

## AML4242 – Studies in Twentieth-Century American Literature and Culture

From *Twelve Years a Slave* to *Black Panther*: Reading and Screening Blackness in the Contemporary Era  
Section #3A28 (Class #10431), Spring 2020

**\*Class sessions will take place on Zoom during Week 1 and Canvas for the remainder of the semester**

**Instructor Name:** Rachal Burton

**Course meeting times & locations:** M W F [Asynchronous/Online] | Period 2 (8:30 – 9:20 a.m.)

**Office Hours and Location:** M [via Zoom] | Periods 7-8 (1:55 – 3:50 p.m.) and by appointment

**Course website:** CANVAS

**Instructor Email:** rachal.burton@ufl.edu

### Course Description:

In a vast amount of American literature and film, race is the central or underlying theme that pervades the narratives of countless texts. Moreover, in said works Blackness is often the primary topic. Whether portrayed as stereotypes in order to defend the institution of slavery or conveyed as superheroes to highlight the fact that #BlackLivesMatter, Blackness and, by extension, anti-Blackness, are in no way new concepts vis-à-vis the American imaginary. Still, race, as literary theorist Hortense Spillers crucially notes, “travels: while we are confronted from time to time, with almost-evidence that the age of the post-race subject is upon us, we are just as certain that its efficacies can, and do, move from one position to another and back again.” Indeed, although many considered the U.S. a post-racial society after the 2008 election of President Barack Obama, the subsequent 2016 election of Donald Trump, perhaps, suggested otherwise. Discourses concerning (anti-)Blackness in American literature and film, then, persist today and often intersect with conversations about class, gender, and sexuality, to name a few. Keeping this in mind, literary works and films by and about Black people offer a unique perspective on (non-)ontology in the American context: that is, what it means to exist within civil society as Human, or outside of it and positioned, instead, by social death. In other words, Black literature and film importantly demonstrate how “race” and, more specifically, Blackness, “is not *simply* a metaphor and nothing more; it is the outcome of a politics.”

### \*COVID Statement:

This course was originally designed as a face-to-face (F2F) class, and due to the exceptional circumstances with the COVID pandemic this year it has been changed to an online format. Classes will be held synchronously during Week 1 and asynchronously for the remainder of the semester. Please be sure to download Zoom on your personal computer before the start of the class and familiarize yourself with how it works. Students may access Zoom meetings on Canvas. When joining a Zoom session, I’ve selected the option that everyone will be muted upon joining, so when I ask open ended questions for you to answer, you will first have to unmute yourself before speaking. Students will be responsible for keeping up with readings, watching the assigned films, and turning in discussion board and group posts. Class lessons (PowerPoint lecture slides) will be accessible on Canvas. If there are ever any outside circumstances impacting your work in this class, please reach out to me and we will work together on finding a solution.

### \*Required Texts/Materials:

- Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave* [via [Doc South](#)] (1853)
- Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929)
- Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959)
- James Baldwin, *If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974)
- Sapphire, *Push* (1996)
- Ta-Nehisi Coates and Brian Stelfreeze, *Black Panther: A Nation Under Our Feet – Book 1* (2016) [free on [Amazon Prime/Kindle](#)]

\*Required texts are available via Course Reserves and/or Internet Archive unless otherwise noted

\*\*Supplemental readings are available on Canvas and/or via Course Reserves

\*\*\*Films are available via Course Reserves, Kanopy, and/or for free with subscriptions to various streaming websites (e.g. Amazon Prime, Hulu, Netflix, etc.). Otherwise, students may rent films on Prime or YouTube at relatively low costs (~\$3-\$5/film).

### **Recommended Texts:**

- Chris Baldick, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Fourth Edition) (2015)

### **Online Resources:**

- Literary terms
  - ❖ <http://ai.stanford.edu/~csewell/culture/litterms.htm>
  - ❖ [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject\\_specific\\_writing/writing\\_in\\_literature/literary\\_terms/index.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/writing_in_literature/literary_terms/index.html)
- Film terms
  - ❖ <https://www.filmsite.org/filmterms1.html>
- MLA formatting
  - ❖ [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/mla\\_style/mla\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/mla\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_and_style_guide.html)

### **Assignments (see below for Grading Rubric):**

#### **1. Attendance/Participation (100 points)**

Students are expected to read the assigned readings and view screenings before class. Consistent participation in Zoom class discussions and online posts, as well as demonstrated knowledge of the assigned readings and films, will also contribute to this portion of the final grade. Students should take notes recording their questions and observations as they read the assigned texts and view the required screenings.

