

University of Florida - College of the Arts - School of Theatre and Dance

## **THE 3231: Section 5331 / Fall 2023**

### **African-American Theatre History and Practice**

Class Meeting Time - MWF Per. 6 (12:50 - 1:40) / CON 0219

Dr. Mikell Pinkney / Office: 222 McGuire Pavilion / 273-0512 / mpinkney@arts.ufl.edu

Office Hours: Mon. & Wed. 11:45 - 12:30PM and/ or Tues. & Thurs. by appointment

**Course Content:** An investigation and examination of the historical origins and development of theatre by, for and about Blacks/ African Americans, through the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The course examines these contributions to American Theatre from an historical, philosophical, ethnic and racial perspective and provides a theoretical understanding of cultural studies and sociological influences on and within a larger American society as created and represented for, about, by and through the perspectives of Black-Americans, highlighting a systematic move from the cultural margin to mainstream theatrical practices and acknowledgements.

**Objectives and Outcomes:** Students will learn the historical contexts of playwrights, performers, theorists & theoretical concepts, productions and organizations that help to identify African-American Theatre as an indigenous American institution. Terminology and concepts of cultural studies are used as a means for access and critical thinking about the subject. Discussions are developed through readings, lectures, videos, and analysis of dramatic literature of the field. Three tests, a mid-term exam, a group presentation and a final paper are required to assess competence, communication and critical thinking skills.

#### **Student Learning Objectives:**

1. Students identify and analyze key elements, biases and influences that shape thought within the discipline (Critical Thinking)
2. Students approach issues and problems within the discipline from multiple perspectives (Critical Thinking)
3. Students will communicate knowledge, thoughts and reasoning clearly and effectively in forms appropriate to the discipline, individually and/or in groups (Communication)
4. Students demonstrate higher awareness of minority and marginalized artistic cultural forms and perspectives of expression (Communication)
5. Students demonstrate awareness of foundations of American theatrical systems (Communication)

For more information about General Education Student Learning Outcomes go to:

[http://gened.aa.ufl.edu/Date/Sites/10/media/gened\\_slo.pdf](http://gened.aa.ufl.edu/Date/Sites/10/media/gened_slo.pdf)

#### **Course Goals:**

- Students will be able to analyze the historical development of dramatic theory, philosophy and practice of marginalized/ minority cultures (SLO 1, 2 & 3)
- Students will become familiar with dramatic literature not part of the overall theatrical mainstream (SLO 1 & 2)
- Students will develop ability to discuss philosophies of “otherness” and “hermeneutical perspectives” among other cultural studies terminology (SLO 3, 4 & 5)
- Students will write about and discuss plays read over the course of the semester, focusing on being able to convey the essence of the literature with the skills of sociological awareness (SLO 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5)
- Students will communicate wider awareness of alternative voices and social agency (SLO 4 & 5)

### **Required Texts:**

Pinkney, Mikell. *The Theoretical Development of African-American Theatre and Drama*.

(\*Unpublished material emailed to registered students in full attendance at regular intervals.)

Childress, Joseph and Gary Hentzi. *Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism*. (New York: Columbia UP 1995) Paperback cover.

Hatch, James V. and Ted Shine, eds. *Black Theatre USA: Vol. 1 - The Early Period 1847-1938*. (New York: The Free Press, 1996)

Hatch, James V. and Ted Shine, eds. *Black Theatre USA: Vol. 2 - The Recent Period 1935-Today*. (New York: The Free Press, 1996)

Childress, Alice. *Trouble in Mind*. Play script

Wilson, August. *Radio Golf*. Play script (Theatre Communications Group 2007).

