

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 476: African American Theatre, Dance and Performance

Spring 2024/8:00-9:50am Monday/Wednesday

Units: 4

Location: KAP 159

Instructor: Lena Ford

Student Hours: M/W 10-11am or by appointment

Contact info: lenaford@usc.edu

Course Assistant: AJ Roa

Student Hours:

Contact info: jroa@usc.edu

Course Description

This course explores African American Theatre and performance traditions as a critical local and global force inextricably connected to culture, history and politics.

Through a study of narratives that reflect the creative voices and stories from the African Diaspora, students will examine globalized definitions of “blackness” and formations of “identity” that are commonly ascribed to dispersed people removed/exiled by the African slave trade to the Americas and Europe. In examination of the artistic expression of African American theatre, dance and performance traditions, students will learn about race and racism in the United States and around the world via: theatre as a site for social and political activism; theatre as ritual and ceremony; the politics of language, gender, and race in dramatic literature/texts; and as a celebration of cultural and racial pride and heritage. Learning about the breadth and depth of these dynamics should enable students to better understand and respect differences between and within groups of people and how enriched our lives can be by exercising our citizenship and living responsibly in a diverse community.

Throughout the course, we will examine the significant global oral, literary, political, ideological, social/economic, and religious traditions rooted within African American culture. We will also examine how African American performance traditions have traditionally acted as a staging ground for urgent questions about the nature of citizenship. Students will critically read and analyze plays, perform excerpts from texts, write essays and articles relevant to plays/thematic context to better understand the historical, social, political, and cultural lens from where these narratives/stories emerged.

This section encourages students to take initiative and develop independent analytical thinking through close and careful reading. We will focus on the dramatic texts from class and explore and analyze the plays from both the playwright and actor’s perspective. This section is structured as a seminar in which student participation in discussion and analysis are primary.

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion + Intimacy in Theater Consent Culture Statement:

Through our pluralistic approach of diverse pedagogies, methodologies, ideologies, and modalities of artistic expression, we invite(engage) and challenge students to expand their breadth and depth of knowledge, complexity, and range of the human experience. Even though we nurture, guide, and challenge our students to embrace the unknown or unfamiliar and step outside of their comfort zones through storytelling/art, we aim to practice effective strategies and offer tools to students mindful of their physical, psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing. In alignment with professional and industry standards, we will integrate core principles and techniques of Intimacy in Theater and Building Cultures of Affirmative Consent. This will provide agency, offer resources and support to the teachers, students, directors, and staff to establish healthy boundaries of consent when working on material that is physically, intimately, or emotionally charged content in both the classroom and production.

Learning Objectives

Analysis of Cultural/Socio-Political Forces: Address social, political, economic, and/or cultural forces that bear on human experience in the U.S. and in societies around the world. Through a socio- political lens, students will be able to define and articulate contrasting ideologies that laid foundations for the Civil Rights movement, Back to Africa movement, Black Nationalism, Apartheid, and the Pan-African movement across the globe.

Improving Quality of Life: Engage students in academic discourse about how to improve the quality of life in the US and around the world both verbally and in writing through weekly dramaturgical papers, comparative analysis and critical/literary discussion groups about thematic or contextual issues from the plays studied in class.

Required Readings

My Dungeon Shook: A Letter to My Nephew – James Baldwin*

Citizen – Claudia Rankine*

The Device of Race – Harry Elam*

The Escape: A Leap for Freedom – William Wells Brown*

Rachel -Angelina Weld Grimke*

American Minstrelsy in Black and White – Hatch, A*

Dutchman – LeRoi Jones*

A Raisin in the Sun – Lorraine Hansberry*

Joe Turner's Come and Gone – August Wilson*

*Provided electronically.

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The evaluation of your performance in the course includes attendance, active engagement, participation in class activities, discussions and critiques, along with the quality, growth, and ingenuity of performance projects, and written work.

The course has four major components: Critique and Analysis of Plays and Essays/Readings that correlate with work studied; Performance explorations and dramatization of text/narrative; Written assignments/Papers; and Group Projects.

Note:

- (1) The written assignments should be typed and double-spaced. The margins of your papers should be kept at 1 inch; the size of the font should not exceed 12-point. Written assignments should be submitted to Turnitin on Blackboard, unless otherwise indicated before 11:59 PDT on the due date. Please allow a 30-minute buffer for uploading.
- (2) According to the School of Theatre policy, no late paper will be accepted, unless permission is granted prior to the due date.
- (3) No Laptops, Phones, or IPAD usage during instructional class session unless otherwise indicated.
- (4) You are expected to attend all classes. In the event you must miss a class, please email me prior to the absence and let me know. Participation contributes to your grade. You are allowed one “free” absence. Subsequent unexcused absences will result in the loss of points for each time you are absent.
- (5) Please do not be late.
- (6) *Please note: **no late final papers are accepted.** If you fail to submit your final paper on time, you will receive a 0 grade for your final paper.