#### **2. Response Papers (4 x 100 = 400 points)**

During the semester, students are required to submit four (4) response papers. The response papers should be 1.5 - 2 pages, single-spaced, and convey students' critical reactions to the assigned weekly texts and films. Well-written responses will provide textual evidence and reasoning to support students' claims.

#### **3. Midterm Exam (200 points)**

This take-home exam will be distributed on-line (via Canvas). Students will be required to define major terms and concepts and answer short essay questions based on readings, films, lectures, and class discussions.

#### **4. Final Paper (300 points)**

This assignment asks students to write a paper of about 7-8 pages and double-spaced that critically analyzes major theme(s), texts, and films discussed in class. Students should reference at least five secondary sources. The goal is for students to produce a strong conceptual argument supported by textual and contextual evidence.

## Course Policies:

1. *Attendance* is required.
  - Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this class are consistent with university policies that can be found at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.
    - You are allowed **three** absences in the form of missed discussion board posts. **Each absence after three will lower your final grade by a third letter grade.**
  - If a student misses **six** periods during a semester, they will fail the entire course. **Only** those absences involving university-sponsored events, such as athletics and band, and religious holidays are exempt from this policy. Absences related to university-sponsored events must be discussed with the instructor **prior** to the date that will be missed. If absent due to a scheduled event, students are still responsible for turning assignments in on time.
  - When you are absent, it is your responsibility to find out what you've missed *and* come to the next class prepared; contact a classmate or the instructor to find out what work you've missed. It is also your responsibility to make yourself aware of all due dates. You should check Canvas daily for new announcements or assignment details/rubrics.
2. *Tardiness*: If students enter class after roll has been taken, they are late, which disrupts the entire class. **Three** instances of tardiness count as **one** absence.
3. *Classroom behavior and netiquette*: Please keep in mind that students come from diverse cultural, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. Some of the texts we will discuss and write about engage controversial topics and opinions. Diversified student backgrounds combined with provocative texts require that you demonstrate respect for ideas that may differ from your own. Disrespectful behavior will result in dismissal, and accordingly absence, from the class. You are expected to be courteous in email messages and threaded discussions.
4. *UF's policy on Sexual Harassment*: The University of Florida is committed to providing a safe educational, working, and residential environment that is free from sexual harassment or misconduct directed towards any and all members of the community: <https://titleix.ufl.edu/policy-statement/>
5. *Paper Format & Submission*: Papers will be submitted in an accepted electronic file format (.doc, .docx, .rtf) on Canvas; no other formats are permitted. Your papers must be formatted according to MLA style and should be in 12-point Times New Roman font and double-spaced with 1-inch margins and the appropriate heading and pages numbered.
6. *Paper Maintenance Responsibilities*. Keep duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course. Save all returned, graded work until the semester is over.
7. *Academic Honesty and Definition of Plagiarism*. UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge: "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: 'On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.'" The Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honorcode/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions.
  - A Student must not represent as the Student's own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to:
    - a. Stealing, misquoting, insufficiently paraphrasing, or patch-writing.
    - b. Self-plagiarism, which is the reuse of the Student's own submitted work, or the simultaneous submission of the Student's own work, without the full and clear acknowledgment and permission of the Faculty to whom it is submitted.
    - c. Submitting materials from any source without proper attribution.

