

**Department:** DRAM/AFAM (AFRA)

**Course No:** 3131/W [231/W]

**Credits:** 3

**Title:** African-American Theatre

**Contact:** Dr. David A. Stern

**Content Area:** CA4 Diversity and Multiculturalism

**Diversity:** CA4 Non-International

**WQ:** W

**Catalog Copy:** DRAM 3131/W [231/W], African American Theatre

Either semester. Three credits. Open to sophomores. *Molette*

The significant developments in African American theatre and its antecedents and an examination of selected play scripts that exemplify those developments.

**Course Information:** **THE PURPOSE OF THIS COURSE** is to recognize, understand, appreciate and think critically about theatre by, for, and about African Americans as a reflection of African American culture through analysis of selected play scripts. To successfully complete this course, each student must exhibit ability to function both individually and as a team member in effectively expressing creative, critical, and analytical thoughts [in written as well as oral form] about the subject matter of the course.

*Course requirements:*

1. Three papers of increasing length and complexity [800, 1400, 1800 words] plus a revision of each paper.
2. In-class exercises to enhance writing and thinking skills.
3. In-class discussion of assigned readings: at least 16 plays and 10 essays addressing historical and theoretical issues.
4. Four scheduled exams of about 50 multiple choice items each [this includes the final exam].

*Major Themes, Issues, & Topics:*

African American theatre: An analysis of the themes and styles of the plays on the reading list; and an analysis and evaluation of the ideas presented in the essays on the reading list.

**Meets Goals of Gen Ed.:**

*Become articulate:*

Each student is scheduled to speak in class five times, submit and revise three papers, formulate five discussion questions, and complete at least six in-class assignments that require written responses to assigned material.

*Acquire intellectual breadth and versatility:*

Most of the information students acquire in college will be obsolete less than a decade after they graduate. My goal is **NOT** to get students to memorize data I learned forty years ago, but to empower them to: **(a)** sharpen their critical and creative thinking capacities, **(b)** solve problems, **(c)** understand complex phenomena, **(d)** persuade others, through well-reasoned argument. Further, I assess each student's thinking and writing for its clarity, accuracy, relevance depth, breadth, and logicalness while recognizing that all reasoning occurs within points of view, proceeds from some goals and objectives, and has an informational base. I expect students to understand that their responses involve interpretation, which requires the employment of concepts, assumptions, and inferences. Generally, I find it necessary to focus some attention on recognizing fallacies in their own and other's thinking.

*Acquire consciousness of the diversity of human culture and experience:*

Since the content I use to encourage critical thinking and oral and written expression is African American culture, African American theatre, and the ideas expressed by African American playwrights, the issues raised by the plays and essays demand an awareness and appreciation of African American culture and experience.

**CA4 Criteria:**

1. The content of the required reading list addresses significant issues related to the nature of African American theatre art and what it means to be an African American in this society. I encourage students to examine the perceptions, thoughts, values, and modes of creativity expressed in the required readings and consider the impact of institutional racism upon the values, perceptions, thoughts, and modes of communication that establish the parameters in which art is created; and what each of us can do to liberate ourselves from the racist values we have acquired by virtue of simply being here. While the focus of this course is upon African American culture/art/theatre, such a focus includes some concern for the African antecedents of African American culture/art/theatre.

**W Criteria:**

1. Describe how the writing assignments will enable and enhance learning the content of the course. Describe the page requirements of the assignments, and the relative weighting of the "W" component of the course for the course grade.

The content of the course focuses on enabling students to read plays and understand their meaning[s], their historical context[s], and how they function as theatre. Topics for papers emerge from the course's reading list and class discussions about the items on the reading list. Because writing a "paper" is a process, not a product, grades for papers emerge by awarding points for submissions at various stages in a paper's development.

**PAPERS #1 & #2** generate a thesis that incorporates one play's theme by describing how the playwright moves the audience to accept the theme. [State the play's theme; then answer the question, "How does the playwright use specific elements— plot, character, language, spectacle, etc. to enhance the theme?"] Sometimes, a specific play from the reading list is assigned, sometimes, students choose from a list of plays shorter than, but derived from the reading list [**at least 1,200 words each**]. Sometimes paper #2 will be about a play that has some unique advantage because it is being produced on campus or because someone to whom the students have access is directly involved in the creation of the play.

**PAPER #3** generates a thesis that defends or opposes the position that one play from the reading list exemplifies some [published] position of Afrocentric aesthetics or dramatic theory [either from the reading list or approved in advance by the professor] and quotes the play and the published position to support that thesis [**at least 1,600 words**].

Each of the three papers is equally weighted in course grading. The three papers (including the three "pre-papers" required prior to first drafts) account for 50% of the total points (750 of 1,500) that may be earned toward the final course grade. Each "pre-paper is worth 25 points; final drafts are worth 100 points.

<b>"W" assignment points</b>	750
Group presentations and in-class work [not "W" assignments]	300
The scheduled exams, including the FINAL EXAM	450

Total points

1,500

**2.** Describe the primary modes of writing instruction in the course (e.g. individual conferences, written commentary, formal instruction to the class, and so on.)

In this course, writing instruction aims to empower student to improve their writing on their own. The class begins with formal instruction which focuses primarily on structure aimed at enhancing persuasiveness and “free write” exercises to stimulate a connection between thinking and writing. Then, the class moves to written commentary from the professor to stimulate revisions in the first two papers. Finally, the third paper focuses on students helping each other through the revision, but always with the invitation to have individual conferences with the professor for any student who feels the feedback from fellow students is of insufficient help. In addition, several in-class assignments are actually writing assignments designed to enhance the papers.

**3.** Explain how opportunities for revision will be structured into the writing assignments in the course. Each paper has a short “pre-paper” assignment designed to force students to think about their papers well in advance of each paper's due date. In addition, ongoing in-class exercises focus on specific developmental issues such as strengthening the thesis sentence; structuring the paper to strengthen its persuasiveness, and improving strength and accuracy of word choices. Also see the discussion in item#2 (immediately above).

**4.** State that the syllabus will inform students that they must pass the "W" component of the course in order to pass the course. (Failure to include this clause will result in a request for revisions on your proposal.)

While the "W" assignments comprise 50% of the grade, the syllabus will clearly state that (1) students cannot pass the course without passing the W component ; (2) ALL writing assignments, including revisions must be completed; and (3) the average grade students receive for all writing assignments is the maximum grade they can be earned in the course.

**Role of Grad Students:** No graduate student assistants have been assigned to this course in the past. While I could develop a system whereby graduate students would gain valuable experience and simultaneously facilitate an increase in the number of potential undergraduate students served, we do not recruit graduate students who indicate a desire to gain professional expertise in African American theatre.