

TH 333 01 / IN 250 15: African American Theatre & Drama
3 credits
Monday, Wednesday, Friday 10:00-10:50am

Spring 2020

Class Location: ADM-SCO 313

Professor: Dr. Tom Robson

Office Hours: Monday 1-4pm, Tuesday 10-11am, Thursday 10-11am

Office Hours are your chance to meet with me to ask questions about our work together. They are the hours that faculty members specifically set aside to work with students. Please take advantage of them.

Course Description:

An investigation of African American/Black dramatic literature and performance, examining a wide variety of voices and styles across the last two centuries.

Learning Outcomes (Theatre & Dance):

1. To engage in analytical learning
2. To engage in technical learning
3. To engage in collaborative learning
4. To engage in professional learning
5. The pursuit of a life of meaning and value.

Learning Outcomes (IN 250):

1. Analyze diverse cultures in the United States through the use of discipline-appropriate sources.
2. Use ethical reasoning to make a judgment about some aspect of the culture of the United States.
3. Reflect on your responsibilities as a democratic citizen of the United States.

Learning Outcomes (African American Studies Minor):

1. Examine the Black experience through the critical lens of race/ethnicity and the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and sexuality in the U.S. and the African diaspora using theories and research methods vital to African American studies (e.g. critical race theory.)
2. Analyze and interpret texts, write critically, and effectively articulate or express understandings about contemporary events and social justice issues as related to major cultural, historical, and sociopolitical events and issues as well as their impact on Black people in America and/or globally.

Learning Outcomes (Course-Specific):

1. Develop knowledge of the history of African American theatre and drama.
2. Investigate the dramatic literature of African American playwrights.
3. Identify the ways in which larger social, political, philosophical, religious, and artistic movements impacted African American theatre and drama.
4. Critique the presentation of social thought within African American dramatic literature.
5. Appraise one's own position within the larger discourse surrounding African American theatre and drama.

Student Well-Being:

The well-being of students is of primary importance. If you are facing any challenges related to your physical or mental health, or obstacles like food or housing insecurity, please do not hesitate to get in touch to discuss ways we can put you in the best possible position to succeed.

Inclusivity:

Every student in this classroom, regardless of personal history or identity categories, is a valued member of this group. Your experiences are valued and important, and you should feel free to share them as

they become relevant to our class. No student in this class is ever expected or believed to speak for all members of a group.

In this classroom you have the right to determine your own identity. You have the right to be called by whatever name you wish, and for that name to be pronounced correctly. You have the right to be referred to by whatever pronoun you wish. You have the right to adjust those things at any point in your education.

If you find that there are aspects of course instruction, subject matter, or classroom environment that result in barriers to your inclusion, please contact me privately without fear of reprisal.

Content Advisory:

This semester we will engage with a number of plays that raise difficult issues. Racial violence and sexual violence, long used as tools of oppression against bodies of color in North America, are presented in plays we will read. If there are topics that you have concerns about engaging with, please speak with me privately so that I can best prepare you. In exceptionally rare circumstances I will permit students alternate assignments if a specific topic is too damaging.

Required Texts:

- Alessandra Raengo, *Critical Race Theory and Bamboozled*
- Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*
- Suzan-Lori Parks, *Topdog/Underdog*
- Kia Corthron, *Force Continuum*
- Tarell Alvin McCraney, *Choir Boy*
- Dominique Morisseau, *The Detroit Project*
- Lynn Nottage, *Sweat*

A Note on Required Texts:

The combined cost of the above books, purchased new at full price on Amazon, is just under \$95 at the time of writing this syllabus. We will begin work with the Raengo book on the first day of class. Many of the other plays are not needed until later in the semester, should you need to spread out your book purchasing. *If you have financial obstacles to purchasing required texts for this class, please communicate with me.*

I have placed personal copies of as many of these books that I can on reserve at the library. I can not promise that all of them will be available there, but I am doing my best to make them accessible to you.

