

# ETHNIC AMERICAN LITERATURE

ENG 117.01 (13733) Spring 2009

MWF 11:15-12:05, Bartlett 302

Teaching Associate: Eric Fortier

## DESCRIPTION:

**Ethnic American Literature** will examine literary and film narratives by African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, and American Indians, particularly narratives that illustrate the shifting dynamics of race relations and ethnic identity in the United States in the twentieth century. Within the context of changing understandings of race and ethnicity, we will ask such questions as: How do these authors and characters create a place for themselves within American society and culture? What expectations are placed upon them as members of ethnic groups? Are they aware of these expectations? Do they cooperate with or resist these expectations? To what extent do they recognize themselves as “ethnic”? Are they able to reconcile this ethnic identity with their status as American citizens? If not, then what are the tensions between the “ethnic” and the “American,” and how are these tensions navigated? What are the psychological and social consequences of a dual identity, what W.E.B. Du Bois called “double consciousness”? What functions does the assertion of ethnicity serve? How are ethnicities constructed? Finally, we will examine the ways in which our texts give shape to these issues through the elements of narrative form: through close reading we will hone our skills of observation, analysis, interpretation, and criticism.

## GOALS:

- a) to acquire facility with some basic terms and concepts for discussing race and ethnicity, and to demonstrate the relevance of these terms and concepts to the course texts
- b) to acquire facility with some basic terms and concepts of literary and film analysis, and to demonstrate the relevance of these terms and concepts to the course texts
- c) to hone our skills of observation, analysis, interpretation, and criticism, and to demonstrate these skills in persuasive oral and written arguments

## REQUIRED TEXTS:

### **Books (available at Amherst Books):**

ZZ Packer, *Drinking Coffee Elsewhere* (Riverhead)

James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (Hill & Wang)

John Okada, *No-No Boy* (U of Washington Press)

Louise Erdrich, *Love Medicine* (Harper)

Junot Diaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (Riverhead)

### **Films (to be watched in class):**

*Zoot Suit* (dir. Luis Valdez, 1981, 104 minutes)

*Daughters of the Dust* (dir. Julie Dash, 1991, 112 minutes)

*Chan is Missing* (dir. Wayne Wang, 1982, 80 minutes)

(The films are on reserve at the Du Bois Library, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. *Zoot Suit* is on reserve from March 2 to March 13; *Daughters of the Dust* is on reserve from April 5 to April 18; *Chan is Missing* is on reserve from April 27 to May 11.)

**Additional short readings** are listed on the schedule and can be accessed online.

### ASSIGNMENTS:

- a) **Reading.** This means attentive, careful reading. Spend some time making notes, reflecting, and preparing comments or questions to discuss in class.
- b) **Participation.** Participation means being prepared for and contributing to the discussion, as well as listening attentively to your classmates' contributions.
- c) **Quizzes.** Regular quizzes will be given. You won't need to study for these; if you are reading the books and watching the films carefully and attentively, you should do fine. Quizzes are pass/fail and may not be made up.
- d) **Papers.** Four papers (3 pages minimum) will be your opportunity to demonstrate your analytical and rhetorical skills. Paper topics will be assigned one week in advance.

### GRADING BREAKDOWN:

65 % Short papers

25% Participation

10% Quizzes

### GRADE EQUIVALENTS:

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

### OTHER POLICIES:

- a) **Contacting Me:** I try to check my email every day, but sometimes I forget, especially on weekends. If you need prompt assistance, please call my cell phone. If you need to leave something for me, use my mailbox on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of Bartlett.
- b) **Office Hours and Extra Help:** My office hours are your time. If you have questions about, or difficulties with, the work in this course, or just want to chat,

please come see me. As writing is a key component of this course, I strongly recommend that each of you visits me to discuss paper topics and get my feedback on your drafts. In addition, I encourage all students to take advantage of the Writing Center. Located in the Learning Commons of the W. E. B. Du Bois Library, the University Writing Center is a free tutorial service where you can receive feedback on your writing at any stage in the writing process. Access the Writing Center website and schedule appointments at [www.umass.edu/writingcenter/index.html](http://www.umass.edu/writingcenter/index.html)

