

ENGL 486: Topics in American Literature—Race, Revolution, Resistance, and Redemption in African American Literature



Instructor: Dr. Matthew Abraham
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Office: Modern Languages Bldg. 428
Office Hours: 1-2 p.m., Tuesday and Thursday and by appt.
Office Phone: 626-0775
Class Location: Modern Languages Bldg. 303
Meeting Day and Time: Tuesday and Thursday, 2-3:15 p.m.

Course Description:

This topics course will focus on how the themes of “resistance,” “redemption,” “revolution”, and “liberation” develop and function in twentieth-century African American literature. Students will consider the following texts during the semester: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, James Baldwin’s *Notes of a Native Son*, Richard Wright’s *Native Son*, Angela Davis’s *An Autobiography*, and Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*.

Resistance, redemption, revolution, and liberation emerge as consistent themes within African American autobiographies and fiction. We will trace this emergence by connecting the works to political movements in the context of the struggle for African American civil rights.

Course goals:

- 1) Read African American literary narratives about the racial condition in America to understand the specific types of resistance African Americans have employed to contend with racism and structural inequality;
- 2) Develop an appreciation for the existential condition outlined in each of the literary works we read;
- 3) Draw comparisons between differing accounts of resistance in the autobiographies and fictional works of African American writers;

- 4) Understand how writers within oppressed communities develop a relationship to death, alienation, and victimhood;
- 5) Understand the symbolic significance of violence and rebellion in the development of critical consciousness in opposition to mainstream society.

***Required Texts:**

James Baldwin's *Notes of a Native Son* (ISBN: 978-0807006238)

Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* (ISBN: 978-0385333795)

Angela Davis's *Autobiography* (ISBN: 978-0717806676)

Malcolm X's *Autobiography* (ISBN: 978-0345350688)

Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* (ISBN: 978-1400033423)

Richard Wright's *Native Son* (ISBN: 978-0060929800)

*It's very important you purchase the correct edition of these books to ensure that, when we make reference to the books in class, everyone have the same pagination. If you don't buy your books through the bookstore, note the ISBN numbers listed above.

Course requirements:

1. *Paper #1 on *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* (7-8 pages)—**due on October 16th** (15%)
2. *Paper #2 on Angela Davis's *Autobiography* (7-8 pages)—**due on November 11th** (15%)
3. *Paper #3 on Wright's *Native Son* (10 pages)—**due on December 2nd** (25%)
4. *Paper #4 on either Baldwin's *Notes of a Native Son* or Morrison's *Song of Solomon* (7-8 pages)—**due on December 17th** (25%)
5. In-class writing responses—approximately every other week—and participation (20%)

* You will receive detailed descriptions for each of these assignments well in advance of the due dates.

Grading Scale

A: 90-100%

B: 89-80%

C: 79-70%

D: 69-60%

F: 59-0%

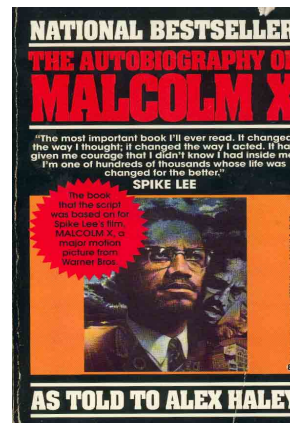
Course Policies

- Attendance will be taken every class. You are allowed to miss two classes without penalty. After your second absence, I will speak to you about your attendance and encourage you not to miss any further classes. After your third absence, I will deduct a half letter grade from your final grade. If you have six absences, I will

deduct a whole letter grade from your final grade. After the sixth absence, I will have you administratively withdrawn from the class.

- Cell phones are not allowed in the classroom. There is nothing more annoying to an instructor than to see students texting in class when they should be listening;
- It is expected that you will treat the instructor and your fellow students with dignity and respect. While I have no problem with heated disagreement, especially given the nature of the material we will be reading this semester, neither I nor the university will tolerate behavior that crosses the line from critique to belittlement and clear harassment;
- You must be in class to take to do the in-class writing assignments; I will not allow any student to make these up:
- Avoid submitting late work, as it is quite likely that I will not accept it, except in the most extraordinary of circumstances;
- Please come talk to me during office hours, as I am happy to discuss any questions that we do not get to in class;
- Post queries about the material we are covering to the discussion section of our D2L site; others will hopefully chime in based on what you ask.