Additional Readings: There are multiple other assigned readings this semester that you will access digitally, either through Moodle or through the North American Theatre Online database. It will be important for class discussions that students have access to these texts in class, either digitally or in hard copy.

Incompletes/Extensions: No incompletes or extensions will be given except for verified medical or other real emergencies. Theatre production duties are not considered emergencies.

Email Communication: Students in this class should be sure to check their Millikin email accounts *at least once per day*, and ideally more frequently than that. In the event of schedule changes, I will use email to inform the class. Additionally, the School of Theatre & Dance regularly uses email to inform students of events, meetings, policies, auditions, etc. If you do not check your email, you will miss vital information.

I check my email regularly and will make every effort to respond to emails as I receive them. That said, you should always allow 24 hours for a response to any email.

Two Notes on Grading: I will be utilizing the Gradebook feature on Moodle for this class. As soon as I finish grading assignment I will post the scores to Moodle so you can track your progress in the course.

I will not discuss grades over e-mail or in the classroom. If you would like to have a grade explained to you, or if you have questions about your standing in the course, please set up a meeting with me. I would be more than happy to have those discussions in my office.

Grading Breakdown (1000 points total):

Final Paper		300 total
Play Submitted	25	
Introduction	25	
Partial Draft	25	
Writing Center Appt.	25	
Final Draft	200	
Reflection Papers		300 total
<i>Bamboozled</i>	100	
Hansberry/Baraka	100	
Final Reflection	100	
Forum Posts (20 points each)		260 total
Self-Assessment		40
Participation		100

Exams and Quizzes: There will be no exams or quizzes in this course.

Research Paper: Students will complete a substantial paper analyzing a play by an African American playwright. Papers must be 2,500-3,000 words in length and conform to the distributed style guidelines. Further details appear in a separate handout. Final papers are due **Monday, April 13**. Prior to that date students will have to meet a series of other deadlines with their papers. These dates appear on the assignment sheet distributed separately.

Response Papers: Students will complete three 2-3 page response papers during the semester. Specific prompts for these papers appear in a separate handout, and you will find the assignment due dates both on that handout and on the course schedule at the end of this syllabus.

Late Work: All written assignments are to be submitted to TurnItIn.com by the beginning of class the day they are due. Late work will not be accepted except under special circumstances discussed in advance. **Please be advised: issues with computers will not be accepted as excuses for failure to turn in assignments on time. Back up your work and plan ahead.**

Forum Posts: For each play you read in this class you are expected to post a response of at least 200 words to Moodle containing your initial reactions to the work. These must be posted by 8:00 AM the first day we are discussing the play. I may give you specific prompts for these responses, or I may leave them up to you, depending on the play. Your response should relay your immediate response to reading this play. Some questions you may wish to consider: What leapt out at you? Did you like it? If so, why? Did you hate it? If so, why? Did it befuddle you? If so, why do you think that is? Did it make you angry? Why? Additionally, there are two other class readings for which you must make forum posts. Assignments requiring a forum post are noted on your course schedule with an asterisk (*).

Self-Assessment: Students will complete a self-assessment reflection activity roughly halfway through the semester, analyzing their work to that point of the semester and articulating strategies for the second half of the semester.

Missed Assessments: Students in this course are responsible for material covered in class every day, regardless of attendance. Students who miss class should make arrangements with classmates to get notes of what was discussed in their absence. Make-up work will not be possible, except in the case of serious extenuating circumstances.

Attendance/Punctuality: Students in this class are permitted three absences for the semester, including illness. Each additional absence above three will result in a 1/3 letter grade reduction off your final course grade. Any

student accruing SEVEN total absences over the course of the semester will automatically fail the course. Additionally, two instances of arriving late to class will be counted as one absence.

Participation: In-class participation—in the form of speaking in class—is an expectation. I recognize that not all students are comfortable speaking aloud, but oral communication is a necessary component of post-graduate success, and as such I encourage students to grow those skills in this classroom. I assure you that “saying the wrong thing” will not negatively impact your grade. Neither I nor your classmates will judge you for misunderstanding something. It’s OK to share a half-formed thought. It’s also supremely helpful to simply say, “I don’t understand this aspect. Can you help me?”

