

African American Literature and Philosophy
Philosophy 396
Dr. Carol Moeller
Fall 2009

Class Meets: Tuesdays and Thursdays: 1:10 – 2:20 p.m.

Classroom: Memorial 303

Office: Zinzendorf 202

Office Hours: T, TH 10:15 – 12, T 2:30 – 3, and by appointment.

Phone: 610-625-7881

Email: moeller@moravian.edu (or mecjm03@moravian.edu -- the first email address is simply the alias for the second, so they both go to my same email account).

Required Texts, in roughly the order that we will read them:

Wright, Richard, *Native Son*, HarperCollins Publishers, April 2008, 9780061148507.

West, Cornel, *Race Matters*, Knopf Doubleday, 1994. ISBN-13: 9780679749868.

Morrison, Toni, *The Bluest Eye*, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2007. ISBN-13: 9780307278449.

Mills, Charles, *The Racial Contract*, Cornell University Press, 1997. ISBN-10: 0-8014-8463-4,

ISBN-13: 978-0-8014-8463-6.

Morrison, Toni, *Beloved*, Knopf Doubleday Publishing, 2004. ISBN-13: 9781400033416.

Obama, Barack, *Dreams from My Father*, Crown Publishing Group, 2004, ISBN-13: 78140008277.

Course Description

Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) theorizes from movements of liberation and decolonization not only in government but also in philosophy and literature. How have writers and thinkers of African descent abroad and in the U.S. engaged with each other? How have these formerly marginalized voices spoken for themselves? What does "colonizing the mind" mean today amidst the ongoing dominance of globalized capitalism and coloniality? Texts may include works by Toni Morrison, Frantz Fanon, Audre Lorde, Paul Gilroy, Kwame Gyekye, Cornel West, Ngugi wa Thiongo, and Anita Allen. Class will require some out-of-class video viewing.

Prerequisites: Junior or Senior class standing, completion of the LinC M2 (literature) and M3 (ultimate questions) requirements, or instructor's signature.

It would be impossible to 'cover' major philosophers of each of the many traditions of African-American literature and philosophy, particularly to look at thinkers around the world (for each part of the world has philosophy), and to look at a great diversity of voices in these conversations. White European and U.S. traditions have tended to claim their own traditions of philosophy and literature as if they represented philosophy and literature on the whole. We will address questions of how voices that are not male, white, and upper class have tended to be excluded. Since we are limited to one semester, we will limit our exploration to six books plus some additional poems and essay excerpts. These books will help us deal with such questions directly, not only about philosophy but also about thought generally.

Philosophy requires each of us to read, think, reflect, speak, and reason critically about what the world is like, what matters, what people are like, and how we ought to live. The course will consist of dialogue with the texts and with each other.

Readings: Before each class meeting, read and reflect upon everything assigned for class class.

Seeing Me: If you have any trouble with any of the material, come see me. Don't wait. Come to my office hours, catch me before or after class, make an appointment to meet me another time if office hours are not convenient, or email me. If you need to get something to me, leave it at my office or email it to me at moeller@moravian.edu (or mecjm03@moravian.edu -- the first email address is simply the alias for the second, so they both go to my same email account). Note: To email me any Word documents, please avoid the ones saved in the latest version of Word (these show a suffix of .docx instead of .doc). If you are working in this latest version of Word, use the "save as" feature to save it in the earlier version of Word, and email me this version. (One of my two computers cannot handle .docx files.)

Course Outcomes

By the end of the course, students should achieve the following outcomes specific to this course:

- 1) To understand and be able to explain important concepts and views related to African-American literature and philosophy.
- 2) To be familiar with some important works of African-American literature;¹
- 3) To develop greater facility in reading, writing, thinking, and speaking about African-American studies, literature, and philosophy;
- 4) To strengthen critical reflection upon which voices have been centered and which marginalized in Western traditions of thought.

Course Requirements (as percentage of final grade)

See footnote 1 at bottom of page for flexibility option

Attendance and discussion participation, and oral presentation, and quiz average.

(presentation is pass/fail)	5%
Exam 1	20
Exam 2	25
Final Exam	25
5-6 Page Essay	<u>25%</u>
	100%

Attendance and Participation: Failure to participate will detract from your grade. Unexcused absences (beyond one) will push your course average -- and final grade -- down by .5 % points per miss from the course average. For example, if you have 3 unexcused absences (which would be 2 beyond the 1 "freebie" allowed); your final average will be lowered by 2 x .5, which equals 1.

