

LIT 6934
Spring 2021

Professor: Dr. King

Class meets: R 6-8th periods

Place: See ZOOM Conferences in Canvas for link

Office Hrs.: T 4th; R 4-5th periods by ZOOM appointment

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TONI MORRISON



“When you really look at the stereotypes of Black women, the worst you can say about them, that is once you disregard the vocabulary and the dirty words and deal with the substance of what is being said is quite complementary. Think about it. What is being said is that Black women are wonderful mothers and nurturers (mammies), that we are sexually at home in our own bodies (oversexed), and that we are self-sufficient and tough (henpecking and overbearing). And isn’t that exactly what every woman wants to be: loving and nurturing, sexually at home in her body, competent and strong?”

-Toni Morrison in an interview with *Ebony Magazine*, July 1988

Description: This course introduces students to an extraordinary woman whose work, both fictional and critical, has shaken the foundations of American literature (and criticism) to reconstitute both it and the boundaries of its canon. Students will investigate why critics herald Toni Morrison as the “most formally sophisticated novelist in the history of African-American literature” while also discovering why she is its most renowned. Morrison’s work has earned the highest accolades in contemporary literary circles: The National Book Critics Circle Award and the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award for *Song of Solomon* in 1977, the Pulitzer Prize and the Robert F. Kennedy Award for *Beloved* in 1988, the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993 and the Presidential Medal of Freedom (2012) (among others). Her novels explore themes of naturalistic fiction while also engaging womanist thought, responsibility and respectability, and the more dramatic themes of modernism: death, love, rebirth, and memory.

They are lyrical prose memorials to suffering and loss that move beyond characters' victimization towards rectification, reconciliation, renewal, and revival.

Focus: Prior to her transition in 2019, Toni Morrison published eleven novels, two plays, a libretto, two short stories, five children's books and several critical pieces. This semester we will read many of her novels, including what critics call the *Beloved* Trilogy. Our discussions and considerations focus on several themes: the relationship of Morrison's work to womanist thought, the sacred to the secular, history and heritage, identity, "race, borders and the desire for belonging." We will evaluate what critics have to say about Morrison (how they construct and reconstruct the artist and her work) as well as evaluate the author's own critical perspectives on art and society.

Required Texts and Materials:

- *The Origins of Others* (2017)
- *The Bluest Eye* (1970)
- *Sula* (1974)
- *Song of Solomon* (1977)
- *Beloved* (1987)
- *Jazz* (1992)
- *Paradise* (1997)
- *God Help the Child* (2015)

Suggested reading:

The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations

COURSE CALENDAR

Week 1: 1/14

Course Introduction, Panelists Assignments

Week 2: 1/21 Morrison's "Nobel Lecture" and "Definition of Womanism" (see Canvas "files")

The Origin of Others (2017)

Film: (in-class) Bill Moyers, *A World of Ideas*

Week 3: 1/28 *The Bluest Eye*

Open discussion (prepare brief commentary and discussion question)

Week 4: 2/4 *Sula*

1st Response Papers (all students) 10 minutes each with no respondent

Week 5: 2/11 *Song of Solomon*

2nd Response Papers (all students) 10 minutes each with no respondent

Due: Critical Review Paper Exchange – *Beloved*

Week 6: 2/18 *Tar Baby*

3rd Response Papers (all students) 10 minutes each with no respondent

Week 7: 2/25 *Beloved*

Viewing the movie *Beloved*

Due: Critical Review Paper Exchange – *Beloved*

Suggested reading: "Drawing the Color Line" by Howard Zinn (found under "Files")

Week 8: 3/4 *Beloved*

4th paper: Critical Review (Panelists 2) 15 min. each w/ respondent (#1)

Open Discussion (prepare brief commentary and discussion question)

Due: Critical Review Paper Exchange – *Jazz*

Week 9: 3/7 *Jazz*

4th paper: Critical Review Papers (Panelists 4) 15 min. w/ respondent (#3)

Due: Critical Review Paper Exchange – *Paradise*

Week 10: 3/11 *Jazz*

Open discussion (prepare commentary and discussion question)

Week 11: 3/18 *Paradise*

4th paper: 5-Source, Critical Review Papers (Panelists 1) 15 min. each w/ respondent (#2)

Due: Critical Review Paper Exchange – *God Help the Child*

Week 12: 3/25 *Paradise*

Open discussion (prepare commentary and discussion question)