**ALSO:** Various in-class handouts in relation to specific areas of discussion

**Optional Texts:** Hill, Errol G. and James V. Hatch. *A History of African American Theatre*. (New York: Cambridge UP, 2003, 2005)

Hill, Errol, ed. *The Theatre of Black Americans: A Collection of Critical Essays*. (New York: Applause Theatre Books, 1980, 1987, 1990)

### **UF Production Dates:**

*Rhinoceros* - Black Box Theatre,

*Fahrenheit 451* - Hippodrome Main Stage,

*The Prom* - Constans Theatre,

**Final Papers:** Papers are to be typed, double spaced and formatted according to MLA standards. (1" margins surrounding the page; **name, date, instructor and course in upper left-hand corner of first page**; title centered on first page; each page numbered in upper right-hand corner of each page ½" from top of page. Neatness, grammar and spelling do count! No added title pages are necessary for papers.) Final Papers should respond to a multi layered question presented by the instructor, with a cultural studies perspective either studied or alluded to in this course during the semester. The core/ essence of each paper should be approximately seven (7) pages in length. This does NOT include endnotes and bibliography pages, which may take your paper to a maximum of 10-11 pages.

**Due no later than Midnight (11:59PM) Monday, December 11th!**

**Content Warning:** In this course, we will cover content and materials that some may find difficult. It is important that in a Theatre Studies course we do not shy away from engaging with materials that may be controversial or challenging. You are encouraged to reach out to your professor if you are struggling with the course materials. In class, if you need to step away for a period of time as we are covering particular content, you may do so without penalty, but you should remember that each student is responsible for any information covered in their absence.

Students are encouraged to employ critical thinking and to rely on data and verifiable sources to interrogate all assigned readings and subject matter in this course as a way of determining whether they agree with their classmates and/or their instructor. No lesson is intended to espouse, promote, advance, inculcate, or compel a particular feeling, perception, viewpoint or belief.

**Group Presentations of Plays Should Include:**

- A Power Point presentation and handout materials of important issues for the entire class
- **Very brief** overview or summary of plot (everyone in class should read the play)
- Possible meaning(s) and purposes of play title
- **Brief** background about the playwright
- Other important works by the same playwright
- Theme and highlights of important issues discussed in play
- Location and setting of the action (including any meaning or metaphors associated)
- Major and minor characters (including their purpose and objectives in the play)
- The time period of the play and related issues from that historical moment
- Major quotes or lines from the play that present important messages for today
- Outside critiques of the play and the issues when it was produced (or later reviewed)
- Personal important and memorable perspectives of group members about the play
- Handout should include 3-5 relevant study questions that may be included on an exam
- Make sure to list each group members contribution to the presentation on your handout

**Each presentation should take no longer than 30-35 minutes of class time. All group members will receive the same numerical point value for the presentations (50 points total). Points will be deducted for missing elements above. Outstanding presentations may be awarded bonus points!**

**Grading:**

Grading will be based on a point system with 500 total possible points:

1. Attendance and Participation	100
<i>(100% for perfect attendance; 10 points dropped for each absence beyond 3.)</i>	
2. 3 Tests @ 50 points each	150
3. Mid-Term Exam	100
4. Group Presentation	50
5. Final Paper	100
<i>(Final Papers due no later than Monday, December 11<sup>th</sup>!)</i>	
TOTAL	500

**A = 470-500 / A- = 450-469 /**  
**B+ = 421-449 / B = 401-420 / B- = 381-400 /**  
**C+ = 366-380 / C = 350-365 / C- = 330-349 /**  
**D+ = 315-329 / D = 300-314 / D- = 280-299 /**  
**E = less than 280**

# COURSE CALENDAR:

(Subject to changes and adjustments)

