

“Identity is an assemblage of constellations.” Anna Deavere Smith

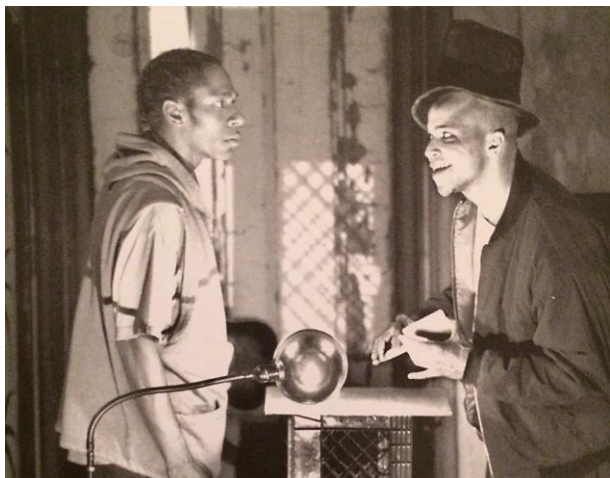
“Blacks have traditionally had to operate in a situation where whites have set themselves up as the custodians of the black experience.” August Wilson

“God created Black people and Black people created style.” George C. Wolf

COURSE DESCRIPTION: As a mode of literature and as a live event, plays written and performed by African Americans can exist as political tools for change, modes of resistance, weapons against the implicit and explicit violence of racism, calls to action, and recuperative devices to maintain and testify to a history that mainstream/white culture either omits or outright misrepresents. From the original African-“*Americans*” (kidnapped Africans who performed for white slave traders while enduring the tortures of the Middle Passage) to current audiences of theatre, hip hop, television, and film, performances of Black identity and Black culture also facilitate an expression of trauma, the creation of solidarity, and the assertion of self. And while the values and functions of African American performance go back to the Middle Passage, so do passionate disagreements about the purpose and criteria of what exactly is (or should be) “Black Performance” or “Black Theatre.”

In this course we’ll consider what African American drama tells us about some of the most heated debates in African American thought, politics, and activism, including: the Du Bois-Washington clashes over the best path to equality; the Christian-informed passive resistance of MLK versus the by-any-means necessary demands for justice of Malcolm X; the passionate assertion by some of a uniquely (and *essentially*) Black theatre and voice compared to the notion of a *culturally constructed* black identity held by others; and the role of Black drama itself - - the idea of African American theatre as a means of propaganda, existing only for social change aimed at (influencing) White audiences versus African American theatre as a cultural space to preserve, celebrate, and document Black culture for Black audiences.

We’ll spend time focusing on important moments in African American history, but we’ll also ponder theoretical questions, such as how formal English language (and its rules of grammar, syntax) is understood by some as a tool for oppression and how, contrarily, the vernacular and linguistic style that emerge from African American culture can become an instrument of resistance. In this vein, we’ll explore how Black performance has followed and at times vigorously departed from Western (White, straight, typically male), so-called “mainstream” performance practices versus African American drama that embraces alternative, non-Western, non-“Mainstream” traditions (e.g., Camp, Expressionism, and non-linear storytelling, to name a few). Finally, we’ll consider how African American drama comments on, supports, or attempts to dismantle social hierarchies such as homophobia, classism, and misogyny.



Mos Def/Yasiin Bey & Jeffrey Wright in *Topdog/Underdog*

EVALUATION CRITERIA:

Participation	10%
Reading Quizzes (18 total)	20%
Kindling Questions	10%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam (<i>not cumulative</i>)	20%
Essay (8 pages)	20%

REQUIRED TEXTS (TITLES AVAILABLE ON MOODLE ARE DESIGNATED “M”)

Blues for Mister Charlie, James Baldwin (purchase)

Dutchman, Amiri Baraka (M)

Notes...Field, Anna Deavere Smith (\$0.99 on Amazon/free for HBO users)

Souls of Black Folk (excerpt), W.E.B. Du Bois (M)

“Criteria of Negro Art,” W.E.B. Du Bois (M)

“Signifyin(g) on African-American Theatre” Harry Elam (M)

Rachel, Angelina Weld Grimké (M)

A Raisin in the Sun, Lorraine Hansberry (purchase)

Color Struck, Zora Neale Hurston (M)

“Art or Propaganda?” Alain Locke (M)

Topdog/Underdog, Suzan Lori-Parks (purchase)

Choir Boy, Tarell Alvin McCraney (M)

