

THR332 (Section 001): Topics in Theatre Studies African American Drama & Performance

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Introduction: African American dramatists have had a long history of addressing themes of segregation, struggle, injustice, identity and self-assertion. With time, however, they have also explored more inclusive issues like family, religion, culture, gender, sexuality, history, war, global concerns and relationships. This class will examine key historical and social factors that have influenced the thematic focus of African American playwrights, as well as their reliance on different approaches that range from the experimental and musical to the traditional. Though our primary focus will be on contemporary playwrights, we will also look at earlier playwrights like Charles Fuller and Ossie Davis.

Course Goals

- Highlight the unique evolution of African American drama
- Identify and discuss topics that have been of prime concern to African American dramatists
- Analyze theatrical styles adopted in recommended texts
- View and discuss videos that reinforce the subject matter of individual plays and the thematic focus of individual playwrights
- Appreciate African American drama as a rich and invaluable addition to the larger American theatrical experience

Student Input

- Pay attention and take notes
- Submit written work on time
- Attend lectures, ask questions and contribute to discussions
- Do one class presentation based on material covered in class (details to be provided)
- Perform at least one scene from any text (details to be provided)

Required Texts

- Charles Fuller, *A Soldier's Story*
- Ossie Davis, *Purlie Victorious*
- Lydia Diamond, *Stick Fly*
- August Wilson, *Fences*
- Katori Hall, *The Mountaintop*
- Lee Breuer, *The Gospel at Colonus*
- Lynn Nottage, *Ruined*
- Ntozake Shange, *For Colored Girls who have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow is ENUF*
- Jackie Sibblies Drury, *We Are Proud To Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as Southwest Africa, From the German Sudwestafrika, Between the Years 1884 - 1915*
- Suzan-Lori Parks, *The America Play*
- Dael Orlandersmith, *Yellowman*

Other Resources

- Articles and supplementary texts to be provided electronically
- Videos to be watched in class and recommended for viewing outside class

Reading, Discussion and Assignment Schedule

Aug. 30: Introduction to course

Sep. 4: Holiday, no class

Sep. 6: Background on African American drama

- PowerPoint Presentation on the roots of African American drama (The oral tradition, music, dance, religion)
- Minstrel Shows: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kbnn3E7Gp8>,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sXIXcAQFy90>

Sep. 11: Charles Fuller

- *A Soldier's Story* – Movie based on Charles Fuller's play, *A Soldier's Play*

Sep. 13: *A Soldier's Play*

Sep. 18: Ossie Davies

- Video: Purlie Victorious or The Musical

Sep. 20: *Purlie Victorious*

Sep. 25: Lydia Diamond

- *Stick Fly* video

Sep. 27: *Stick Fly*

Oct. 2: First in-class essay, open book

Oct. 4: August Wilson

- Movie version of *Fences*

Oct. 9: Discuss *Fences*, Diagnostic essay due

Oct. 11: Katori Hall

- Video: Roads to Memphis
- Katori Hall on playwriting, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SA5n1HoI6ZU>

Oct. 16: Katori Hall

- *The Mountaintop*

Oct. 18: Lee Breuer

- Video: *The Gospel at Colonus*

Oct. 23: *The Gospel at Colonus*

Oct. 25: Lynn Nottage

- *Ruined*
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmWlrTOLUi8> (Lynn Nottage discusses bringing *Ruined* to Arena Stage)

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxnccqXCC-A> (Lynn Nottage and Saidah Arrika Ekulona on *Ruined*)
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0yJuAs5Ad5U&index=9&list=PLwAAXweQS0Ai7e_jpVzYTkcBvpRNxhIEj

Oct. 30: Second in-class essay, open book

Nov. 1: Ntozake Shange

- Movie version of *for colored girls*

Nov. 6: *For Colored Girls*

Nov. 8: Jackie Sibblies Drury

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fhhOOPVdRQk>
- *Theatre Review*. 'We Are Proud to Present a Presentation...'

Nov 13: *We Are Proud To Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as Southwest Africa, From the German Sudwestafrika, Between the Years 1884 - 1915*

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPF2UULYRdq>

****Nov. 15:** Suzan-Lori Parks (to be replaced)

- *The America Play*

Nov. 17: Midterm exam due

Nov. 20, 22: No class, Thanksgiving break

Nov. 27: Dael Orlandersmith

- *Yellowman*
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-UucHAjDs9Y>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U3SxrT8fICw>

Nov. 29: Third in-class essay, open book

Dec. 4: Performance of selected scenes

Dec. 6: Performance of selected scenes

Dec. 11: Final project due

Attendance Policy: You are required to attend and participate in every class meeting. Two unexcused absences will be allowed; otherwise, you will need to provide proof and/or documentation for unavoidable absences. The latter would be the result of unusual and extreme circumstances like illness, court appearance, job interview, death, religious holiday, birth of a baby and so forth. Where an absence is anticipated, arrangements will need to be made in advance to make up missed work. Besides the two allowed unexcused absences, each additional absence will result in a deduction of 0.5 points from your final score.