- d. Submitting a document, assignment, or material that, in whole or in part, is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment the Student did not author.
8. Students with *disabilities* who are requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)), which will provide appropriate documentation to give the instructor early in the semester.
  9. *Students who are in distress* or who are in need of counseling or urgent help: please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu) or 352-392-1575 so that a team member can reach out to you. UF's Counseling and Wellness Center offers additional support: 352-392-1575, or contact them online: <https://counseling.ufl.edu/>
  10. For information on UF Grading policies, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>
  11. *Course Evaluations*. Toward the end of the semester, you will receive email messages asking you to go online and evaluate this course: <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals/Default.aspx>
  12. Students who face difficulties completing the course or who are in need of counseling or urgent help may call the on-campus Counseling and Wellness Center (352) 392-1575, or contact them online: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>
  13. *Policy on environmental sustainability*. Whenever possible, I will use paper-sparing electronic media to distribute our course materials. Consider purchasing electronic editions of assigned texts when they are available or used copies of print texts. If you do not elect to keep your print books, consider sharing them with others after the semester ends. (For example, you could donate them to the Alachua County [Friends of the Library](#) annual book sale.)
  14. *Writing Studio*: The University Writing Studio (formerly the Writing Center) is available to all UF students. Students have the opportunity to work one-on-one with a consultant on issues specific to their own particular development. Because the Writing Studio's aim is to help students become more effective writers, they do not simply proofread or edit documents. They can, however, assist students to become better proofreaders and editors of their own work.

### Tentative Schedule

\*The calendar contains the reading and writing assignments for the semester. Readings will be discussed on the day they appear, and assignments will be due by 11:59 p.m. on the date they appear. Students should note that the schedule is a guideline & may change.

| Wk | Date         | Assigned Readings   | Assignments Due          |
|----|--------------|---|--------------------------|
| 1  | M 8/31       | Class Introductions; Watch <i>Four Women</i> (dir. Julie Dash, 1977, 7 min)<br>[Zoom]                                     |                          |
|    | W 9/2        | Discuss <i>Four Women</i> [Zoom]  |                          |
|    | F 9/4        | Solomon Northup, <i>Twelve Years a Slave</i> (Editor's Preface and Chs. 1-3)<br>[Zoom]                                    | Virtual Ice Breaker      |
| 2  | <b>M 9/7</b> | <b>NO CLASS – Labor Day</b>   |                          |
|    | W 9/9        | Northup, <i>Twelve Years a Slave</i> (Chs. 4-12)  |                          |
|    | F 9/11       | Northup, <i>Twelve Years a Slave</i> (Chs. 13-16)   |                          |
| 3  | M 9/14       | Northup, <i>Twelve Years a Slave</i> (Chs. 17-22); Watch: <i>12 Years a Slave</i> (dir. Steve McQueen, 2013, 2 hr 14 min) | DB 1                     |
|    | W 9/16       | Discuss <i>12 Years a Slave</i> (film)  | Group Post 1             |
|    | F 9/18       | Salamishah Tillet, "I Got No Comfort in This Life": The Increasing Importance of Patsey in <i>12 Years a Slave</i> "      | <b>Response Paper #1</b> |
| 4  | M 9/21       | Nella Larsen, <i>Passing</i> (Part One and Part Two: Ch. 1)   |                          |
|    | W 9/23       | Larsen, <i>Passing</i> (Part Two: Chs. 2-4 and Part Three: Ch. 1)   |                          |
|    | F 9/25       | Larsen, <i>Passing</i> (Part Three: Chs. 2-4)   | DB 2                     |