- c) **Attendance:** You are allowed three absences, which I suggest you reserve for illness or emergency. For each subsequent absence, your course grade will drop by one third of a letter; more than nine absences will result in a failing grade for the course. Documentation of illness or emergency must be delivered to me immediately upon your return to class. If you know in advance that you will not attend class, please let me know as soon as possible.
- d) **Tardiness:** We have a lot of ground to cover in three and a half months, and every minute counts. If you enter the room after class has begun, I consider you tardy. Three tardies will count as one absence. If you arrive more than fifteen minutes late, or leave more than fifteen minutes early, I consider you absent.
- e) **Late Work:** All work is due in class on the specified date. Exceptions will be made only in the case of documented illness or emergency. Your grade on an assignment will drop by one full letter for each day late. Work received more than three days late will not receive credit.
- f) **Plagiarism:** It is fine to use other people's words and ideas in your writing, as long as you acknowledge the source. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to) inadequately citing or paraphrasing a quotation, purchasing a paper online, copying another student's homework, and submitting work you wrote for another class. Suspected cases of plagiarism will be handled according to the University's Academic Honesty Policy, which can be found at [www.umass.edu/dean\\_students](http://www.umass.edu/dean_students)
- g) **Classroom Environment:** When in class, please be circumspect in your words and behavior. A student whose behavior consistently interferes with other students' learning or my teaching will be asked to withdraw from the course.
- h) **Food & Cell Phones:** Drinks in lidded containers are fine, but please don't bring food into the classroom. Please recycle and/or otherwise dispose of your refuse. Cell phones, iPods, and other electronic gadgetry should remain off during class.
- i) **Accommodations:** Contact me to arrange disability-related accommodations.

## SCHEDULE

*This schedule is subject to change. Any changes to due dates will be announced at least one week in advance.*

DAY	IN CLASS	READING & WRITING DUE
M 1/26	introduction	read syllabus, obtain texts
W 1/28	elements of narrative form	“Elements of Narrative Form” (handout); Packer, “Brownies,” “Doris is Coming”
F 1/30		Packer, “The Ant of the Self,” “Drinking Coffee Elsewhere”
M 2/2		Packer, “Speaking in Tongues”
W 2/4		
F 2/6	race and ethnicity: terms and concepts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. DuBois, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” from <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i>: <a href="http://www.bartleby.com/114">www.bartleby.com/114</a></li> <li>2. “What is Race?": <a href="http://academic.udayton.edu/Race/01race/race.htm">http://academic.udayton.edu/Race/01race/race.htm</a></li> <li>3. “Abolish the White Race”: <a href="http://www.racetractor.org">www.racetractor.org</a> (click on “sitemap,” search drop-down menu)</li> </ol>
M 2/9	<b>add/drop period ends</b>	Johnson, <i>Autobiography</i> Preface-51
W 2/11		Johnson, <i>Autobiography</i> 52-88
F 2/13	<b>paper topics distributed</b>	Johnson, <i>Autobiography</i> 89-148
M 2/16	<b>Presidents’ Day: no class</b>	
W 2/18		Johnson, <i>Autobiography</i> 149-211
F 2/20		<b>first paper due</b>
M 2/23		Okada, <i>No-No Boy</i> Preface-49

W 2/25		Okada, <i>No-No Boy</i> 51-101
F 2/27		Okada, <i>No-No Boy</i> 103-143
M 3/2		Okada, <i>No-No Boy</i> 145-213
W 3/4		Okada, <i>No-No Boy</i> 215-251
F 3/6	Valdez, <i>Zoot Suit</i> paper topics distributed	“Elements of Film Form” (handout)
M 3/9	Valdez, <i>Zoot Suit</i>	
W 3/11	Valdez, <i>Zoot Suit</i>	
F 3/13	Valdez, <i>Zoot Suit</i>	second paper due
<b>SPRING BREAK</b>		
M 3/23		Erdrich, <i>Love Medicine</i> to page 60
W 3/25		Erdrich, <i>Love Medicine</i> 61-7, 85-145
F 3/27		Erdrich, <i>Love Medicine</i> 146-211
M 3/30		Erdrich, <i>Love Medicine</i> 212-258
W 4/1		Erdrich, <i>Love Medicine</i> 276-97, 329-67
F 4/3		
M 4/6	Dash, <i>Daughters of the Dust</i>	
W 4/8	Dash, <i>Daughters of the Dust</i> paper topics distributed	

F 4/10	Dash, <i>Daughters of the Dust</i>	
M 4/13	Dash, <i>Daughters of the Dust</i>	
W 4/15	Dash, <i>Daughters of the Dust</i>	<b>third paper due</b>
F 4/17		Diaz, <i>Oscar Wao</i> to page 50
M 4/20	<b>Patriots' Day: no class</b>	
Tu 4/21	<b>Monday class schedule</b>	Diaz, <i>Oscar Wao</i> 51-165
W 4/22		Diaz, <i>Oscar Wao</i> 167-201
F 4/24		Diaz, <i>Oscar Wao</i> 203-261
M 4/27		Diaz, <i>Oscar Wao</i> 263-335
W 4/29		
F 5/1	Wang, <i>Chan is Missing</i>	
M 5/4	Wang, <i>Chan is Missing</i> <b>paper topics distributed</b>	
W 5/6	Wang, <i>Chan is Missing</i>	
F 5/8	Wang, <i>Chan is Missing</i>	
M 5/11	evaluation & reflection	<b>fourth paper due</b>