

Department of English, Foreign Languages, Journalism
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

English ENG460-15 The Black Arts Movement

Course Syllabus - Summer 2007

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Office Hours: Normally available shortly before and after class, and by appointment.

Class Meeting Time and Room: 10:30 - 1:20, MTWR, Murphy Hall 109.

Required texts and materials: *Black Fire*, Baraka & Neal; *The Black Poets*, Randall; *The LeRoi Jones/ Amiri Baraka Reader*, Harris; *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, Bambara; *Dutchman* and *The Slave*, Baraka; *Blues for Mister Charlie*, Baldwin.

Students with Disabilities: Anyone who has a disability that prevents the fullest expression of her or his potential to succeed in this course must notify me in writing as soon as possible so we may discuss course requirements, options, and accommodations.

Course Description & Goals: Our college catalog describes ENG460 as follows: “An in-depth study of a literary period or movement; focus will change each time the course is offered.” Our literary movement is “Black Arts,” the explosive period in U.S. literary history during which art became openly politicized along racial lines. As that Minnesota troubadour Robert Zimmerman phrased it, “There was music in the cafes at night / And revolution in the air” (“Tangled up in Blue”). We will explore whether BAM truly constituted a revolution or whether it remained more akin to rebellion. What is without question, however, is that art became politicized, a weapon with which to identify and incite.

Caveat: Many of the works we will read seethe racially and sexually charged language. While the presence of such language rightly should disturb us, we must read it nonetheless with the understanding that disturbing people was precisely what the writers meant to do. Paramount to the success of our course is that we approach and analyze offensive language, stereotypes, and ideologies in their historical and artistic context.

Key Questions:

- * What constitutes a literary movement?
- * What forces precipitated the Black Power and Black Arts Movements?
- * What movements preceded, succeeded, and occurred concurrent with BAM?
- * What artistic groups and accomplishments resulted from BAM?
- * What innovations in form and language did BAM writers create?
- * What was BAM’s role in the larger Black Power Movement?
- * How does BAM reflect the Zeitgeist?
- * What constitutes “nationalism”?
- * Why did BAM split from “liberal” groups?
- * What was the source and outcome of Black antisemitism?
- * How was BAM perceived *intra*racially as well as *interracially*?
- * What divided BAM from Marxism?
- * What role did religions play in BAM?
- * How did BAM affect gender roles?

- * What persons and events beyond the U.S. impacted BAM?
- * What ended BAM?
- * What was the lasting impact of BAM?

Prerequisite: ENG210 or ENG220 and junior standing.

Academic Honesty: Each of you has too much integrity to cheat. If I notice any oversights in crediting sources, I will ask you to correct the mistakes. That said, I am required to post the following official statement of this university:

MWSU Academic Honesty Policy and Due Process: Academic honesty is required in all academic endeavors. Violations of academic honesty include any instance of plagiarism, cheating, seeking credit for another's work, falsifying documents or academic records, or any other fraudulent activity. Violations of academic honesty may result in a failing grade on the assignment, failure in the course, or expulsion from the University. When a student's grade has been affected, violations of academic honesty will be reported to the Provost or designated representative on the Academic Honesty Violation Report forms.

Please see the 2006-07 Student Handbook and Calendar on page 21 for specific activities identified as violations of this policy and the student due process procedure. This handbook is also available online at <http://www.missouriwestern.edu/handbook/index.pdf>

Grading: A four-week majors' course is certain to be intense. This means we must all be present, prompt, and prepared to discuss each day's assigned reading. We need to think of ourselves as a team dedicated to learning all we possibly can given realistic time constraints. We can greatly increase coverage and enrich our learning if we divide and conquer. Toward that goal, each of us will independently educate herself or himself on some writer or subject and then present our findings to the class. (I will suggest presentation topics below.) Finally, we will each write one major research paper that I will have published and distribute to each of you. I am establishing grading criteria to reward good team effort:

Daily Retention-Enhancement Questionnaires:	5%
One-page Daily Response Papers:	15%
Presentation to Class:	30%
Major Research Paper:	40%
Final Exam:	<u>10%</u>
Total:	100%

Suggestions — by no means all-inclusive — for presentation topics:

* Succinctly summarize unassigned essays (about 100 pages total) or chapters from our class texts. This will work especially well on essays in *Black Fire* or the *Baraka Reader*. It could also work well on texts held by our library or that I own. For example, Harold Cruse's book, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, offers a wealth of analysis (some inflammatory) of the period. Stephen Henderson's *Understanding the New Black Poetry* performs a great service, as does Amiri Baraka's *Blues People*. You might also examine more recent texts by Cheryl Clarke, James Smethurst, and Lisa Gale Collins.

* Read and condense biographical material from the life of a writer who interests you. Someone might read and condense for the class Gwendolyn Brooks' autobiography, *Report from Part One*. Someone else might read the autobiography of Baraka's first wife, Hettie Cohen, *How I Became Hettie Jones*.

* Enlighten the class on selected works by a writer not included or else minimally covered. Martin Luther King, for example, comes immediately to mind, as does Eldridge Cleaver's prison writings. Many strong women writers such as Jayne Cortez, Carolyn Rogers, and Gwendolyn Brooks merit more attention. (Brooks is especially interesting because of her "Saul" to "Paul" transformation.) You might also enlighten the class on critics of BAM, such as Langston Hughes and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

* Compare BAM to its predecessors or successors. Alain Locke's renowned anthology, *The New Negro*, predates

BAM by over a quarter century and begs to be compared to *Black Fire*. Several of you could compare different genres, perhaps one of you comparing the essays, another the poetry, another the drama, another the fiction. Another option would be to peruse any contemporary anthology of Black writing and compare selected works to those in our texts. Someone might also read Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, which predates yes predicts BAM.

* Incorporate the global view of post-colonialism, especially as articulated by Frantz Fanon in his seminal *Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin, White Masks*.

Regardless which of the above you choose, you will need to read either a book or else several essays, poems, plays, or criticism totalling 100-200 pages to gain the expertise needed for a strong presentation. Any of the above suggestions *could* evolve seamlessly from a presentation to a major research paper. Everyone is free, however, to select entirely different topics for the two projects.

Attendance: Obviously, in a course already limited to sixteen sessions, attendance is crucial. Excessive absences will result in lost points, reduced comprehension of material, and lower course grades.

Excused Absences: Common sense and human decency will prevail. I will grant special consideration to students who can document extenuating circumstances.

Make-up Work: Except in the case of extenuating circumstances, I will not allow missed quizzes to be made up.

Classroom behavior: As stated in the *MWSC Student Handbook*, instructors "may establish additional classroom rules and expectations for conduct in the classroom. Behavior which disrupts the classroom environment or interferes with other students' ability to learn may be grounds or justification for dismissal from the classroom" (28). Sleeping, conducting private conversations, using computers for other than assigned purposes, eating, drinking, damaging property, and using vulgar or deliberately offensive language are some of the more common acts that can damage the learning environment. Likewise, all telephones are to be silent during class time. No headphones may be worn, no music listened to, no homework done for other classes. Let's establish a cordial and respectful atmosphere in which we can have fun while learning together.

Final Exam: Thursday, June 28, Murphy Hall 109, regular class time.

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