Assignments and Quizzes

- Final exam (25 points)

- Midterm exam (20 points)
- Three in-class essays (20 points)
- Diagnostic essay (15 points)
- Class presentation/participation (10 points)
- Scene performance (10 points)

Grade Scale

- 90—100% 4.0
- 85—89% 3.5
- 80—84% 3.0
- 75—79% 2.5
- 70—74% 2.0
- 65—69% 1.5
- 60—64% 1.0
- 00—59% 0.0

Course assignments will be graded on MSU's 4.0 grade scale as indicated above. Final course grades will be rounded to the nearest half grade, except that at least a 1.0 must be earned to receive a 1.0 final course grade. For example, a 2.74 could round to a 2.5 course grade; a 2.75 could round to a 3.0 course grade, and so on. Any final course grade below a 1.0, however, earns a 0.0; thus, a 0.75 would not round to a 1.0, but rather would earn a 0.0 (failure in the course).

Classroom Conduct: Students will interact respectfully with fellow students and the class instructor. The instructor will equally treat all class members with respect. This means that there will be no room for cursing, using foul language, making bigoted statements, interrupting a speaker, being loud or displaying any other form of rude and disruptive conduct. In addition, students should avoid using technological devices, including cell phones and laptops that are distracting and disruptive to the learning environment.

Resources for Students:

- For assistance with writing research and other class papers, students may consult *The Writing Center*. This includes consultation on digital writing projects as well as a Grammar Hotline. *The Writing Center* is in 300 Bessey Hall. For further information, go to: <http://writing.msu.edu>.
- International students are encouraged to take advantage of the *ESL Writing Lab*, which assists with course readings, writing assignments, proofreading and revising papers. For more information on the *Lab*, visit: <http://elc.msu.edu/esl-lab>.
- Located in 202 Bessey Hall, *The Learning Resource Center* offers a range academic support services to students. These include seminars and workshops on skills enhancement, learning methods and effective time management. The *Center* also provides one-on-one tutoring on critical reading and related academic concerns. Further details on the *Center's* services can be accessed at <http://lrc.msu.edu>.

Students with Disabilities: Michigan State University does not discriminate against students with documented mental or physical disabilities. If you have a disability that requires accommodations in this or any other course, contact your instructor immediately as well as the *Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities* located in 120 Bessey Hall. To meet with a counselor, call 353-9642 (voice) or 355-1293 (TTY).

Academic Integrity: MSU prescribes specific guidelines to ensure that students maintain high standards of academic honesty and discipline. These are outlined under its policies on

“Protection of Scholarship and Grades” and “Integrity of Scholarship and Grades,” which charge students to refrain from any form of academic dishonesty, including cheating on tests or plagiarizing on written assignments. This means that papers submitted by students will not have been copied from the Internet or other source, and will not be a replication of the works of other students. This also means that while students are expected to consult external sources during research, such sources are to be properly acknowledged using an acceptable form of citation. MSU policy cautions that the consequence for academic dishonesty and/or plagiarism is a failing grade on an assignment or course. In addition, failure resulting from dishonesty will be brought to the attention of the appropriate academic dean. More information on cheating and dishonesty can be accessed at the Office of the University Ombudsperson webpage: <https://msu.edu/~ombud/academic-integrity/index.html>.

Online SIRS Evaluation Policy: Michigan State University takes seriously the opinion of students in the evaluation of the effectiveness of instruction and has implemented the Student Instructional Rating System (SIRS) to gather student feedback (<https://sirsonline.msu.edu>). This course utilizes the online SIRS system, and you will receive an email during the last two weeks of class asking you to fill out the SIRS web form at your convenience. In addition, participation in the online SIRS system involves grade sequestration, which means that the final grade for this course will not be accessible on STUINFO during the week following the submission of grades for this course unless the SIRS online form has been completed. Alternatively, you have the option on the SIRS website to decline to participate in the evaluation of the course. We hope, however, that you will be willing to give us your frank and constructive feedback so that we may instruct students even better in the future. If you access the online SIRS website and complete the online SIRS form or decline to participate, you will receive the final grade in this course as usual once final grades are submitted.

Possible Course Amendments: Course Content may be changed or amended during the semester. Students will be notified of such changes.