HU4542 Topics in American Literature
(The Black Man and Woman in American Drama)
Spring Semester 2002  Time: 11:05-12:20  Professor Gill, PhD
Office: Walker 327  Room: Walker 116 gegill@mtu.edu
Phone: 487-3246  Office hours: 11-11:50 MWF (I check email once a day.)

THIS PLAN IS FLEXIBLE!

CATALOG DESCRIPTION: Selected problems posed by literary genres, themes, movements, and individual authors in American literature.

RESTRICTIONS: Must be enrolled as a junior or senior.

PREREQUISITES: UN1002 or UN1003 or permission of instructor.

TEXTS: Fences, August Wilson
Black Theater, USA, Revised and Expanded Edition, Vols I and II, James V. Hatch and Ted Shine, Editors

ON RESERVE:
No Surrender! No Retreat! African American Pioneer Performers of Twentieth-Century American Theater, Glenda E. Gill
Fences, August Wilson

SUPPLIED BY PROFESSOR: Full-text of For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf, Ntozake Shange

Tu. - Jan. 15--Introduction of ourselves, filling out of bio cards, distribution of syllabi, and begin Colored Girls.

Th. - Jan. 17-Tu., Jan. 22--Colored Girls. If we finish on Jan. 22, we will begin the film of Wright and Green's Native Son.

Th. - Jan 24-Tu., Jan 29--Native Son (film and discussion of text and one of the films.) Please see my No Surrender! No Retreat! and even portions of my White Grease Paint on Black Performers: A Study of the Federal Theatre, 1935-1939 for the sections on Canada Lee and his portrayal of Bigger Thomas in the 1940 stage production of Native Son.)

Th. - Jan 31--Individual conferences. Given the size of this class and the need that many students have to talk individually with the professor, I can divide the hour and a half into four sections, as enrollment currently stands. However, be advised that in most libraries, not just ours, securing material on African Americans is often difficult and may take up to two weeks, so you might want to choose your first topic the first week of class. I will not be able to hold any office hours after this class on any day, so we will need to plan accordingly.

Tu. - Feb. 5--First paper/project. Note the end of the syllabus for explanations, but they should be five pages, each, and I expect that you will have read three articles to inform the basic play. Presentations are verbatim, i.e., I do not like work "off the cuff." I wish for a prepared presentation and we will have the rare leisure of time for discussion.

Feb. 7-9--WINTER CARNIVAL RECESS!

Th. -Feb. 21 - Th., Feb. 28--The Amen Corner, James Baldwin

Tu. - Mar. 12--Student conferences
Th. - Mar. 14--Second paper/project (Five pages)
Tu. - Mar. 19--Mar. 26--Big White Fog, Theodore Ward (I will also discuss the lecture I heard Ward give in 1977.) We will discuss the critical and audience reception of this highly controversial play of The Great Depression.

Tu. - Mar. 28--Fences, August Wilson
Sunday, March 31--EASTER SUNDAY

Tu. - Apr. 2-4--Fences. (I also recommend p. 188 of my No Surrender! No Retreat! for a discussion of James Earl Jones's portrayal of Troy Maxson on Broadway. He won a Tony.

Tu. - Apr. 9--Cushion for Fences. Begin the film of A Soldier's Play (A Soldier's Story) with Howard Rollins. The playwright is Charles Fuller. May I also suggest for Fences that you try to read some of Sandra Shannon's The Dramatic Vision of August Wilson (in your library) and Henry Louis Gates's "The Chitlin Circuit." (Note bibliography.) Wilson does NOT believe in non-traditional casting!

Th. - Apr. 11-18--A Soldier's Play
Tu. - Apr. 23--conferences/work day/cushion
Th. - Apr. 25--conferences/work day/cushion
Tu. - Apr. 30--FINAL PAPERS/PROJECTS
Th. - May 2--TBA (Somewhere in the course of the semester, we may join professor Inetta Harris for her excellent discussion of Porgy and Bess. I may try to add it in myself. She was in 3,000 productions of it. There is no text, only an expensive script. Let's discuss this and we must play it by ear.)

May 6-10--FINALS WEEK. There is no final examination in this class.

KINDS OF ASSIGNMENTS: You may do a performance analysis, critical paper, or creative project. All work must be double-spaced and each paper should average five, double-spaced pages, not counting the Works Cited page. We use the MLA Handbook for documentation and I ask that you learn it, please. I must admit a bias for creativity, but no one should feel pressured to (next page, please)
focus exclusively on creativity. I also like good papers that are well organized, well-written and relatively free of error. Previous creative projects have included photography, a money collage, sketches, paintings, a movie (among the well-heeled who also had equipment), music, dramatic renderings, poetry, puppetry and a host of other possibilities. Someone even did a full project on Hirschfeld caricatures one semester.

YOU MUST WRITE IN A SIZE 14 FONT, PLEASE!

With few exceptions, I expect all three kinds of assignments to be researched, generally, in refereed journals for critical papers. You cannot find material for performance analysis in the MLA Bibliography. Generally, you will need my guidance to steer you through the perilous waters.

GRADING: I will grade all three assignments with equal weight.

ABSENCES: If you have ten absences, I will reserve the right to fail you, even with work turned in. I really expect a maximum of three absences, unless you are ill or have some circumstance beyond your control. Excessive absences perpetuate excessive misunderstanding. You are not here and so you miss vital information on a sustained basis and it generally strains the relationship between professor and student. Any absences beyond three may result in a lower grade. This is highly essential, even if you are paying tuition.

GRADING CRITERIA: Please see attached form.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Attached.