

English 360
Spring 2005
Tu-Th 3:00-4:15
King 127

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OH's: TBA

Unstable Subjects: The Idea of Ethnic American Experimental Literature

Through readings of works that de-stabilize, de-center, and de-naturalize our assumptions about what literature ought to be, this course will explore what it might mean to be an “ethnic experimentalist” writing in America today. We’ll examine what “experiment” provides for ethnic American authors, and question how their works seek to reframe contemporary discussions of race, ethnicity and language.

Required Texts:

Ricardo Cortez Cruz, *Straight Outta Compton*
Sesshu Foster, *City Terrace Field Manual*
Myung Mi Kim, *Commons*
Suzan Lori-Parks, *The America Play*
Harryette Mullen, *Sleeping with the Dictionary*
Claudia Rankine, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*
Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons*
Jean Toomer, *Cane*

Course Requirements:

Attendance:

Attendance is mandatory. You are expected to attend every class session, although you are allowed two unexcused absences. For every unexcused attendance thereafter, your final grade will be lowered by one third. This means that if you miss class three times, a final grade of B+ will be lowered to a B; if you miss four times, that B+ will become a B-.

Written Work:

Papers: There will be two papers due, one at mid-semester and one at semester's end. All papers are due at the beginning of class. Papers should be typed, double-spaced, in Times 12-point font. Papers should be titled, pages should be numbered, and should be consistently formatted. Remember to spell-check.

- The first paper (6-8 pages) will be worth 25% of your final grade.
- The second paper (10-12 pages) will be worth 30% of your final grade.

Assignments: There will be five shorter assignments, of varying length. All assignments should be turned in at the beginning of class, and should be typed, not hand-written. Late assignments will not be accepted (without prior approval).

- These assignments are designed to refine your critical reading and writing skills, and will often involve textual analysis and interpretation.

- Although shorter than the papers, these assignments will be evaluated as ‘mini’ papers, and should be prepared as such.
- These assignments are worth twenty points each, and will be worth 10% of your final grade.

A Note on Plagiarism: Don’t. Keep in mind that plagiarism is not limited to someone else’s words, but extends to intellectual ideas as well. If you are at all unsure about what is and what is not plagiarism, please don’t hesitate to ask.

Late Paper Policy: Late papers will be penalized one third of a grade for every day beyond the original date that the paper is not turned in. This means that if a paper is due on Thursday, and you turn it in on Friday, a B+ will drop to a B; that same paper, if turned in on Monday, will drop to a C.

Student-led Discussion:

You (along with 2-3 classmates) will be responsible for leading one class discussion during the semester. This format of this discussion is flexible, but consists of two main requirements:

- The focus of the discussion should be relevant to material we’re covering in class, and will ideally address and expand upon issues raised in class discussion and your own readings. However, they should not simply repeat what’s already been covered in class.
- The discussion should incorporate at least one critical text alongside the primary text. This can take the form of literary criticism, literary theory, poetic theory, or historical source material. Each group will be responsible for researching these sources, and making sure that they are distributed to the class in advance of their discussion.

Here are some basic ground-rules for the discussions:

- Discussions should be well thought-out and organized—this means groups should be ready to present cohesive topics and themes that explore the texts beyond surface-level ideas. Plot summaries, vague theories, and generalized opinions will not fly so well for these discussions.
- Discussions should be focused. This means that each group should prepare ‘homework’ for the class in advance of the discussion—you can ask the class to look at specific passages, to bring in a written response to readings, etc.—and should plan to address those things during the course of the discussion.
- Likewise, the critical text(s) should be distributed in advance of the discussion. Here, too, groups can ask the class to complete ‘homework’ while reading these texts.
- All members of the group should contribute to the presentation, regardless of format.
- Creativity is encouraged, but substance is crucial: ideally, presentations will mix intellectual creativity with academic rigor.
- Needless to say, the success of these discussions depends not only on each group’s level of preparation, but also on the class’s willingness to actively participate. Thus, you’ll be graded on your own discussion as well as on your participation in others.
- Class discussions will be worth 20% of your final grade—10% will be based on your own discussion, 10% will be based on your participation during other discussions.

Class Participation:

- Your participation in class plays a crucial role in making this class successful. Everyone must participate. For you shy students, this means making a concerted effort to speak up in class, perhaps more than you'd like. I won't hesitate to call on you, so you might as well preemptively speak. On the flip side, those of you who love to talk should be aware that dominating a discussion sometimes has the same effect as not holding discussion at all. All students should make every effort to facilitate discussion, whether that means speaking up or shutting up.
- Civility is important. This means that disagreements should remain at the level of intellect, and should not involve the effects/affects of personality. This also means, more pragmatically, that you should come to class on time, stay awake in class, stay in class (absenting yourself mid-class without reason or request is highly discouraged; if you need to go somewhere, please ask me first), not eat in class, and a variety of other common-sense things.
- Class participation is worth 15% of your final grade.

Grade Break-down

First paper:	25%
Second paper:	30%
Assignments:	10%
Discussion:	20% (10/10)
Participation:	15%

Oberlin Honor Code

All work in the class is subject to the Oberlin Honor Code. For the full text of the Honor Code, see:

www.oberlin.edu/students/student_pages/honor_code.html

Remember to write the Honor Pledge and sign your name at the end of all assignments. The Honor Pledge states: "I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment."

If you have questions about the Honor Code, don't hesitate to ask. If you don't know whether you're violating the Honor Code, *always ask*—don't let a simple misunderstanding jeopardize your grade in class and your student record.

Schedule:

DATE	CLASS SCHEDULE	WHAT'S DUE
Feb. 8	Introduction, administration	
Feb. 10	Introduction, con't.;	
Feb. 15	<i>Tender Buttons</i>	

Feb. 17	<i>Tender Buttons</i>	
Feb. 22	<i>Tender Buttons</i> <u>Student-led Discussion</u>	Assignment 1
Feb. 24	<i>Cane</i>	
Mar. 1	<i>Cane</i> <u>Student-led Discussion</u>	
Mar. 3	<i>Cane/Sleeping with the Dictionary</i>	
Mar. 8	<i>Sleeping with the Dictionary</i>	Assignment 2
Mar. 10	<i>Sleeping with the Dictionary</i> <u>Student-led Discussion</u>	
Mar. 15	<i>Commons</i>	
Mar. 17	<i>Commons</i>	
Mar. 22	<i>Commons</i> <u>Student-led Discussion</u>	
Mar. 24	<i>Don't Let Me Be Lonely</i>	First Paper
Mar. 29	NO CLASS— Spring Break	
Mar. 31	NO CLASS— Spring Break	
Apr. 5	<i>Don't Let Me Be Lonely</i>	Assignment 3
Apr. 7	<i>Don't Let Me Be Lonely</i> <u>Student-Led Discussion</u>	
Apr. 12	<i>City Terrace Field Manual</i>	
Apr. 14	<i>City Terrace Field Manual</i>	
Apr. 19	<i>City Terrace Field Manual</i> <u>Student-Led Discussion</u>	Assignment 4
Apr. 21	<i>Straight Outta Compton</i>	
Apr. 26	<i>Straight Outta Compton</i>	
Apr. 28	<i>Straight Outta Compton</i> <u>Student-led Discussion</u>	
May 3	<i>The America Play</i>	Assignment 5
May 5	<i>The America Play</i>	
May 10	<i>The America Play</i> <u>Student-led Discussion</u>	
May 12	Final Class: Conclusion	Second Paper