

THE 3231 – African American Theatre History and Practice
12:50 p.m. – 1:40 p.m. M,W,F
Fall 2024

Instructor: Ryan Hope Travis

Office Hours: 1:00pm-3:00pm Thurs. & By Appt. @ SoTD, Room 226

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Course Description:

“Examines origins and development of theatre by, for, and about Black Americans” (UF Undergraduate Catalog). This course explores the rich and diverse history of African American theatre from its origins to contemporary practice. Students will examine key periods, movements, and figures that have shaped African American theatre, including the Harlem Renaissance, the Black Arts Movement, and modern-day innovators. Through a combination of lectures, readings, and practical workshops, students will gain a comprehensive understanding of the cultural, social, and political contexts that have influenced African American theatrical expression. This course is also practice-based. We will analyze works that come from the African American theatrical tradition. Then, we will create.

Key Topics:

1. Early African American performance traditions
2. The Harlem Renaissance and its impact on theatre
3. The Black Arts Movement and revolutionary theatre
4. Contemporary African American playwrights and productions
5. The role of African American theatre in social justice and activism

College of the Arts Meta-Strategy 2021-2025: Systemic Resilience

The University of Florida College of the Arts intends to be a transformative community, responding to and generating paradigmatic shifts in the arts and beyond. We do so by:

- A) Embracing the complexity of our evolving human experience and seeking to empower our students and faculty to shape that experience fearlessly through critical study, creative practice, and provocation.
- B) Collaborating effectively with the forces of change.
- C) Preparing students to access and unsettle centers of power in a radically changing world.
- D) Facilitating an arts education that will position emerging artists and researchers as catalysts for equity on local and global levels.

Student Learning Outcomes:

- A) Analyze the historical development of African American theatre and its cultural significance
- B) Critically engage with key texts and performances in African American theatre history
- C) Develop practical skills in acting, directing, and playwriting through hands-on workshops
- D) Reflect on the role of theatre as a tool for social change and community engagement
- E) Create a work of art or original research that embodies the historical tradition of African American Theatre

Course Requirements:

1. Active participation in class discussions and workshops
2. Completion of assigned readings and written/oral reflections
3. Attendance to SoTD performances
4. Final project involving a performance or research presentation

Required Text:

There is no required text. However, published plays and reference materials, which may be obtained from the campus libraries, will be utilized by the student in class. Essays and selected readings will be posted on Canvas. Handouts may be distributed as well.

Grading:

This course embraces the philosophy of *un-grading*. Simply, complete assignments receive complete points. Because students come to this space with varying synthesis and exegesis proficiencies, diverse pedagogical backgrounds and analytical skills, *time*, *effort*, and *commitment* are the crux of your grade.

Full participation is crucial in grading – i.e., thorough and thoughtful discussion posts, willingness to participate in class discussions, full prep work outside of class, etc.

1. *Thorough and thoughtful discussion posts*: This means discussion posts reflect critical thinking, depth of analysis, clarity and coherence, relevance, use of sources, etc.
2. *Willingness to participate in class discussions*: Active participation in class discussions shows that you are engaged and interested in the subject. It involves asking questions, sharing your thoughts, and listening with an open heart.
3. *Full prep work outside of class*: This includes all the preparation you do outside of class, such as reading assigned materials, reviewing notes, and meeting with group members, where appropriate. It is about being prepared for each class session and staying on top of the coursework.

Overall, full participation means being proactive and dedicated to all aspects of the learning process, which is crucial for both understanding the material and achieving a good grade. Each assignment will be awarded a specific point value. Points will be tallied at the end of the semester to determine the final grade.

Grading Scheme:

Points are used to demonstrate the weight of each assignment. In general, we will utilize a "complete" or "incomplete" grading scheme. Feel free to reach out if this is unclear.

The following grading standard will be used to determine your final grade in this class:

Grade	Range
A	100pts to 93pts
A-	< 93pts to 90pts
B+	< 90pts to 87pts
B	< 87pts to 83pts
B-	< 83pts to 80pts
C+	< 80pts to 77pts
C	< 77pts to 73pts
C-	< 73pts to 70pts
D+	< 70pts to 67pts
D	< 67pts to 63pts
D-	< 63pts to 60pts
F	< 60pts to 0pts

Assignments:

1. To lighten our impact on the planet, all documents will be submitted via Canvas. Canvas will also be our repository for the syllabus, readings, assignments, links, grades, etc. Emailed assignments are not permitted.
2. Due dates will be set with respect to student needs and outside obligations -- where appropriate.