<b>Week #1:</b>	
Wed. Aug. 23	First Class / Introductions and Overview
Fri. Aug. 25	Basic cultural studies terms ( <i>Columbia Dictionary</i> needed for class)
<b>Week #2:</b>	
Mon. Aug. 28	Read for Discussion: Introduction to <i>Theoretical Development</i> . . .
Wed. Aug. 30	Discussion: Chapters 1& 2 of <i>Theoretical Development</i> , including excerpts from “Here Comes Everybody: Scholarship and Black Theatre History
Fri. Sept. 1	Discussion: Chapter 3 – Early Pioneering Efforts
<b>Week #3:</b>	
Mon. Sept. 4	<b>LABOR DAY HOLIDAY / No Classes</b>
Wed. Sept. 6	Discussion: Chapter 4 – From Minstrelsy to Warranted Assertion
Fri. Sept. 8	Quiz overview/ preview
<b>Week #4:</b>	
Mon. Sept. 11	<b>Test #1:</b> Chapters 1-4 (including Introduction and cultural studies terms)
Wed. Sept. 13	<b>Play Discussion: THE ESCAPE; OR, A LEAP FOR FREEDOM (1858)</b>
Fri. Sept. 15	Discussion: Chapter 5– Sacred and Spiritual Nature
<b>Week #5:</b>	
Mon. Sept. 18	<b>Video: Ethnic Notions</b> - and discussion
Wed. Sept. 20	Discussion: Chapter 6 – Minstrelsy’s Opponents
Fri. Sept. 22	<b>Play Discussion: IN DAHOMEY (1902)</b>
<b>Week #6:</b>	
Mon. Sept. 25	Discussion: Chapter 7 – Creating a New Image
Wed. Sept. 27	<b>Play Discussion: STAR OF ETHIOPIA (1912)</b>
Fri. Sept. 29	Discussion: Chapter 8 – W. E. B. Du Bois’ Criteria for Negro Art
<b>Week #7:</b>	
Mon. Oct. 2	<b>Play Discussion: RACHEL (1916)</b>
Wed. Oct. 4	Discussion: Chapter 9 - Developmental Years 1927-1950
Fri. Oct. 6	<b>HOMECOMING WEEKEND/ No Class</b>
<b>Week #8:</b>	
Mon. Oct. 9	<b>Play Discussion: THE PURPLE FLOWER (1928) &amp; OLD MAN PETE (1934)</b>
Wed. Oct. 11	<b>Play Discussion: BIG WHITE FOG (1938)</b>
Fri. Oct. 13	Black Images in 1940s Films- <b>Movie Excerpt: Stormy Weather &amp; The Green Pastures</b>
<b>Week #9:</b>	
Mon. Oct. 16	<b>Major Mid Term Exam (100 points)</b>
Wed. Oct. 18	<b>Play Discussion: A RAISIN IN THE SUN (1959)</b>
Fri. Oct. 20	<b>Video and Discussion:</b> Lorraine Hansberry and the coming revolution
<b>Week # 10:</b>	
Mon. Oct. 23	Discussion: Chapter 10 – Revolutionary Black Arts Movement
Wed. Oct. 25	<b>Play Discussion: DUTCHMAN (1964)</b>
Fri. Oct. 27	<b>Play Discussion: DAY OF ABSENCE (1965) + THE 1<sup>st</sup> MILITANT PREACHER (1967)</b>

**Week #11:**

Mon. Oct. 30  
Wed. Nov. 1  
Fri. Nov. 3

Discussion: Chapter 11 – The Afro-Centric Era, 1970s-1999s  
**Play Discussion:** *for colored girls who have considered suicide. . . (1975)*  
**Video:** Black Theatre-The Making of a Movement

**Week #12:**

Mon. Nov. 6  
Wed. Nov. 8  
Fri. Nov. 10

**Test overview/ preview**  
**Test #2:** Chapters 10-11, plays since Mid-Term & video information  
**Vetetans Day Observed / No Class**

**Week #13:**

Mon. Nov. 13  
Wed. Nov. 15  
Fri. Nov. 17

Chapter 12 – “New Age” Post-Revolutionary Aesthetics  
Chapter 12 continued  
**Play Discussion:** *THE COLORED MUSEUM (1988)*

