The Black Novel in the United States

So if the ideal of achieving a true political equality eludes us in reality – as it continues to do – there is still available that fictional vision of an ideal democracy in which the actual combines with the ideal and gives us representations of a state of things in which the highly placed and the lowly, the black and the white, the northerner and the southerner, the native-born and the immigrant are combined to tell us of transcendent truths and possibilities such as those discovered when Mark Twain set Huck and Jim afloat on the raft.

~Ralph Ellison, From the 1981 Introduction to *Invisible Man*

The question of black-white racial difference is the central theme of the black novel in the United States. But as Ellison notes in his Introduction to his famous novel, it has political objectives that extend well beyond the question of race. Over the course of the semester, you will read a number of novels that grapple with the question of black-white racial difference and judge for yourself the novel’s ability to achieve its aims.

**Course Requirements**

3 short papers, 1 long paper (8-10 pages), final exam, and class participation

**Texts** (Available for Purchase at Bowdoin Textbook Annex):
- Martin Delany, *Blake; or, The Huts of America* BEACON PRESS PAPERBACK ONLY
- Sutton Griggs, *Imperium in Imperio* MODERN LIBRARY EDITION ONLY
- W.E.B. DuBois, *Dark Princess* UNIVERSITY PRESS OF MISSISSIPPI ONLY
- Richard Wright, *Black Boy* HARPER PERENNIAL EDITION ONLY
- Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* HARPER PERENNIAL EDITON ONLY
- Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* VINTAGE
- Toni Morisson, *The Bluest Eye* VINTAGE
- Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* MARINER BOOKS
- Kenneth Warren, *What Was African American Literature?*

**Class Format:**
Each class will follow a discussion/lecture format. Each student is expected to
respond to questions that are posed both by me and other members of the class. Each student will be assigned a passage or chapter from the text we are reading and asked to perform a close reading of it during class. Attendance is mandatory. If you are forced to miss a class due to illness please have the dean’s office inform me of your absence. Class participation counts for 25% of your final grade.

Written Assignments:
Students will be given a prompt 2 weeks before the deadline for each written assignment. All assignment are due on the dates stipulated in the schedule of classes. No extensions are permitted.

Texts (all are available for purchase at the college bookstore):

Martin Delany, *Blake; or, The Huts of America*
Sutton Griggs, *Imperium in Imperio*
W.E.B. DuBois, *Dark Princess*
Richard Wright, *Black Boy*
Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*
Toni Morisson, *The Bluest Eye*
Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*
Kenneth Warren, *What Was African American Literature?*

Schedule of Classes

Jan 25. – Introduction – Mark Twain’s *Huck* and the Problem of the Black Novel
Jan 27 – *Blake* (ch. 1-10)
Feb. 1 – *Blake* (ch. 11-34)
Feb. 3 – *Blake* (ch. 35-50)
Feb. 8 – *Blake* (ch. 51-End) - One Page paper due
Feb. 10 – *Imperium in Imperio* (ch. 1-10)
Feb. 15 – *Imperium in Imperio* (ch. 11-End)
Feb. 17 – *Dark Princess* (pt. 1)
Feb. 22 – *Dark Princess* (pt.2)
Feb. 24 – *Dark Princess* – (pt. 3) Three Page Paper due
Mar. 1 – *Black Boy* pt. 1 (ch. 1-8)
Mar. 3 – *Black Boy* pt. 1(ch.9-15 – end pt. 1)
Mar. 8 – *Black Boy* pt. 2 (ch. 16-end)
Mar. 10 – *Invisible Man* (Prologue-ch. 7)
*JOINT CLASS ( WITH PROF. REIZBAUM’S MODERN NOVEL CLASS) ON INVISIBLE MAN* (ch. 8-15)
Mar. 29 – *Invisible Man* (ch. 16-23)
Mar. 31 – *Invisible Man* (ch. 24-End)
April 5 – No Class – Peer Review
April 7 – No Class – Five Page Paper Due
Submit paper to Africana Studies Program Office, 3rd floor, Adams Hall

April 12 – *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (ch. 1-10)
April 14 – *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (ch. 11-End)
April 19 – *The Color Purple* (pp. 1-101), Gates, *Signifying Monkey* (on e-reserve)
April 21 – *The Color Purple* (pp. 102-End)
April 26 – *The Bluest Eye* (pp. 1-79)
April 28 – *The Bluest Eye* (pp. 80-End)
May 3 – *What Was African American Literature?* (pt. 1)
May 5 – *What Was African American Literature?* (pt. 2)
May 10 –*What Was African American Literature?* (pt. 3) **Final Paper Due**