Week 13: 4/1 --*God Help the Child*

4th paper: Critical Review Papers (Panelists 3) 15 min. each w/ respondent (#4)

Week 14: 4/8 --*God Help the Child*

4th paper: 5-source, critical review papers (panelists 5) 15 min. Each w/ respondent (#5)

Open discussion (prepare commentary and discussion question)

Week 15: 4/15 Final paper thesis share-out

Please Note: Papers due by 11:59 pm, April 20th in Canvas

GRADE DISTRIBUTION

• **50%: Each student is asked to write four (4) papers and present them to the class.** The first three are response papers (readings identified in the syllabus), which everyone must complete and discuss with the class. The fourth is a critical review paper, which must include five scholarly texts featuring your assigned novel or a theme presented in the novel. Panelists and respondents for this fourth paper are assigned primary texts via the Canvas "Groups" feature, which correlates with assignment dates and texts on the syllabus. All papers offer a close reading of the assigned texts as well as independent, researched materials where applicable as follows.

* **Response papers:** no more than three (3) typed, double spaced pages for the ten-minute presentation with class discussion to follow.

* **Critical review paper:** no more than six (6) typed, double spaced pages for the fifteen-minute (5-source, critical review) presentations. Consult with each other to determine who will respond to the individual papers if there is more than one respondent.

Students present their critical review papers with respondents. Please note time limits indicated in the course schedule and above. Submit all papers for grading to me via Canvas.

In addition, each student is responsible for responding to one set of critical review papers orally. By this, I mean respondents do not have to submit a written paper to me. I want you to lead discussion of the critical review papers; do not read a written statement. You may use notes during your in-class discussion of assigned paper(s), course objectives, and other texts or papers read thus far. Respondents' comments should highlight points of presenter insight and analysis of the researched materials as well as personal points of agreement and disagreement, additions or enhancements. You may even wish to do some research of your own.

Because there are respondents for the 5-source, critical review paper each panel member must complete drafts two weeks in advance of the presentation date, so respondents have an opportunity to prepare for the session. To ensure things move smoothly, please post papers via

email to the assigned respondents by 1:30 the Thursday two weeks preceding the primary discussion of your assigned text (see schedule above). Late paper submissions will be penalized by immediate letter grade reduction (no exceptions). If you cannot meet the due day or have other problems, make arrangements for the submission with me or your student respondent.

I expect these response papers to reflect serious contemplation on the part of each class member. The focus of your paper is up to you, but you must address the assigned reading material. Critical review papers must discuss scholarly work published within the last ten years; but, if you need to go back further, you may include that work in addition to the more recent material.

• **50%: 25-page seminar paper.** Seminar papers are due by April 20th at 11:59 pm in Canvas. You may build upon one of the previous papers or develop an entirely new focus. You do not have to write on the text assigned previously but you must discuss the works covered in this class.

“Participation in our class is fundamental since improving oral conversation skills is a key objective of the course. Thus, students are required to have their cameras on from start to finish during our classes on Zoom. A default setting for our sessions in Zoom is that participants will be muted when they enter, so you will unmute yourself when you comment orally during our whole-group conversations and when you are in small groups. Your instructor may also ask students to reply in the chat box for specific activities. Oral comments on camera and written comments in the chat box are considered activities for participation. If you have technical issues, please immediately consult UF IT Help to resolve them and then contact your instructor. Zoom sessions will not be recorded by the instructor and may not be recorded by students. As in all courses, unauthorized recording and unauthorized sharing of recorded material is prohibited.”

Preparation:

All readings must be prepared and ready for each class session. If you are not presenting a panel paper or response, please prepare a comment and a question you would like to offer for class discussion, debate, or contemplation.

Audits:

Students auditing this course must attend class regularly and participate. I require an entrance paper (3 pages--due January 14th) and an exit paper (3-5 pages--due April 20th—discussing what you learned in this seminar and how you might use it in your future research). These requirements must be fulfilled in order to earn a “satisfactory” audit grade. See me for further instructions.

