobs and graduate schools, graduate students working on theses and dissertations, multilingual students mastering English, and a variety of others. The RWC serves mostly walk-in tutoring appointments; however, it also offers three different courses for credit that specifically target reading, undergraduate-level writing, and graduate-level writing. The tutors in the RWC, all graduate students in English with training and experience in teaching composition, use a process-centered approach to help students at any stage of writing: from generating ideas, to drafting, organizing, and revising. While the RWC does not provide editing or proofreading services, its tutors can help writers build their own editing and proofreading strategies. Our approach to tutoring is to help students grow as writers, readers, and critical thinkers by developing strategies for writing in a variety of situations. During the fall and spring semesters, the RWC is open Monday through Thursday from 10-6 and Friday from 10-2. Hours of operation vary in summer. Visit the RWC website or call 644-6495 for information.

### Digital Studio

The Digital Studio provides support to students working individually or in groups on a variety of digital projects, such as designing a website, developing an electronic portfolio for a class, creating a blog, selecting images for a visual essay, adding voiceover to a presentation, or writing a script for a podcast. Tutors who staff the Digital Studio can help students brainstorm essay ideas, provide feedback on the content and design of a digital project, or facilitate collaboration for group projects and presentations. The Digital Studio currently has two locations: Williams 222-B and Johnston Ground. Students can use the Digital Studio to work on their own to complete class assignments or to improve overall capabilities in digital communication without a tutoring appointment if a workstation is available. However, tutor availability and workspace are limited so appointments are recommended. For hours and to make an appointment, visit the studio's website: <http://wr.english.fsu.edu/Digital-Studio/How-to-Make-an-Appointment>.

## LIBERAL STUDIES FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

The *Liberal Studies for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* Program at Florida State University builds an educational foundation that will enable FSU graduates to thrive both intellectually and materially and to support themselves, their families, and their communities through a broad and critical engagement with the world in which they live and work. Liberal Studies thus offers a transformative experience. This course has been approved as meeting the Liberal Studies requirements for Humanities and Cultural Practice and thus is designed to help you become a thoughtful patron of and participant in cultural practice.

## SYLLABUS CHANGE POLICY

Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation (grading) statement, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.

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Daily Schedule

## WEEK 1

26 June: Syllabus and Introductions

27 June: James Baldwin – *The Fire Next Time* pp. 1-47

28 June: James Baldwin – *The Fire Next Time* pp. 47-106

29 June: Ta-Nehisi Coates – “The Good, Racist People”; Joan Morgan – Hip-Hop Feminist (Bb Course Library)

\*Plagiarism exercises

## WEEK 2

3 July: Ta-Nehisi Coates – *Between the World and Me* pp. 1-71

\*In-class exercise on close readings

4 July: No class – Independence Day

5 July: Ta-Nehisi Coates – *Between the World and Me* pp. 73-132

6 July: Ta-Nehisi Coates – *Between the World and Me* pp. 133-152

## WEEK 3

10 July: Toni Morrison – *A Mercy* pp. 1-41

11 July: Toni Morrison – *A Mercy* pp. 42-83

12 July: Toni Morrison – *A Mercy* pp. 84-118

13 July: Toni Morrison – *A Mercy* pp. 119-158

\*Close reading paper due today

## WEEK 4

17 July: Toni Morrison – *A Mercy* pp. 159-196

18 July: Paul Beatty – *The Sellout* – Prologue pp. 1-24

19 July: Paul Beatty – *The Sellout* – “The Shit You Shovel,” chapters 1-3 pp. 27-56

20 July: Paul Beatty – *The Sellout* – “The Shit You Shovel,” chapters 4-6 pp. 57-89

## WEEK 5

24 July: Sandra Cisneros “Never Marry a Mexican” (Bb Course Library)

25 July: Sherman Alexie – “The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven” (Bb Course Library)

26 July: ZZ Packer – “Drinking Coffee Elsewhere” (Bb Course Library)

27 July: Junot Díaz – *Drown* – “Ysrael,” “Fiesta, 1980” pp. 1-43

WEEK 6

31 July: Junot Díaz – *Drown* – “Aurora,” “Aguantando,” “Drown,” “Boyfriend” pp. 45-117

\*Course evaluations

1 August: Junot Díaz – *Drown* – “Edison, New Jersey,” “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie,” pp. 120-149

\*Research paper due today

2 August: Junot Díaz – *Drown* – “No Face,” “Negocios,” pp. 151-208

3 August: Final Exam