Reaction Paper

For *Pipeline*, our first SoTD production of the season, you will submit a 2-page (500-750 word commentary (see Canvas Assignments tab for due dates). The essay *should not* be a synopsis of the play. Rather, attention should be paid to the themes, story, conflict, etc. Draw parallels between what you observe and what we discuss in class. Discuss how the play aligns with and speaks to the African American theatrical tradition. Be prepared to discuss your observations in class. (10pts)

Weekly Discussion Posts

Posts may be a 250-300 word commentary or 2-3min video. Posts should respond to the themes and/or readings of the week. You may find and discuss peer-reviewed essays written about a play, person, genre, or period in Black performance history. You may discover media trends that are relevant to class topics. Here, Black, African-American theatre and performance are considered broadly. The purpose of this assignment is to get you to practice: reading arguments, synthesizing arguments, connecting coursework to your everyday lives, and more. See Canvas Discussions tab for due dates, parameters, and prompts. 10 posts required (5pts each).

Final Research Project

This is an opportunity to deepen your investigation or point of inquiry. You can delve deeper into something we studied e.g., a theme or topic, the works of a playwright, etc. You may choose to investigate a playwright we have not studied. Check out the non-exhaustive list at the end of this syllabus, for examples. Instructions and rubrics will be discussed in class and shared on Canvas. Presentations will be during the last weeks of class. (20pts)

Option 1: Conference Paper

Ideal for students who want to practice academic writing, public speaking, and learn about academic conferences. This essay is also an excellent starting point for the SoTD Honors in the Major requirement. You will develop a research question and write an essay targeting the Association of Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) conference. ATHE is one of the major international conferences in our field (and the largest in the US). Every year, ATHE has several “debut/emerging scholar panels” that are intended to support new researchers—like you! You will be expected to write 8-10 pages double-spaced essay accompanied with a 10-15 minute presentation.

Option 2: Creative Project

Ideal for students who want to respond to the themes of the class creatively. Projects may explore or celebrate the rich history, culture, and contributions of African American theatre. The project should reflect your understanding of the themes, styles and/or significant figures of African American Theatre history. Creations may be a performance piece, visual art, multimedia project, documentary, and more. The possibilities are infinite. The creative project must be accompanied with a 2-3 page commentary and with a presentation component approximately 10-15 minutes in length.

Reaction Paper: <i>Pipeline</i>	10pts
Discussion Posts	50pts
Final Research Project	20pts
Participation	20pts
Total	100pts

For information on current UF grading policies for assigning grade points, please visit:
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

Attendance Policy:

We learn from each other. Your presence is important to the collective learning process. Therefore:

2 tardies = 1 unexcused absence

Per 2 Unexcused absences = 10 points from your final grade

You are encouraged to contact the Dean of Students Office to receive a letter of excusal for anticipated or unanticipated absences. For information on current UF attendance policy, please visit:
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>

Attendance at UF Productions:

You are required to see the SoTD mainstage shows to which you receive a complimentary ticket. You are encouraged to attend other SoTD, Florida Players and theatre-related productions, when possible. Be prepared to discuss SoTD productions in class.

Policy on Responding to Students:

A 24 to 48 hour reply to emails/Canvas message is typical. Submitted documents are typically returned within 2 weeks after the due date.

Late Assignment Policy:

Assignments submitted 48hrs beyond the due date will receive a half letter grade deduction every day it is late. Keep track of due dates. Keep the lines of communication open. If you are having a challenge, let me know. Extensions will be permitted if you email me 24hrs *before* the deadline.

Make-up assignments will be a 1-page (500 word minimum) reflection essay, applying topics discussed in class to an assigned SoTD mainstage (or approved) production.

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at: catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/

Academic Honesty Policy:

UF students are responsible for honest and ethical conduct while pursuing their studies. They are expected to abide by the UF Academic Honesty Policy, which defines an academic honesty offense as “the act of lying, cheating, or stealing academic information so that one gains academic advantage.” In this course's context, this includes conducting original research and properly citing sources for any materials (both printed and online) used in the writing reaction papers, journals, and self-analysis paper. Submitting work

that has been plagiarized will result in a failing grade. For more information on the UF Academic Honor Code visit: <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>.

