

SOCIOLOGY OF BLACK AMERICAN LITERATURE

SYLLABUS

Note: This schedule of readings and topics is intended to be very flexible. Changes, if necessary or desirable, will be announced during our weekly meetings. A revised syllabus may be distributed after about seven meetings.

Report topics are either to be chosen from the list provided or suggested by individuals. Topic titles can then be inserted into the spaces provided.

Additional reading material may be handed out from week to week.

April 5: Course introduction; assignment of oral presentations; brief overview of Black-White relations as seen through current media coverage; discussion; writing sample.

HOMEWORK: Copy course materials: selections from *Black Writers of America* (Barksdale & Kinnamon); Bigsby & Thompson, "The black experience"; packet of "Significant Documents in Afro-American History"; and the *Newsweek* feature entitled "Black and White in America."

HOMEWORK: Read "The black experience" and Part 1 of B&K, "The Eighteenth-Century Beginnings."

Read also Oaudah Equiano, "The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African"; Phyllis Wheatley, poems.

April 12: Discussion of "The black experience" and other texts; discussion of Olaudah Equiano and Phillis Wheatley.

REPORT:

HOMEWORK: Read "The Struggle Against Slavery and Racism: 1800-1860" and Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*.

April 19: Discussion of Frederick Douglass.

REPORT:

HOMEWORK: Read section entitled "Folk Literature."

7 April 26: Discussion of Black Folk Literature and texts; listen to recordings of traditional black folk songs (if available).

REPORT:

HOMEWORK: Read "The Black Man in the Civil War: 1861-

1865." Read "Two Black Soldiers Comment" and the packet of "Significant Documents in Afro-American History."

May 3: Discussion of readings, soldiers' comments.

REPORT:

HOMEWORK: Read "Reconstruction and Reaction: 1965-1915" and W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, *Resolution at Harpers Ferry, 1906*, *A Litany of Atlanta*, *The Immediate Program of the American Negro (1915)*, *In Black*, and *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois*.

May 10: Discussion of Du Bois and Reconstruction.

REPORT:

HOMEWORK: Read Booker T. Washington, excerpt from *Up From Slavery*.

May 17: Discussion of Booker T. Washington.

REPORT:

HOMEWORK: Read "Race and Politics," Robert Brown Elliott's "Speech on the Civil Rights Bill."

Read Tales, Prison Songs, Bad Man Songs, ~~The~~ Blues, and Work Songs under "Folk Literature" section.

* May 24: Discussion of Elliott and Folk Songs.

REPORT:

HOMEWORK: Read "Renaissance and Radicalism: 1915-1945." Read Langston Hughes, all poems, selection from *The Big Sea*, and *Dear Dr. Butts*.

Read some of the poems of Countee Cullen.

* May 31: Discussion of Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes, and Countee Cullen.

REPORT:

HOMEWORK: Read Richard Wright, *Native Son*.

June 7: Discussion of *Native Son*. Possibility of seeing recent movie version, in English.

REPORT:

HOMEWORK: Read "The Present Generation: Since 1945" and Gwendolyn Brooks' poems. Read selections from James

Baldwin, especially *Sonny's Blues*, and Amiri Baraka, especially *The Last Days of the American Empire*.

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Generals

June 14: Discussion of Brooks, Baldwin, Baraka, the new Black Aesthetic.

REPORT:

HOMEWORK: Read Charles Fuller, *A Soldier's Play*.

June 21: Discussion of Fuller. Possibility of seeing recent movie version of *Soldier's Play*, in English.

REPORT: Tues

HOMEWORK: Read Martin Luther King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail" and "I Have a Dream." Read Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.

June 28: Discussion of Fuller, King, and Malcolm X.

REPORT:

HOMEWORK: Read selections of current black writers to be passed out in class.

July 5: Discussion of current black writers.

REPORT:

SOCIOLOGY OF BLACK AMERICAN LITERATURE

POLICY SHEET

Instructor: Jay Dougherty

Home Phone: 712 72 28

Office: Presently nonexistent;

leave messages with Frau Buchholz in the English Department main office.

Texts: Xeroxed packet from *Black Writers of America: A Comprehensive Anthology*, eds. Richard Barksdale and Kenneth Kinnamon.

Xeroxed chapter from *Intro to American Studies*, "The black experience," by C.W.E. Bigsby and Roger Thompson.

Xeroxed section from *Significant Documents in Afro-American History*.

Richard Wright, *Native Son*

Charles Fuller, *A Soldier's Play*

Note: all xeroxed material is available from the instructor. The two books are available from Margot Shoeller's Bücherstube, Knesebeckstraße. No need to purchase the books right away.

Requirements: 1. Class attendance. In addition to introducing you to the large field of Black Studies, one of the goals of this course is to allow you ample opportunity to practice your English verbal skills. This aim will, of course, be defeated if you choose not to come to class. More than two missed classes, therefore, will have a negative impact upon your grade for the course.

2. Oral Report. The purpose of the oral report is three-fold: it will give you the opportunity to explore in-depth a topic not covered or only partially covered by our readings, thus providing you with a good foundation on which to later base your paper; the class will benefit from the extra knowledge you bring to it; and your presentation skills will be exercised.

It is requested that you not read your oral report directly from a printed page. Rather, use notes, handouts, charts, etc., as an outline for your talk. Reports should be anywhere from 15-30 minutes.

3. One Paper of 6-10 pages on a topic of your choice. Can be longer, but not much shorter. Please type.

4. Final Exam. The exam is primarily an incentive to ensure that you read the texts. If you do read the texts and come to class, the examination should present you with no great problems.

Course Grade: Calculated, roughly, as follows: 40% oral participation, class attendance, final exam; 40% final paper; 20% oral presentation.

Extra Credit: I strongly recommend that you keep a vocabulary notebook, English-English, during the course of this semester, and fill it with previously unknown words that you have gathered from our texts or from our discussions. I would ask this even of my American students, and, if you turn this notebook in to me at the end of the semester, I will take it into consideration in the calculation of your final grade. A vocabulary test, consisting of words drawn from our texts, will probably be part of the final examination.

Remarks: In this course, we will be covering a very large span of time--from the mid-eighteenth Century to the present--very quickly. We will, by necessity, then, be able to look only at representative works by a relatively few black writers. Nevertheless, it should be possible, through close readings of the texts and through our discussions, to arrive at some well-informed inferences concerning the changing physical and spiritual conditions of black people in the United States.

As you read the assigned texts in preparation for our weekly meetings, please not only take notes on the content of what you read but, more importantly, write down questions that arise concerning any aspects of the material and bring those questions up during class sessions.

I'll try to keep the classes as lively as possible by bringing in supplementary materials, like recordings, relevant written materials, and, if possible, video recordings.