**Week #14:**

Mon. Nov. 20  
Wed. Nov. 22  
Fri. Nov. 24

Lecture on Chapter 13  
THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY  
THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

**Week #15:**

Mon. Nov. 27  
Wed. Nov. 29  
Fri. Dec. 1

Discussion: Chapter 13 – Black Theatre at the End of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century  
**Play Discussion:** *RADIO GOLF (2005-2007)*  
Summation and New Directions / 21<sup>st</sup> Century Trends and Hip Hop Theatre

**Week #16:**

Mon. Dec.4  
Wed. Dec.6

**Test #3:** Chapters 12-13, plays since Mid-Term & video information  
No Class Meeting

**(Final Papers Due: by midnight, Monday December 11<sup>th</sup>. Email to [mpinkney@arts.ufl.edu](mailto:mpinkney@arts.ufl.edu))**

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**Final Papers due no later than  
Midnight, Monday, Dec. 11<sup>th</sup>  
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## Play Presentation Groups

(All plays, except *Radio Golf*, appear in *Black Theatre USA: The Recent Period 1935-Today/ Vol.2*)

1. *The Escape; or a Leap for Freedom (1858)*
2. *In Dahomey (1902)*
3. *Star of Ethiopia (1912)*
4. *Rachel (1916)*
5. *The Purple Flower (1928) & Old Man Pete (1934)*
6. *Big White Fog (1938)*
7. *Trouble in Mind (1957)*
8. *A Raisin in the Sun (1959)*
9. *Dutchman (1964)*
10. *Day of Absences (1965) & The 1<sup>st</sup> Militant Preacher (1967)*
11. *for colored girls who have considered suicide (1976)*
12. *The Colored Museum (1988)*
13. *Radio Golf (2005-07)*

### Representative List of Additional African-American Plays and Playwrights

#### AUTHORS:

Langston Hughes  
Amiri Baraka  
James Baldwin  
Adrienne Kennedy

Ntozake Shange  
August Wilson

William Wells Brown  
Angelina Weld Grimke  
Theodore Ward  
Suzan-Lori Parks

Ed Bullins

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

P. J. Gibson  
Steve Carter  
Phillip Hayes Dean  
Leslie Lee  
Charles Fuller

#### PLAYS:

*Mulatto / Simply Heavenly*  
*Dutchman / The Slave/ The Toilet/ Slave Ship/ Great Goodness of Life/ etc.*  
*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, etc.*  
*For Colored Girls Who have Considered Suicide/ Spell #7/ Layla's Dream*  
*Ma Rainey's Black Bottom/ Fences/ Piano Lesson/ Joe Turner's Come and Gone/ Seven Guitars/ Two Trains Running/ Jitney / King Hedley, II/ Gem of the Ocean/ Radio Golf*  
*The Escape; or, A Leap for Freedom (1858)*  
*Rachel (1916)*  
*Big White Fog (1938)*  
*The America Play/ The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World / Top Dog-Under Dog / Venus/ 365Days-365 Plays / Father Comes Home From the Wars/ etc.*  
*The Duplex/ Going to Buffalo/ The Electronic Nigger/ Clara's Ole Man/ In The Wine Time/ etc.*  
*Trouble in Mind/ Wine in the Wilderness/ Florence/ Wedding Band*  
*A Raisin in the Sun/ The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window/ Les Blancs*  
*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 / etc.*  
*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/ etc.*  
*A Soldier's Play/ Zooman and the Sign*

Don Evans	<i>One Monkey Don't Stop No Show/ Showdown Time/ Love Song for Miss Lydia/ etc.</i>
Richard Wesley	<i>The Sirens/ The Talented Tenth/ Autumn/ etc.</i>
Samm-Art Williams	<i>Home/ Eyes of the American/ The Sixteenth Round/ The Waiting Room</i>
Pearl Cleage	<i>Flyin' West/ Blues for an Alabama Sky/ Hospice/ Puppet Play/ Bourbon at the Border / etc.</i>
Cheryl West	<i>Before it Hits Home/ Jar the Floor/ Holiday Heart/ etc.</i>
Lynn Nottage	<i>Intimate Apparel/ Fabulation, or the Re-Education of Undine / Crumbs from the Table of Joy/ Ruined/ By the Way, Meet Vera Stark/ Sweat/ etc.</i>