“The Black Arts Movement,” Larry Neal (M)

“What Is a Black Play? ...Corner,” Sandra Shannon (M)

Fences, August Wilson (purchase)

“The Ground on Which I Stand” August Wilson (M)

The Colored Museum, George C. Wolfe (purchase)

ENG 3520 GRADING SCALE			
94-100%	A	77-79%	C+
90-93%	A-	73-76%	C
87-89%	B+	70-72%	C-
83-86%	B	67-69%	D+
80-82%	B-	60-66%	D
		0-59%	F

COURSE POLICIES: Since this is not the kind of course in which the teacher talks endlessly while students silently take notes, **your voice counts very much to the quality of our class.** In addition to your questions and comments being welcomed, they’re also a part of assessment (your final grade) via “participation points.” In other words, in addition to your written work, **consistent, thoughtful class participation that indicates a student’s physical and intellectual presence in class will definitely be considered in the final course grade.** This recognition of participation is also extended to our occasional small group discussions in class.

Obviously illness and emergencies are sometimes unavoidable; accordingly, two absences can be accrued with no penalty to the course grade. After the second absence, the final grade is reduced considerably. **Every absence beyond the allotted two reduces the final grade by 1/3 of a letter grade** (e.g., an A- becomes a B+). (At some point, most people will experience unexpected illness, car trouble, etc. – so it’s a good idea to save these allotted two for emergencies.)

Being more than 20 minutes late/leaving more than 20 minutes early counts as an absence. Absences for religious observance are of course not included; it’s your responsibility to see me ahead of time if you require an absence for this reason. As an extension of respect and fairness to everyone, **all assignments are final.** These policies are firm.



Please make sure all cell phones and electronics before class starts. The first use of a cell phone will result in a discreet, private warning from me. Use of cell phones after that first warning will result in an absence. I respect all of you from the get go; I require that same respect. Many of you are working long hours, raising families while going to school, and/or carrying heavy class loads; for these reasons, some students find in-class drowsiness an issue. If you start to drowse off during class, the first instance will result in a discreet, private alert/warning from me. After this initial “warning,” all following instances will result in a *significant* deduction to the “participation” component of the course grade. (Please feel free to bring whatever snacks or beverages you need to stay alert). **Please remember: use of laptops, readers, and/or texting once class starts is not allowed.** (This is firm.)

A final note, regarding email: It’s likely that at some point this semester we’ll communicate (individually) via email. Consider this friendly reminder: emails to your professors should be considered formal communication. Particularly in light of the fact that this is an *English* course, emails to an instructor should always refrain from text speak, vulgar language, and of course avoid any tone that might be misread as offensive or aggressive. What you write in papers, exams, and emails reflects your intelligence, as well as the respect you allot and expect to receive.

KINDLING QUESTIONS: At one time during the term, each student is responsible for composing two *open, live* questions that might act as discussion prompts at the beginning of that day's class. (Everyone will be required to come up with two questions to be presented on one day.) An assignment sheet will follow and we'll discuss the term further, but for now, consider a *live question* as one that can't be answered with a "yes" or "no." As with literal "kindling" in a fire, these questions should spark bigger discussion, the shape and direction of which might be unpredictable, powerful, and illuminating. You're free to request a specific session/reading for your Kindling Questions, providing that day is available. By our second class I'll distribute a schedule on which everyone can sign up for a day to "present." On your day to present your questions, you'll be responsible for starting a brief "response," as well as bringing copies of the questions (enough for everyone in class to take one home – approximately 36).

QUIZZES: For the most part (a few exceptions are noted on the course schedule) the reading quizzes for this class are once a week, on Tuesdays, due no later than just before the start of class. These quick (5 minutes or less) 10-point quizzes are comprised of three **easy** questions – 2 T/F (3 points each) and 1 multiple choice (4 points). The point of these quizzes is to be (1) easy points and (2) provide a positive inducement to keep up with our reading – which itself will help your course grade *significantly* (I promise).