Our Honor Code on AI (Artificial Intelligence) Usage:

As students committed to academic integrity and personal growth, we recognize the importance of producing original work that reflects our own understanding and effort. The use of AI tools can be beneficial for learning and research, but it must be balanced with ethical considerations to maintain the integrity of our academic work.

1. Originality and Authenticity – Students must ensure that all submitted essays are their own work. AI tools should not be used to generate entire essays or significant portions of text.
2. Permissible Uses of AI / AI tools may be used for:
 - Grammar and spell-checking
 - Generating ideas or outlines
 - Conducting preliminary research
 - Providing feedback on drafts
3. Prohibited Uses of AI / AI tools may not be used to:
 - Write entire essays or large sections of text
 - Paraphrase or rephrase existing content to pass it off as original work
 - Generate citations or references without proper verification
4. Transparency:
 - Students must disclose any use of AI tools in their work. This includes specifying which tools were used and how they contributed to the final essay.
5. Accountability:
 - Students are responsible for the content of their essays, including any errors or inaccuracies introduced by AI tools. Proper verification and critical evaluation of AI-generated content are required.
6. Respect for Intellectual Property:
 - Students must respect copyright laws and avoid using AI tools to generate content that infringes on the intellectual property rights of others.
7. Commitment to Learning:
 - The primary goal of essay assignments is to enhance learning and critical thinking skills. Students should use AI tools as aids, not substitutes, for their own intellectual efforts.

By adhering to this honor code, we commit to upholding the values of academic integrity, personal responsibility, and ethical use of technology in our academic pursuits.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, dso.ufl.edu/drc) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. A meeting with the student, instructor and DRC representative will be scheduled to discuss students' needs. Absences related to accommodation are not retroactive.

Campus Resources:

Health & Wellness

1. *U Matter, We Care*: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit umatter.ufl.edu/ to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

2. *Counseling and Wellness Center*: Visit counseling.ufl.edu/ or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.
3. *University Police Department*: Visit police.ufl.edu/ or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).
4. *UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center*: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; ufhealth.org/emergency-room-trauma-center.

Academic Resources:

1. *E-learning technical support*: Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](http://uf.computinghelpdesk.com) at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.
2. *Career Connections Center*: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.
3. *Library Support*: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
4. *Teaching Center*: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.
5. *Writing Studio*: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.
6. *Student Complaints On-Campus*: [Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage for more information](#).
7. *On-Line Students Complaints*: [View the Distance Learning Student Complaint Process](#).

Course Evaluations:

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/students/. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via ufl.bluera.com/ufl/. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/public-results/.

Course Journey:

This is a judgment-free zone. In this class, we are committed to sharing and listening mindfully, thoughtfully, and patiently. We hold space for each other. We listen with open hearts. We enter this space with a *wide* range of experiences and backgrounds. Our differences help us learn. They also provide building blocks for a safe, brave, inviting, and rigorous space. We grow here.

Most Recognizable African American Playwrights

1. August Wilson – Known for his Pittsburgh Cycle, a series of ten plays that depict African American life in each decade of the 20th century. Most famous for *Fences* and *The Piano Lesson*.
2. Lorraine Hansberry – Best known for her groundbreaking play *A Raisin in the Sun*, which was the first play on Broadway written by an African American woman.
3. Amiri Baraka – A prominent figure in the Black Arts Movement, *Dutchman* and *The Slave* are notable for their sharp social commentary.

4. Suzan-Lori Parks – The first African American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for Drama with her play *Topdog/Underdog*. Her works often explore themes of identity and history.
5. Ntozake Shange – Famous for her choreopoem *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow Is Enuf*, which combines poetry, dance, music, and drama.
6. Lynn Nottage – A two-time Pulitzer Prize winner, she is known for her plays *Intimate Apparel*, *Ruined* and *Sweat* that all address issues of social justice and human resilience.
7. Tarell Alvin McCraney – Known for his trilogy *The Brother/Sister Plays* and for co-writing the Oscar-winning film *Moonlight*.
8. Dominique Morisseau – Her *Detroit Project* trilogy, including *Detroit '67*, *Paradise Blue*, and *Skeleton Crew*, explores the lives of African Americans in Detroit during pivotal moments in the city's history.