|  |                          |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| 5  | M 9/28                   | Rebecca Nisetich, "Reading Race in Nella Larsen's <i>Passing</i> and the Rhinelander Case"; Watch: <i>Imitation of Life</i> (dir. John M. Stahl, 1934, 1 hr 51 min)          | Group Post 2             |
|  | W 9/30                   | Discuss <i>Imitation of Life</i>   | <b>Response Paper #2</b> |
|  | F 10/2                   | Lorraine Hansberry, <a href="#">A Raisin in the Sun</a>  |                          |
| 6  | M 10/5                   | Hansberry, <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> ; Watch: <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> (dir. Daniel Petrie, 1961, 2 hr 8 min)   | DB 3                     |
|  | W 10/7                   | Discuss <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>   | Group Post 3             |
|  | F 10/9                   | Carol M. Rose and Richard R. W. Brooks, "Racial Covenants and Housing Segregation, Yesterday and Today"  |                          |
| 7  | M 10/12                  | Rose and Brooks, "Racial Covenants and Housing Segregation, Yesterday and Today"   |                          |
|  | <b>W 10/14</b>           | <b>MIDTERM EXAM</b>  |                          |
|  | F 10/16                  | Seymour Chatman, "What Novels Do That Films Can't (and Vice Versa)"  |                          |
| 8  | M 10/19                  | James Baldwin, <i>If Beale Street Could Talk</i>   |                          |
|  | W 10/21                  | Baldwin, <i>If Beale Street Could Talk</i>   |                          |
|  | F 10/23                  | Baldwin, <i>If Beale Street Could Talk</i> ; Watch: <i>If Beale Street Could Talk</i> (dir. Barry Jenkins, 2018, 1 hr 59 min)  | DB 4                     |
| 9  | M 10/26                  | Discuss <i>If Beale Street Could Talk</i>  | Group Post 4             |
|  | W 10/28                  | Michelle Alexander, "Introduction"   |                          |
|  | F 10/30                  | Alexander, "Introduction"  | <b>Response Paper #3</b> |
| 10   | M 11/2                   | Sapphire, <i>Push</i>  |                          |
|  | W 11/4                   | Sapphire, <i>Push</i>  |                          |
|  | F 11/6                   | Sapphire, <i>Push</i>  |                          |
| 11   | M 11/9                   | Screening: <i>Precious</i> (dir. Lee Daniels, 2009, 1hr 50 min)  | DB 5                     |
|  | W 11/11                  | <b>NO CLASS – Veterans Day</b>   |                          |
|  | F 11/13                  | Michelle Jarman, "Cultural Consumption and Rejection of Precious Jones: Pushing Disability into the Discussion of Sapphire's <i>Push</i> and Lee Daniels's <i>Precious</i> " |                          |
| 12   | M 11/16                  | Jarman, "Cultural Consumption and Rejection of Precious Jones"   | <b>Response Paper #4</b> |
|  | W-F 11/18-11/20          | Screening: <a href="#">Moonlight</a> (dir. Barry Jenkins, 2016)  |                          |
| 13   | M 11/23                  | Discuss <i>Moonlight</i>   | Group Post 5             |
|  | <b>W 11/25 – F 11/27</b> | <b>NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Break</b>   |                          |
| 14   | M 11/30                  | Jared Sexton, "Shadow and Myth: On <i>Stranger Inside</i> and <i>Moonlight</i> "   | DB 6                     |
|  | W 12/2                   | Ta Nahisi Coates and Brian Stelfreeze, <i>Black Panther: A Nation Under Our Feet Book One</i>  |                          |
|  | F 12/4                   | Coates and Stelfreeze, <i>Black Panther: A Nation Under Our Feet Book One</i>  |                          |
| 15   | M 12/7                   | Cathy Thomas, "'Black' Comics as a Cultural Archive of Black Life in America"; Watch: <i>Black Panther</i> (dir. Ryan Coogler, 2018, 2hr 14 min)                             | Group Post 6             |
|  | W 12/9                   | Discuss <i>Black Panther</i>   | DB 7                     |
| <b>Final Paper Due Wed, Dec 16 by 11:59 p.m.</b> |                          |  |                          |

## Grading/Assessment Rubric

|    |      |        |          |    |      |       |         |
|----|------|--------|----------|----|------|-------|---------|
| A  | 4.0  | 93-100 | 930-1000 | C  | 2.0  | 73-76 | 730-769 |
| A- | 3.67 | 90-92  | 900-929  | C- | 1.67 | 70-72 | 700-729 |
| B+ | 3.33 | 87-89  | 870-899  | D+ | 1.33 | 67-69 | 670-699 |
| B  | 3.0  | 83-86  | 830-869  | D  | 1.0  | 63-66 | 630-669 |
| B- | 2.67 | 80-82  | 800-829  | D- | 0.67 | 60-62 | 600-629 |
| C+ | 2.33 | 77-79  | 770-799  | E  | 0.00 | 0-59  | 0-599   |

## General Paper Rubric

Papers are generally graded based on how well they meet the following criteria:

- A clear and concise thesis statement
- Paragraphs that focus on one main idea but include several examples to illustrate main point(s)
- Clear transitions between sentences and paragraphs
- Seamless use of direct, partial, and/or paraphrased quotes from primary and/or secondary sources
- Clearly written with precise language and word choice
- Acceptable use of spelling, syntax, capitalization, and grammar
- Proper use of MLA formatting