COURSE POLICIES

1) **“FATAL ERRORS” POLICY:** Students must meet high standards in writing. To this end, all written assignments must meet minimal presentation criteria to be acceptable. These standards address spelling, punctuation, format and basic grammar. The term Fatal Errors refers to formal writing errors of form. Specifically, they include the following and will be identified in evaluated written assignments by error number:

1. Each different word misspelled;
2. Each sentence fragment;
3. Each run-on sentence or comma splice;
4. Each mistake in capitalization (capitalize Black and White when referring to individuals, communities, or ideas);
5. Each serious error in punctuation that obscures meaning, including errors in the use or failure to use italics and quotation marks;
6. Each error in verb tense, shifts, or subject/verb agreement;
7. Each instance of ending a sentence with a preposition;
8. Each improper citation, or lack of citation, where one is needed;
9. Each misuse of words (WHO for THAT or unwarranted use of clichés, for instance) and reference problems (note: pronouns refer to the last person mentioned);
10. Poor paragraphing or lack of paragraphing;
11. Lack of conformity with assignment format.

Papers with more than three (3) fatal errors on any one page or more than seven (7) for the entire document will be returned to the student for revision and will suffer a half letter grade deduction. Only one resubmission is allowed. Penalties for final course papers (where there is no time for a resubmission) will be based on the magnitude of errors and the relative importance of the assignment to the determination of the final course grade. This policy applies to all written assignments, except in class quizzes or oral presentations.

2) Cell phones and computers: Cell phones must be muted during the class session. If an emergency occurs and you have to respond to calls or texts, please leave the classroom. Computers (iPads or other electronics) are allowed for note taking, access to eBooks, at the request of the professor and presentations only. The exception is ZOOM, of course. You will be informed if I record the class (presentations, for instance).

3) Papers: All papers must be typed and double spaced using the 8 1/2 x 11 page layout with one-inch margins all around. Use Courier or New York Times font at 12-point size. Documentation and form should follow the MLA style manual. Number all pages after the first within the upper right margin.

4) Paper Maintenance Responsibilities: Students are responsible for maintaining duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course and retaining all returned, graded work until the semester is over. Should the need arise for a resubmission of papers or a review of graded papers; it is the student's responsibility to have and to make available this material.

5) Grade Disputes: Questions about assigned grades are acceptable during my office hours only. If my written responses do not address your concerns, I will explain why a grade was earned. With the exception of miscalculation, I will not consider grade changes. Please do not ask; **I consider it harassment**. You may consult the department of English's Associate Chair, for grade appeals, however. Please note: appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.

6) Midterm assessment Report: Individual grades are always available in Canvas "Grades," indicating your current status in the class. These reports will offer information on all graded aspects of the course completed. You should consider these performance-tracking grades carefully and govern yourself accordingly.

7) Missed class sessions: Make up work for approved absences must be addressed within one week of your return. See me for submission deadlines for missed work within this time frame.

8) Response Papers and Seminar Paper Submission guidelines: Like all written assignments, this paper must be submitted electronically. Microsoft Word compatible documents only please. Unreadable documents will be returned ungraded. Submit your project via Canvas by midnight the evening of the due date. Late submissions will suffer a half letter grade reduction.

9) "Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found in the online catalog at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>."

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Disability Services: The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides students and faculty with information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities in the classroom. It is your responsibility to contact the school administration regarding any disability you may have, and to inform me so we can make any necessary arrangements. For more information, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>.

Academic Honesty: Honor Code. "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity." This oath represents UF's commitment to academic honesty and integrity. "Cheating, plagiarism, bribery, misrepresentation, conspiracy and fabrication" are violations of the Honor Code. All students must abide by the student honor code. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/student-responsibilities/> .

Harassment: UF provides an educational and working environment for its students, faculty, and staff free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: <https://hr.ufl.edu/forms-policies/policies-managers/sexual-harassment/> .

COURSE EVALUATIONS: "Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu> . Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results>."

Campus Resources Health and Wellness U Matter, We Care: If you, or a friend, are in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu or 352 392-1575 so that a team member can reach out to the student.

Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc>, and 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS): Student Health Care Center, 392-1161. University Police Department at 392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies), or <http://www.police.ufl.edu/> (Links to an external site.).

Academic Resources E-learning technical support, 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or e-mail to Learning-support@ufl.edu. <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>. Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 392-1601.

Career assistance and counseling. <https://www.crc.ufl.edu/>. Library Support, <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>. Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Teaching Center, Broward Hall, 392-2010 or 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring. <https://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/>. Writing Studio, 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. <https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>.

Student Complaints Campus:

https://www.dso.ufl.edu/documents/UF_Complaints_policy.pdf. On-Line Students Complaints: <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-complaint-process>.