*Other Notable African American Playwrights Worth Considering *(Non-Exhaustive List)*

AUTHORS:

Langston Hughes
 Amiri Baraka
 James Baldwin
 Adrienne Kennedy

 William Wells Brown
 Angelina Weld Grimke
 Theodore Ward
 Ed Bullins

 Alice Childress
 Douglas Turner Ward
 Ossie Davis
 George C. Wolfe
 Judi Ann Mason

 P. J. Gibson
 Steve Carter
 Phillip Hayes Dean
 Leslie Lee
 Charles Fuller
 Don Evans
 Richard Wesley
 Samm-Art Williams
 Pearl Cleage

 Cheryl West

PLAYS:

Mulatto / Simply Heavenly
Dutchman / The Slave / The Toilet / Slave Ship / Great Goodness of Life
The Amen Corner / Blues for Mr. Charlie
A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White / Funnyhouse of a Negro / The Ohio State Murders
The Escape; or, A Leap for Freedom (1858)
Rachel (1916)
Big White Fog (1938)
The Duplex / Going to Buffalo / The Electronic Nigger / Clara's Ole Man / In The Wine Time
Trouble in Mind / Wine in the Wilderness / Florence / Wedding Band
Day of Absence / Happy Ending
Purlie Victorious
The Colored Museum / Spunk / Jelly's Last Jam
Daughters of the Mock / Indigo Blues / Livin' Fat / A Star Ain't Nothin' But a Hole in Heaven / Roseleaf Tea / The Time Traveler's Ball / The Cornbread Man
Long Time Since Yesterday / Brown Silk and Magenta Sunsets
Eden
Sty of the Blind Pig / Freeman / Roberson
Colored People's Time / The First Breeze of Summer / Rabbit's Foot
A Soldier's Play / Zooman and the Sign
One Monkey Don't Stop No Show / Showdown Time / Love Song for Miss Lydia
The Sirens / The Talented Tenth / Autumn
Home / Eyes of the American / The Sixteenth Round / The Waiting Room
Flyin' West / Blues for an Alabama Sky / Hospice / Puppet Play / Bourbon at the Border
Before it Hits Home / Jar the Floor / Holiday Heart

TENTATIVE TIMETABLE

WEEK 1:

Course Introduction, Orientation, Syllabus Review
Self-introductions

WEEK 2:

*DUE Tuesday at Noon: Discussion Post #1

WEEK 3:

*DUE Tuesday at Noon: Discussion Post #2
READ Dominique Morisseau's – *Pipeline*

WEEK 4:

*DUE Tuesday at Noon: Discussion Post #3
Minstrelsy Exploration

WEEK 5:

DUE Tuesday, February 4th: *SoTD Show 1* Discussion
*DUE Tuesday at Noon: Discussion Post #4
READ Erroll Hill Essay

WEEK 6:

Making history and crafting in absence
*DUE Tuesday at Noon: Discussion Post #5

WEEK 7:

*DUE Tuesday at Noon: Discussion Post #6
READ Sam Kelley's *Blue Vein Society*

WEEK 8:

*DUE Tuesday at Noon: Discussion Post #7
MASTERCLASS and/or PERFORMANCE by Invited Lecturer
DUE: Final Research Project– Topic and Creative Project Pitches

WEEK 9:

*DUE Tuesday at Noon: Discussion Post #8
Theme Exploration

WEEK 10:

*DUE Tuesday at Noon: Discussion Post #9
READ Charles Fullers's *A Soldier's Play*
Final Project Check-in and Presentation Dates Assigned

WEEK 11:

*DUE Tuesday at Noon: Discussion Post #10
Class Discussion– further explorations

WEEK 12:

*DUE Tuesday at Noon: Discussion Post #11
Final Project Presentations

WEEK 13:

*DUE Tuesday at Noon: Discussion Post #12
Final Project Presentations

WEEK 14:

No Class (Thanksgiving Break)

WEEK 15:

Final Project Presentations
(Last Day of Class)

This syllabus is a good approximation of what this course will be like this semester. The instructor reserves the right to make reasonable additions or subtractions to the syllabus or to allow time for certain sections based on how the work progresses this semester.