¹ NOTE: Consider how you could best learn and demonstrate your learning throughout the course. If the three exams and one 5-6 page paper option does not seem to match this, you may petition me to modify and customize the above requirements. If your plan is not to include Exam 1, you must get this approved by September 29. Likewise, to not include Exam 2, you must have an alternative approved by Thursday, October 29. Any alternative that would replace Exam 3 (final) or the 5-6 page essay must be approved by Thursday, November 12. (Once you take an exam, it counts, regardless of other modification you might request.) Talk to me in advance if you are interested in such an option.

If your grade would otherwise be an 80.1 (B -), it will become a 79.1 (C +). If the final score remains right on the borderline between two letter grades, your participation level will be taken into account (as opposed to simply attendance).

Quizzes: There may be pop quizzes, every few chapters or so, to check to see how well students are understanding the material from the text and from class. There will be no make-up quizzes except for those recognized as official College absences (e.g., athletic matches and religious observance), serious illness documented with doctor's note). Unexcused absences on quiz occasions will result in a mark of 0 for that quiz.

The lowest single quiz score for each student will be dropped. That is, if you miss a quiz, that one zero will be dropped; if you are present for all of them, the lowest score will be dropped.

Presentation: Further required is a single oral presentation. You may do this in a presentation giving an overview of the readings for that day, or you may bring in and share something -- an object, an experience or story to tell, a piece of music, etc. -- that has ethical meaning, according to you. You must explain, giving reasons to support your notion that it has ethical meaning.

Three Exams (20% + 25% +25% = 70%): These will cover material from the text and from class, and it will also go beyond those to ask you to apply these ideas and skills further. (In other words, you will need to go far beyond mastery of the written and verbal material from class.)

Essay (25%): 5-6 double-spaced pages on topic selected from those I distribute, or your own proposed topic with my written approval. Please use 10-12 font (no decorative fonts please), use 1 inch margins (top/bottom/sides) and properly document sources. Use a complete bibliography and references, according to MLA, Chicago, or another standard style. Come see me (well in advance of the deadline) for any help, and for feedback on outlines and/or drafts of your essay.

Academic Integrity:

The rules of academic integrity for Moravian College must be followed. Please take them seriously. Any suspicion of violations will be actively pursued. Moravian College standards on academic integrity and plagiarism are available in *Academic Honesty at Moravian College*, available from the Office of the Dean of the College (in Colonial Hall, first floor). Plagiarism is very serious, resulting in automatic failure on the relevant assignment, even if the action is unintentional, such as the failure to cite the source of paraphrased ideas. We will discuss these issues on particular assignments, such as essays. For more information on these policies, please see the student handbook, the professor, or the academic dean's office.

For this course, the following pointers may be helpful. Follow instructions on graded assignments, doing your own work unless the assignment is explicitly given as a group project or as allowing for open-book work. In doing essays, be sure to give references and credit for any ideas which are not entirely your own. That is, when quoting or paraphrasing or even referring to the idea(s) of another, cite the source. If you are not sure whether a reference is required, give a reference anyway. If in doubt, err on the side of overly generous reference giving, and consult with the professor for guidance.

Doing Well:

It is imperative that students keep up with their work in this course and get help any time they have trouble. Each chunk of material builds upon the previous chunk, and so holes in understanding will continue to cause problems. Similarly, missing even a single class can disrupt

the learning process and leave a student feeling hopelessly lost very quickly. Please be on top of your work, come to class, ask questions, and achieve an excellent level of understanding of all the material covered, together with the developed ability to apply that understanding independently.

Further, students tend to have wide variation in how long it takes them to learn. It might seem that you spend eight hours on reading that a friend completes in one hour. Everyone needs to spend as much time as it takes to master the material.

Disabilities /Learning Disabilities:

Students with disabilities/learning disabilities should contact Joe Kempfer in the Learning Services Office as soon as possible to arrange for any necessary accommodations. Official authorization is necessary for accommodation eligibility.

Potential Syllabus Changes:

This syllabus is subject to change at the professor's notice.

Further Note on Grading:

As in other courses, grading is at the professional judgment of the professor. For example, there may be an element of discretion in how much partial credit is given to a response. You may appeal grades to the department chair, Dr. Cantens, and to the Dean's Office.

Grading and academic integrity policies for this course are in accordance with Moravian College standards, as expressed in the Catalog (p. 43). Please note the following about grading.

Grading scheme: 97-100=A+ 93-96.9=A 90-92.9=A- 87-89.9=B+ 83-86.9=B 80-82.9=B- 77-79.9=C+ 73-76.9=C 70-72.9=C- 67-69.9=D+ 63-66.9=D 60-62.9=D- 0-59.9=F

A (4.00 points) and A- (3.67): "These grades indicate achievement of the highest caliber. They involve expectations of independent work, original thinking, and the ability to acquire and effectively use knowledge."