NO AI GENERATED WORK ACCEPTED

All work should be original and created specifically for the given assignment. You are responsible for the accuracy and originality of any material submitted.

You should be the author of all text submitted. In assignment that are collaborative, the group of students will be the co-authors and have all associated responsibilities.

Academic integrity policies regarding the use of generative AI tools will apply to every assignment.

*Using an AI generator will count as plagiarism; students are responsible for whatever is turned in, including AI's false citations.

PARTICIPATION

- Class participation includes attending/commenting in class on a regular basis and writing reflection papers. Students are required to attend lectures and to participate in class discussions and debates providing both qualitative and quantitative data to support your hypothesis.

Participation contributes to your grade. Please be on time.

Please do not have other applications or web pages open during class unless I ask you to do so for a specific exercise.

- Please do not use cell phones during class.
- Simple snacks and/or drinks are acceptable as long as they do not distract you or your peers during class.

REFLECTION PAPERS:

Students are required to write reflection papers as indicated on the weekly course schedule. Each student must create a **one-page reflection paper** to respond to the plays, videos and/or critical text for the week and turn them in at class.

A reflection paper must include 1) a concise statement addressing the conflicts/themes discussed by the playwright or author; 2) evidence from the text or lecture that supports your analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the text/performance; 3) a statement about how the play/text connects to larger concepts introduced in the course. **PLEASE DO NOT WRITE A PLAY SUMMARY**; focus your critical lens on the concept(s) the playwright/writer is expressing.

***Include one question for discussion in class.**

You will be assessed on the following:

1. Length of Entries: The entries are the required length.
2. Appropriateness and Vitality of Entries/Question: The entries define the terms and make serious efforts to explain their relevance to the play.

A printed copy is due at the start of class.

PERFORMANCES/PRESENTATIONS:

Solo Performance/Oral Presentation - You will create your own solo performance/public address based on one of the social, political, cultural, historical, or current event topics discussed in class. Should incorporate ethnographic and dramaturgical research skills used in creating performance project **5-7 minutes in length**. You will receive an individual grade for this assignment.

Multi-Media Literary Analysis Group Project - You are required to participate in a Multi-Media Literary Analysis Group Project based on one of the following plays: *The Escape*; *The Dutchman*; *A Raisin In The Sun* or *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*. Each presentation will choose a historical, biographical, gender, psychological, formalistic and/or subjective lens through which to analyze the plays; incorporate textual and visual evidence from play in presentation; music or video/film of scenes or thematic material from plays; as well as a dramatization of text, characters, or scene work presented live as part of the presentation.

Students will be assessed on not only the specificity of content but also how the group creatively composed and organized the presentation. This further examines how any kind of presentation is a type of performance. Your partners will be assigned accordingly and will range between three to four people. Your whole ensemble will receive a group grade for this **20-minute project**.

EXAMS:

Midterm – Based on material covered in class through week 5, students will have to identify and describe contextual significance of a quote or excerpt from a play/video, theories, methodologies, and artistic/literary/historical figures examined in class. There will be ten identifications on the midterm.

FINAL - Comparative Analysis Essay:

You will write a comparative analysis essay about **two plays or narratives** studied in class **exploring similar themes from the past and the present** including at least **one critical source**. You will identify the critical lens you are using to analyze text including: formalistic, psychological, biographical, historical, gendered, allegorical and subjective. MLA source guidelines. (1200-1800 words)

GRADING BREAKDOWN

Reflection Papers (30pts each)	15% - 150pts
Midterm	15% - 150pts
Oral/Solo Presentations	10% - 100pts
Multi-Media Literary Group Analysis	20% - 200pts
Comparative Analysis - FINAL	25% - 250pts
Participation	15% - 150pts
TOTAL	100% - 1000

All assignment will be graded on a percentage of 100 points. The grades will then be calculated into a final point total that will then be converted into a final letter grade as follows:

A: 100-95; A-: 94-90; B+: 89-85; B: 84-80; B-: 79-75; C+: 74-70; C: 69-65; C-: 64-60; D: 59-55; D-: 54-50; F: Below 50.

Grading scale for SDA: A indicates work of excellent quality; B of good quality; C of average quality; D of below average quality; and F indicates inadequate work.