There are a total of 18 quizzes over the term (including: our first "Syllabus Quiz"; 16 online quizzes; and one "in-class" quiz) and these quizzes go into the 20% of the course grade that is allotted to "Quizzes." **Because these quizzes are online and taken through our course Moodle page, consistent, dependable access to the internet is a requirement for this course. If you think this might be an issue for you at some point, you should drop the course.** Because IT-related nightmares are often unavoidable, it's a good idea to not take the quiz just before it's due. Each quiz is due just before the start of our class (1PM). Finally, quizzes are always (only) on the specific material assigned for that day (the quiz's due date)

ACADEMIC HONESTY: This is a no brainer for most of us, but its importance merits stating the obvious. Plagiarism — using someone else's words or ideas without acknowledging the source — is unacceptable and unnecessary. Part of the process of academic writing is highlighting the ways you use other's ideas and research in your own work. Getting help from others is not something to hide, but rather something to demonstrate and remark upon. No one ever writes alone, and successful academic writers relish the opportunity to tell the story of how others helped them think and write.



James Baldwin

It is your responsibility to adhere to OU's Academic Conduct policy for the duration of the course, with regard to plagiarism issues as well as quizzes, exams, and any other supplementary assignments. Further details are also available at <http://www.oakland.edu/?id=1610&sid=75>, as well as the "Academic Conduct" section in the undergraduate catalogue. You should always feel encouraged to consult with me at any time, as well as the OU Writing Center, or any MLA style book with citation-oriented queries. As you've hopefully figured out already, there are no stupid questions!

(Please be aware that all faculty are *required* to report cases of suspected academic misconduct to the Office of the Dean of Students. *Any student found responsible for academic misconduct will fail the class.*)

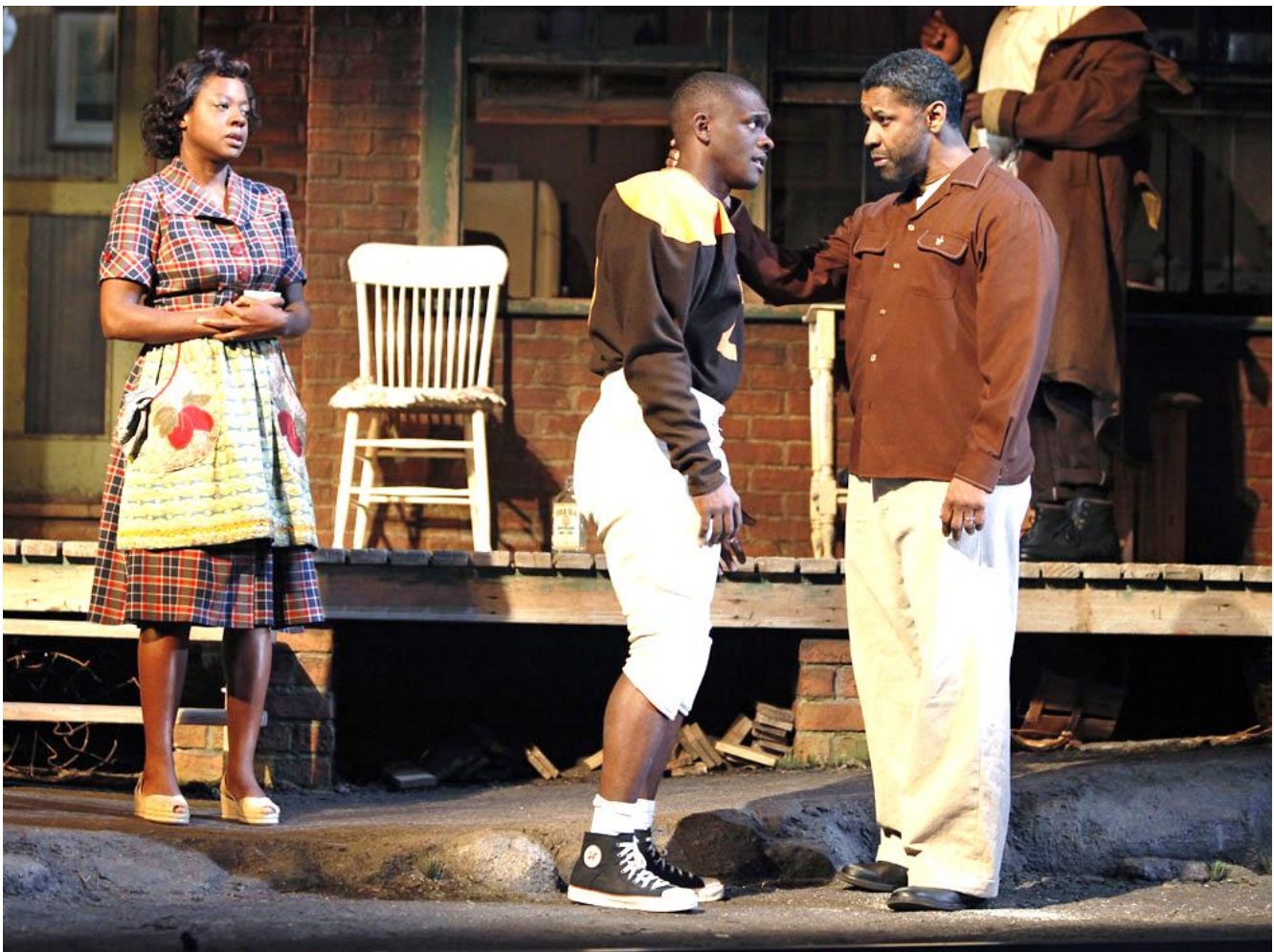
CONFERENCES: You'll be asked to meet with me once individually in my office hours some time during the first two weeks of the semester. I'll distribute a sign-up sheet for these informal five-minute appointments. (For anyone who has conflicts with my posted office hours, scheduled appointments are no problem.) This quick, informal meeting is to acquaint you with *where* my office is, **but also to encourage you to use me as a resource.** In addition to a "getting to know you" opportunity, this might allow you to get a head start on ideas for future projects or merely chat about parts of the course with which you might have concerns. (Please feel free to use me as a resource or sounding board.)