B+ (3.33), B (3.00), and B- (2.67): "These grades indicate higher than average achievement. Evidence of independent work and original thinking is expected."

C+ (2.33), C (2.00), and C- (1.67): "These grades are given when the student has devoted a reasonable amount of time, effort, and attention to the work of the course, and has satisfied the following criteria: familiarity with the content of the course, familiarity with the methods of study of the course, and active participation in the work of the class."

D+ (1.33), D (1.00), and D- (0.67): "These grades indicate unsatisfactory work, below the standard expected by the College. They indicate work which in one or more important aspects falls below the average expected of students for graduation. The work is, however, sufficient to be credited for graduation, if balanced by superior work in other courses."

F (0.00): "This indicates failure."

Moravian College standards on academic integrity and plagiarism are available in *Academic Honesty at Moravian College*, available from the Office of the Dean of the College (in Colonial Hall, first floor). Plagiarism is very serious, resulting in automatic failure on the relevant assignment, even if the action is unintentional, such as the failure to cite the source of paraphrased ideas. We will discuss these issues on particular assignments, such as essays.

For this course, the following pointers may be helpful. Follow instructions on graded assignments, doing your own work unless the assignment is explicitly given as a group project or as allowing for open-book work. In doing essays, be sure to give references and credit for any

ideas which are not entirely your own. That is, when quoting or paraphrasing or even referring to the idea(s) of another, cite the source. If you are not sure whether a reference is required, give a reference anyway. If in doubt, err on the side of overly generous reference giving, and consult with the professor for guidance.

FALL TERM 2009 Tuesdays & Thursdays PHIL 396 (Readings are to be done prior to that day's class)	
Monday, August 31	CLASSES BEGIN
Tuesday, September 1	Introduction to course, syllabus
Thursday, September 3	<i>Native Son, beginning to 94, Race Matters, XIII – XVI, 1 - 32</i>
Tuesday, September 8	<i>Native Son, 95 – 197, Race Matters, 33 - 70</i>
Thursday, September 10	<i>Native Son – 197 - 270, Race Matters, 71 – 100</i>
Tuesday, September 15	<i>Native Son, 271 - 363, Race Matters, 101 - 132</i>
Thursday, September 17	<i>Native Son, 363 - 430, Race Matters, 133 - 159</i>
Tuesday, September 22	<i>The Bluest Eye, IX – XIII, 1 - 58</i>
Thursday, September 24	<i>The Bluest Eye, 59 - 109</i>
Tuesday, September 29	<i>The Bluest Eye, 110 - 163</i>
Thursday, October 1	<i>The Bluest Eye, 164 - 206</i>
Tuesday, October 6	Exam 1
Thursday, October 8	<i>The Racial Contract, 1 - 40</i>
Friday, October 9	Midpoint of Fall term
Sat, October 10 noon- Wed. October 14, 7:30am	Fall Recess
Tuesday, October 13	No Class, Fall Break
Thursday, October 15	<i>The Racial Contract, 41 - 90</i>
Tuesday, October 20	<i>The Racial Contract, 91 – 133</i>
Thursday, October 22	<i>Beloved, beginning to XIX, 1 - 100</i>
Tuesday, October 27	<i>Beloved, 101 - 172</i>
Thursday, October 29	<i>Beloved, 173 - 280</i>
Tuesday, November 3	<i>Beloved, 281 - 325</i> Election Day
Thursday, November 5	Exam 2
Friday, November 6	Last Day for Withdrawal with “W”
Tuesday, November 10	<i>Dreams from My Father, vii – xvii, 1 - 91</i>
Thursday, November 12	<i>Dreams from My Father, 92 - 186</i>

Tuesday, November 17	<i>Dreams from My Father, 187 - 271</i>
Thursday, November 19	<i>Dreams from My Father, 272 - 323</i>
Tuesday, November 24	Essay Due (unless an extension was requested in writing by by Tuesday Nov. 3, and approved by me) Note: RECESS does not begin until 10pm on Tuesday, Nov 24, so we do have class that Tuesday <i>Dreams from My Father, 324 - 391</i>
Thursday, November 26	No Class
Tuesday, December 1	<i>Dreams from My Father, 392 - 457</i>
Thursday, December 3	<i>Dreams from My Father (whole book)</i>
Tuesday, December 8	Further Discussion
Wednesday, December 9	CLASSES END
Wednesday, December 16 1:30	Final Exam