Schedule:



Week #1

Session #1 (August 26th, Tuesday): Introductions

Session #2 (August 28th, Thursday): Discuss Introduction and Chapter 1 in *Autobiography of Malcolm X*

Week #2

Session #3 (September 2nd, Tuesday): Discuss Chapter 2 & 3 in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

Session #4 (September 4th, Thursday): Discuss Chapter 4 & 5 in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

Week #3

Session #5 (September 9th, Tuesday): Discuss Chapters 6 & 7 in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

Session #6 (September 11th, Thursday): Discuss Chapters 8 & 9 in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

Week #4

Session #7 (September 16th, Tuesday): Discuss Chapters 10 & 11 in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

Session #8: (September 18th, Thursday); Discuss Chapter 12 & 13 in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

Week #5

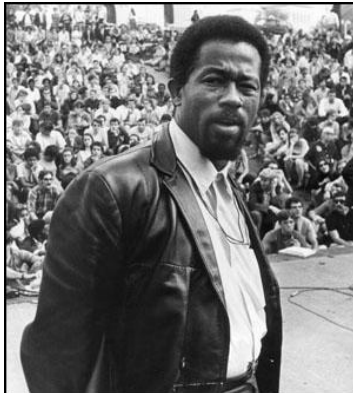
Session #9 (September 23rd, Tuesday): Discuss Chapters 14 & 15 in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

Session #10 (September 25th, Thursday): Discuss Chapters 16 & 17 in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

Week #6

Session #11 (September 30th): No class

Session #12 (October 2nd): Complete discussion of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

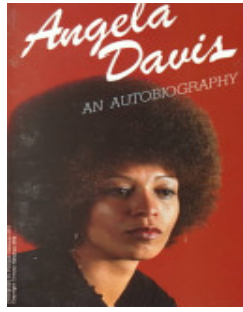
**Week #7**

Session #13 (October 7th): Discuss Letters From Prison, Part 1 in *Soul on Ice*

Session #14 (October 9th): Discuss Blood of Beat, Part 2 in *Soul on Ice*

Week #8

Session #15: (October 14th) Discuss Prelude to Love-Three Letters, Part 3, and White Woman Black Man, Part 4 in *Soul on Ice*



Session #16 (October 16th): Discuss Chapter 1 in *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*

Week #9

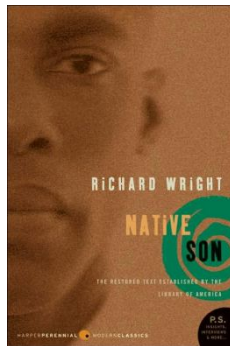
Session #17 (October 21st): Discuss Chapter 2 in *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*

Session #18 (October 23rd): Discuss Chapter 3 in *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*

Week #10

Session #19 (October 28th): Discuss Chapter 4 in *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*

Session #20 (October 30th): Discuss Chapter 5 in *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*



Week #11

Session #21 (November 4th): Complete discussion on *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*

Session #22 (November 6th): Begin Wright's *Native Son*. Discuss Book 1, Fear.

Week #12

Session #23 (November 11th): No class (Veteran's Day); Read pp. 97-163 in Book 2 of *Native Son*, Flight

Session #24 (November 13th): Discuss pp. 97-209) in Book 2 of *Native Son*, Flight

Week #13

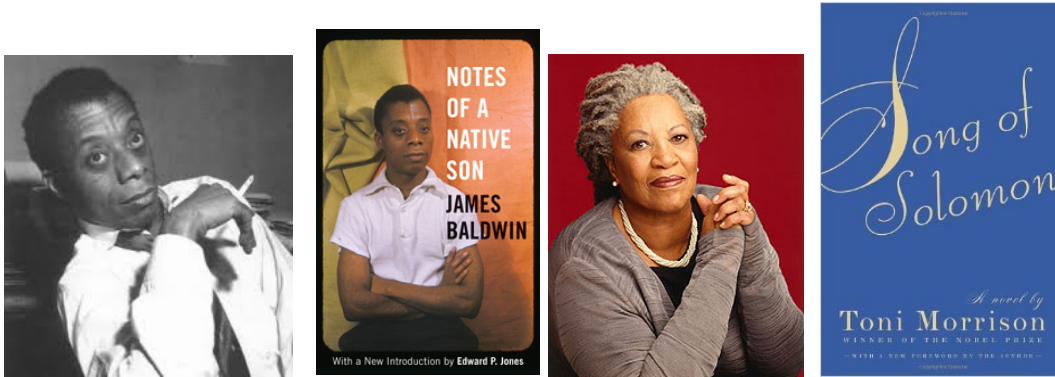
Session #25 (November 18th): Discuss pp. 210-270 in Book 2 of *Native Son*, Flight

Session #26 (November 20th): Discuss pp. 273-325 in Book 3 of *Native Son*, Fate

Week #14

Session #27 (November 25th): Discuss pp. 326-400 in Book 3 of *Native Son*, Fate

Session #28 (November 27th): No class



Week #15

Session #29 (December 2nd): Discuss Part 1 of *Notes of a Native Son*; Morrison's *Song of Solomon*

Session #30 (December 4th): Discuss Part 2 of *Notes of a Native Son*; Morrison's *Song of Solomon*

Week #16

Session #31 (December 9th): Last Day of Class—Complete *Notes of a Native Son*; and Morrison's *Song of Solomon*

Wednesday, December 17th from 3:30-5:30 pm—Final Exam Period—final paper due