Grading Timeline

Dramaturgical Papers, Critical Group Presentations, Midterm test will be graded 5-7 days from due date.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Week 1 – CITIZENSHIP and Forum on Black Theatre

1/8 Course/syllabus overview
Background on James Baldwin/video
READ: *My Dungeon Shook/Letter to My Nephew* by James Baldwin

1/10 READ: *Citizen* by Claudia Rankine, I-IV
READ: *The Device of Race* by Harry Elam, p. 3-1

Week 2

1/15 NO CLASS
1/17 READ: *The Black Experience School of Drama* by Samuel A. Hay, p.15-32

Week 3

1/22 **Roots, Ritual Ceremony & Cultural Practice**
READ: *The Escape: A Leap for Freedom* – William Wells Brown
Reflection Paper #1 due on *The Escape* by William Wells Brown

1/24 **Roots/Reconnection**
Watch *Roots*: Auction scene by Alex Hailey-discuss
READ: *Roots in African Drama and Theatre*, p.18-37

Week 4

1/29 Review: Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre: Revelations
READ: *The Black Performer and the Performance of Blackness* by Harry J. Elam, Jr., p 288-305

1/31 READ: *Joe Turner Come and Gone* by August Wilson
READ: August Wilson Speech: *The Ground on Which I Stand*
In-class review: August Wilson speech
Reflection Paper #2 due on *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* by August Wilson

Week 5

- 2/5 Solo Performance/Docudrama
READ (excerpts): **Twilight, Los Angeles, 1992 (1994)** by Anna Deavere Smith
- 2/7 READ: *Anna Deavere Smith, Acting as Incorporation* (1993) by Richard Schechner, p. 265-266.
Review: Upcoming Solo Performances

Week 6

- 2/12 **Midterm Exam**
- 2/14 The Weave of Racial Cultures
READ: *American Minstrelsy in Black and White* by James V. Hatch, p. 93-125
(History of African American Theatre)

Week 7

- 2/19 NO CLASS
- 2/21 Watch/review: Spike Lee's *Bamboozled/Get Out* by Jordan Peele

Week 8

- 2/26 Solo Performances
- 2/28 Solo Performances

Week 9

- 3/4 **Politics of Language, Gender and Race** - Harlem Renaissance
- 3/6 Review: *The Device of Race* by Harry J. Elam, Jr;
W.E.B. DuBois and Alain Locke positions on Art and Theatre

Week 10

- 3/11 SPRING BREAK
- 3/13 SPRING BREAK

Week 11

- 3/18 **Harlem Renaissance, cont'd**
Review: Zora Neale Hurston/Langston Hughes
- 3/20 **Black Arts/Black Power Movement**
In-class review: The Black Arts/Black Power Movement

Week 12

- 3/27 READ: *Dutchman* by Amiri Baraka
In-class review of *Dutchman* by Amiri Baraka
Reflection Paper #3 on *The Dutchman* by Amiri Baraka due
- 3/29 In-class review: *Someone Blew Up America* by Amiri Baraka
Review: Upcoming Multi-Media Literary Analysis Presentations

Week 13

- 4/1 **Imagery of Woman/Manhood**
READ: *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry
In-class review: *A Raisin in the Sun*
Reflection paper #4 on *A Raisin in the Sun*
- 4/3 VIEW: *Moonlight* by playwright Tarell Alvin McCraney

Week 14

- 4/8 READ: *Rachel* by Angelina Grimke
In-class review of *Rachel*
Reflection Paper # 5 due on *Rachel* by Angelina Grimke
- 4/10 **Afro Surrealism/Afro Futurism/Black Future Month**
Why Donald Glover's Atlanta Feels So Weird video
READ: *Black to the Future* – Mark Dery
Historical, social, political movement
Black Adaptation: *Fat Ham* by James Ijames – Pulitzer Prize
Final Paper Review

Week 15

- 4/22 Multi-Media Literary Analysis Presentations
4/24 Multi-Media Literary Analysis Presentations
- 5/6 **FINAL PAPER DUE – Comparative Analysis**

If you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19, or if you discover that you have been in close contact with others who have symptoms or who have tested positive, you are advised to **complete the contact tracing form in MySHR** (<https://usc.edu/myshr>). The contact tracing form contains information for positive students to obtain isolation accommodations through the university, and fields to enter email addresses for known close contacts during their infectious period.

To reduce the spread of COVID-19, USC recommends that face coverings (masks) be worn indoors, including in classrooms, as well as in crowded outdoor settings. Face coverings that cover your nose and mouth to be worn throughout the class session is suggested. Cloth/homemade masks or bandanas are not recommended. USC will provide masks (including N95s) upon request. Requests for accommodations related to the face covering policies should be directed to the Office for Student Accessibility Services (<https://osas.usc.edu/>).

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism—presenting someone else’s ideas as your own—is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. This includes repurposing any portion of your academic work without appropriate permission. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “*Behavior Violating University Standards*” here <https://policy.usc.edu/files/2020/07/SCampus-Part-B-1.pdf> and on academic integrity here <https://sjacs.usc.edu/students/academic-integrity/>.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website for DSP and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies. See the university’s site on Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 or (213) 740-9355 (WELL) – 24/7 on call

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services provides immediate therapy services for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (e.g., sexual assault, domestic violence, stalking). **All services are confidential.**

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. equity.usc.edu.

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit: titleix.usc.edu.

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias or hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

The Office of Disability Services and Programs provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. dsp.usc.edu.

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa.

Diversity at USC. For Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. diversity.usc.edu

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. emergency.usc.edu.