STUDENTS W/SPECIAL NEEDS: Please feel free to discuss any special circumstances with me - *anytime*. There are also many services available for students at the Office of Disability Support Services, 103A NFS, x3266.

DROP/ADD: OU's add/drop policy will be explicitly followed. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of deadlines for dropping the course. Fall 2015 important dates: http://www.oakland.edu/important_dates

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY: I practice an inclusive pedagogy and value differing experiences of and perspectives on religion, sexual orientation, race, class, sex/gender, (dis)ability, and nationality, as well as different approaches to learning. I do, however, reserve the right to challenge any set of beliefs around those issues, and I welcome you to do the same. My objective is a classroom community that is both challenging and welcoming, a community in which all students play a vital and active role. A multiplicity of voices contributes to the quality of the work we do, the richness of our ideas and their continued development. In this vein, students' voices and perspectives are a serious part of the course and we'll eagerly await what you have to say (your voice matters very much.) We'll often discuss sensitive and/or provocative issues dealing with ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality. Your point of view will always be honored, respected, and allowed; but it's also worth mentioning that this course has a (strong) zero tolerance policy regarding harassment, hate-speech, disrespect, or intolerance.

Free speech and diversity of ideas are guaranteed to everyone in class, but so is the protection of everyone's individual dignity and respect. On that note, I ask that you be collegial, and open to the examination of your own ideas as well as those of others'. I believe that learning should be a transformative experience. With your help, I expect to leave this course with a richer perspective than when I entered; I hope the same will be true for you.



2010 Broadway revival of Wilson's *FENCES* (Viola Davis, Chris Chalk, and Denzel Washington)

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Readings and assignments are due the day they're listed; slight changes may be necessary as the semester progresses; please **ALWAYS BRING YOUR TEXT WITH YOU TO CLASS**.

WEEK 1 TH 9/6 Brief Syllabus Review
Lecture: "Slave Narratives, "Voice," and Agency"

"THE PROBLEM OF THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY" & THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

WEEK 2 T 9/11 *RACHEL*, Grimké (M)
SYLLABUS QUIZ Due
QUIZ #1 Due (on *Rachel* only)

TH 9/13 *RACHEL*, Grimké (M) (discussion continued – no new reading)
(In-class viewing: select clips from Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*)

WEEK 3 T 9/18 "Criteria of Negro Art," Du Bois **and** "Art or Propaganda?" Locke (M)
RACHEL, Grimké (M) (discussion continued)
QUIZ #2 Due

TH 9/20 *COLOR STRUCK*, Hurston (M)
QUIZ #3 Due (on *Color Struck* only)

WEEK 4 T 9/25 *SOULS OF BLACK FOLK* (excerpt), Dubois (M)
COLOR STRUCK, Hurston (M) (discussion continued)

TH 9/27 *RAISIN IN THE SUN*, Hansberry
QUIZ #4 Due (on *Raisin in the Sun* only)

RESISTANCE & CITIZENSHIP: (SO-CALLED) AMERICAN IDENTITY & CRITIQUING CHRISTIANITY

WEEK 5 T 10/2 *RAISIN IN THE SUN*, Hansberry (discussion cont – no new reading)

TH 10/4 "The Black Arts Movement," Neal (M)
QUIZ #5 Due (on essay only)