Grading Scale:

A: 940-1000

A-: 900-939

B+: 870-879

B: 830-869

B-: 800-829

C+: 770-779

C: 730-769

C-: 700-729

D+: 670-679

D: 630-669

D-: 600-629

F: 0-599

Course Schedule (Subject to Change)

M = Reading Found on Moodle

NATO = Reading Found through North American Theatre Online

CRT = *Critical Race Theory and Bamboozled*

* = Forum Post Required

Date	Topic	Assigned
W 1/22	Course Introduction	CRT 1-22
F 1/24	Critical Race Theory	CRT 22-36
M 1/27	Critical Race Theory	CRT 36-49
W 1/29	Critical Race Theory	CRT 49-64
F 1/31	Critical Race Theory	CRT 64-88
M 2/3	<i>Bamboozled</i> Film Screening	
W 2/5	<i>Bamboozled</i> Film Screening	
F 2/7	<i>Bamboozled</i> Film Screening	
M 2/10	<i>Bamboozled</i> Discussion	CRT 99-189
W 2/12	<i>Bamboozled</i> Discussion	
W 2/14	The Harlem Renaissance	<i>Plumes</i> (NATO)*
M 2/17	NO CLASS --- AUDITION DAY	Reflection Papers Due
W 2/19	The Harlem Renaissance	<i>The Purple Flower</i> (NATO)*
F 2/21	The Harlem Renaissance	<i>Color Struck</i> (NATO)*
M 2/24	Paper Workshop	PLAYS FOR FINAL PAPERS DUE
W 2/26	Lorraine Hansberry	<i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> *
F 2/28	Lorraine Hansberry	
M 3/2	Lorraine Hansberry	PAPER INTRODUCTIONS DUE
W 3/4	The Black Arts Movement	"The Revolutionary Theatre" (M)
F 3/6	NO CLASS (Tom at Conference)	"The Black Arts Movement" (M)
		Self-Assessments Due
M 3/9	NO CLASS --- SPRING BREAK	
W 3/11	NO CLASS --- SPRING BREAK	
F 3/13	NO CLASS --- SPRING BREAK	
M 3/16	Amiri Baraka	<i>Dutchman</i> (NATO)*
W 3/18	Hansberry vs. Baraka	Reflection Papers Due
F 3/20	NO CLASS --- AUDITION DAY	
M 3/23	Ntozake Shange	<i>for colored girls...</i> (NATO)*
W 3/25	Ntozake Shange	"unrecovered losses" (M);
F 3/27	Ntozake Shange	"Black Beauty and Black Power" (M)
M 3/30	Paper Workshop Day	DRAFTS DUE
W 4/1	August Wilson	<i>Joe Turner's Come and Gone</i> (NATO)*
F 4/3	August Wilson	

M 4/6	August Wilson	"The Ground on Which I Stand" (M)
W 4/8	Suzan-Lori Parks	"I Want a Black Director" (M)
F 4/10	NO CLASS --- EASTER BREAK	<i>Topdog/Underdog*</i>
M 4/13	Suzan-Lori Parks	FINAL PAPERS DUE
W 4/15	Kia Corthron	<i>Force Continuum*</i>
F 4/17	Kia Corthron	
M 4/20	Katori Hall	<i>The Mountaintop (M)*</i>
W 4/22	Katori Hall	
F 4/24	NO CLASS --- DAY OF SCHOLARSHIP	
M 4/27	Tarell Alvin McCraney	<i>Choir Boy*</i>
W 5/2	Tarell Alvin McCraney	Essay TBD
F 5/4	Dominique Morrisseau	<i>Skeleton Crew*</i>
M 5/7	Dominique Morrisseau	
W 5/9	Lynn Nottage	<i>Sweat*</i>
F 5/11	Lynn Nottage	
Finals Week	Final Discussion	Final Reflections Due