### **SOME OTHER AFRICAN-AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHTS:**

Edgar White, Willis Richardson, Garland Anderson, Marita Bonner, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Randolph Edmonds, Ted Shine, Martie Charles, Keith Glover, Eugene Lee, Shay Youngblood, Keith Glover, Lynne Nottage, Tarrell Alvin McCraney, Katori Hall, Lydia Diamond . . .

### **PLAY ANTHOLOGIES:**

- Branch, William B. ed. *Crosswinds: An Anthology of Black Dramatists in the Diaspora*. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993).
- Couch, William, Jr., ed. *New Black Playwrights: An Anthology*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press 1968.
- Elam, Harry J., Jr. and Robert Alexander, eds. *Colored Contradictions: An Anthology of Contemporary African-American Plays*. (New York: Plume/ Penguin, 1996).
- Harrison, Paul Carter and Gus Edwards, eds. *Classic Plays from the Negro Ensemble Company*. (Pittsburgh and London: U. of Pittsburgh Press 1995).
- Hatch, James V. and Ted Shine, eds. *Black Theatre USA: The Early Period 1847-1938*. (New York: The Free Press, 1996)
- Hatch, James V. and Ted Shine, eds. *Black Theatre USA: The Recent Period 1935-Today*. (New York: The Free Press, 1996)
- Jackson, Pamela Faith and Karimah, eds. *Black Comedy: Nine Plays (A Critical Anthology with Interviews and Essays)*. (New York: Applause Books 1997).
- King, Woodie, Jr., ed. *The National Black Drama Anthology: Eleven Plays from America's Leading African-American Theaters*. (New York: Applause, 1995).
- Mahone, Sydne, ed. *Moon Marked & Touched by Sun: Plays by African-American Women*. (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1994).
- Oliver, Clinton F., ed. *Contemporary Black Drama: From A Raisin In The Sun to No Place To Be Somebody*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1971).
- Perkins, Kathy A., ed. *Selected Plays by Alice Childress*. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press 2011).
- Banks, Daniel, ed. w/ Introduction. *Say Word: Voices from Hip Hop Theatre*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 2011).

### **IMPORTANT MONOGRAPHS:**

- Black Theatre's Unprecedented Times: The National Black Theatre Summits of 1998*. Perez, Hely M., ed. (Gainesville, FL: Black Theatre Network, 1999).
- African American Review (Special Black Theatre Issue)*. Vol. 31, Number 4, Winter 1997. Ed. by Paul Carter Harrison and Victor Leo Walker, II.
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## **Academic Honesty:**

As a result of completing the registration form at the University of Florida, every student has signed the following statement:

*“I understand that the University of Florida expects its students to be honest in all their academic work. I agree to adhere to this commitment to academic honesty and understand that my failure to comply with this commitment may result in disciplinary action up to and including expulsion from the University.”*

The instructor of this course fully supports the intent of the above statement and will not tolerate academic dishonesty. We, the members of the University of Florida Community, pledge to hold ourselves, and our peers, to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.

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### **SOTD Handbook and Production Policy Manual:**

**Listed on webpage under General Theatre / Current Students/ Student Resources**

<http://www.arts.ufl.edu/programs/generaltheatre.aspx>

**In case of a disaster affecting the UF campus, for the latest information see  
<http://www.ufl.edu>**

**University Police**  
352-392-1111

***City Emergency Notification:***  
**Weekdays Evenings/ Weekends**

**Fire/Police/Medical Emergency:**                      911                      911