WEEK 6 T 10/9 *BLUES FOR MISTER CHARLIE*, Baldwin
QUIZ #6 Due (on *Blues for Mister Charlie* only)

TH 10/11 *BLUES FOR MISTER CHARLIE*, Baldwin (cont – no new reading)

WEEK 7 T 10/16 *I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO* (documentary; in-class viewing)
IN-CLASS QUIZ: to be taken in class, handed in after film

TH 10/18 *DUTCHMAN*, Baraka
QUIZ #7 Due (on *Dutchman* only)

WEEK 8 T 10/23 *DUTCHMAN*, Baraka (discussion continued – no new reading)

TH 10/25 **MIDTERM EXAM**

“BLACK” THEATRE, “BLACKNESS” DECONSTRUCTED, RESISTANCE REVISITED

WEEK 9	T	10/30	<i>FENCES</i> , Wilson Quiz #8 Due (on <i>Fences</i> only)
	TH	11/1	<i>FENCES</i> , Wilson (discussion continued – no new reading) clips from <i>American Masters</i> documentary on Wilson
WEEK 10	T	11/6	<i>FENCES</i> , Wilson (discussion continued) “The Ground on Which I Stand,” Wilson (M) Paper “Assignment Sheet” Distributed Quiz #9 Due (on Wilson essay only)
	TH	11/8	<i>THE COLORED MUSEUM</i> , Wolfe Quiz #10 Due (on <i>The Colored Museum</i> only)
WEEK 11	T	11/13	“Signifyin(g),” Elam (M) <i>THE COLORED MUSEUM</i> , Wolfe (discussion continued) Quiz #11 Due (on essay only)
	TH	11/15	<i>Choir Boy</i> , McRaney (M) Quiz #12 Due (on <i>Choir Boy</i> only)
WEEK 12	T	11/20	<i>Black Is...Black Ain't</i> (documentary; required home viewing, before class) <i>Choir Boy</i> , McRaney (M) (no new reading, but documentary is homework) Quiz #13 Due (on documentary only)
	TH	11/22	NO CLASS – NOVEMBER BREAK
WEEK 13	T	11/27	<i>TOPDOG/UNDERDOG</i> , Parks “What Is a Black Play?” Shannon (M) Quiz #14 Due
	TH	11/29	<i>TOPDOG/UNDERDOG</i> , Parks (discussion continued – no new reading) In-class viewing: “This is America,” Childish Gambino “Play/Topic/Thesis” Doc Due (counts as “Quiz #15”)
WEEK 14	T	12/4	<i>NOTES FROM THE FIELD</i> , SMITH (purchase on amazon \$.99 or free to HBO users) Paper Workshop Class Quiz #16 Due (on <i>Notes from the Field</i> only)
	TH	12/6	<i>NOTES FROM THE FIELD</i> , SMITH (in-class discussion) LAST CLASS – COURSE EVALUATIONS

This course satisfies the university **GENERAL EDUCATION, INTEGRATION (I.1. KNOWLEDGE APPLICATIONS)** area requirement (4 credit hours). 2017-2018 catalogue reads:

The Knowledge Applications area prepares students to demonstrate:

- *how knowledge in a field outside of the student's major can be evaluated and applied to solve problems across a range of applications*
- *knowledge of the personal, professional, ethical, and societal implications of these applications*

[Note: Course must be outside the rubric of the student's major]

This course also satisfies the university **GENERAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENT IN U.S. DIVERSITY** (4 credit hours). 2017-2018 catalogue reads:

U.S. Diversity prepares the student to demonstrate:

knowledge of how diverse value systems and societal structures in the United States are influenced by at least two of the following: race, gender, and ethnicity identify major challenges and issues these raise in society. Approved diversity courses may double count in the major and/or general education.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of this course, students should be able to

- Delineate major moments in literary history and modes as they emerge in African American literature and drama
- Identify and distinguish significant sociocultural and historical moments in African American history as those moments are investigated in literature and drama
- Describe and synthesize the ways in which cultural products (literature and drama) varyingly support and resist social hierarchies based in race, sexual identity, gender, and class

Name (what you prefer to be called) _____

Pronoun Preference _____

Email _____

Phone _____ **Year @ OU** (junior, senior) _____

Recent movie or book you liked _____

I have read the syllabus for ENG 3520 and understand the policies as detailed.

Signature

Please briefly describe why you're taking this class. (Be as honest as is comfortable)
