

English 350, Section A1  
**Studies in African-American Literature**  
Summer Term, 2016  
M, 6:00-9:30 p.m.  
Humanities 107

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## Course Information and Syllabus

### CLU Catalog Description

With an emphasis on literary works by African-American writers, this course explores race in the American context. Each semester offers a different focus based on culture, genre, or theme. For example: Race and Ethnicity in the 19th Century, Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance, or Representations of Race in African-American Literature. Prerequisite: ENGL 111.

### Important Information about Official Add/Drop/Course Completion Dates

Monday, June 6: Last day to add a class.  
Monday, June 6: Last day to drop a class without financial penalty.  
Wednesday, July 30: Last day to withdraw from a course.  
Thursday, August 4: Last day to remove a grade of "IN" (Incomplete) from the prior term.

### Introductory Essay

In the spring of 1986, during one of my last terms as an undergraduate English major, I took a course that focused on the twentieth-century American novel. Midway through the course we were assigned Ralph Ellison's groundbreaking novel Invisible Man (1952). When I first read the title of the novel on the syllabus, I thought we were reading H. G. Wells's The Invisible Man (1897), a semi-comedic science fiction novel that explores the moral and social dilemmas faced by an ostracized scientist, who uses an invisibility potion to get back at the society that has rejected him. I had read Wells's novel as a kid, and I had also thoroughly enjoyed the fascinating plot depicted in the 1933 film version, which had been rebroadcast on television when I was growing up in the 1970s. Failing to notice that the title Invisible Man was not the same as The Invisible Man, and attributing my confusion about the name of the author as *Ellison* rather than *Wells* to a faulty childhood memory, I opened the novel expecting to read an account of the scientist's decision to use his invisibility formula. Instead, I was immediately both captivated and challenged by the first three paragraphs of the prologue—so much so, that it and the entire novel caused my naive “twentysomething” thinking about race and ethnicity in American culture to take a 180-degree turn. The opening paragraphs introduce us to the protagonist of the novel, an unnamed African-American male who also serves as the narrator of the story:

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me.

Nor is my invisibility exactly a matter of a biochemical accident to my epidermis. That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their *inner* eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality. I am not complaining, nor am I protesting either. It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen, although it is most often rather wearing on the nerves. Then too, you're constantly being bumped against by those of poor vision. Or again, you often doubt if you really exist. You wonder whether you aren't simply a phantom in other people's minds. Say, a figure in a nightmare which the sleeper tries with all his strength to destroy. It's when you feel like this that, out of resentment, you begin to bump people back. And, let me confess, you feel that way most of the time. You ache with the need to convince yourself that you do exist in the real world, that you're a part of all the sound and anguish, and you strike out with your fists, you curse and you swear to make them recognize you. And, alas, it's seldom successful.

One night I accidentally bumped into a man, and perhaps because of the near darkness he saw me and called me an insulting name. I sprang at him, seized his coat lapels and demanded that he apologize. He was a tall blond man, and as my face came close to his he looked insolently out of his blue eyes and cursed me, his breath hot in my face as he struggled. I pulled his chin down sharp upon the crown of my head, butting him as I had seen the West Indians do, and I felt his flesh tear and the blood gush out, and I yelled, "Apologize! Apologize!" But he continued to curse and struggle, and I butted him again and again until he went down heavily, on his knees, profusely bleeding. I kicked him repeatedly, in a frenzy because he still uttered insults though his lips were frothy with blood. Oh yes, I kicked him! And in my outrage I got out my knife and prepared to slit his throat, right there beneath the lamplight in the deserted street, holding him in the collar with one hand, and opening the knife with my teeth—when it occurred to me that the man had not *seen* me, actually; that he, as far as he knew, was in the midst of a walking nightmare! And I stopped the blade, slicing the air as I pushed him away, letting him fall back to the street. I stared at him hard as the lights of a car stabbed through the darkness. He lay there, moaning on the asphalt; a man almost killed by a phantom. It unnerved me. I was both disgusted and ashamed. I was like a drunken man myself, wavering about on weakened legs. Then I was amused: Something in this man's thick head had sprung out and beaten him within an inch of his life. I began to laugh at this crazy discovery. Would he have

awakened at the point of death? Would Death himself have freed him for wakeful living? But I didn't linger. I ran away into the dark, laughing so hard I feared I might rupture myself. The next day I saw his picture in the *Daily News*, beneath a caption stating that he had been "mugged." Poor fool, poor blind fool, I thought with sincere compassion, mugged by an invisible man! (Ellison 3-5).

Ellison's prose challenged me to think about race relations in a new way. Like so many of my peers from my generation, I had grown up in two mostly white, middle-class communities: Concord, California, where I lived until I turned eleven, and Bartlesville, Oklahoma, where I attended middle school and high school, before going on to study English and music at the University of Kansas, Ball State University. Although Bartlesville, Oklahoma certainly had more African Americans than Concord, California, I thought they mostly "stuck to themselves" (as I would have put it back then), and nearly all of them lived on the other side of the railroad tracks. I never questioned this apparently "natural," "chosen" segregation, because everything I had learned in school and from the media had taught me that we lived in a free, equitable society in which both racial and ethnic difference no longer mattered in any substantive way: all Americans were free to pursue the American Dream, I thought, and thus any racial or ethnic skirmishes were just that—*skirmishes*, and therefore minor and of no consequence.

Ellison's powerful words challenged me to think more deeply about race relations in America. To begin with, the narrator's explanation of why he is an "invisible man"—because of the "construction" of people's "*inner eyes*"—made me question my own eyes: how did I look at (metaphorically speaking) those who were different than I? When I encountered someone from outside my white, middle-class "bubble," did I really see that person as a person, or did I perceive him or her as somehow fundamentally different, "other," or even deficient from my own white middle-class norm? Were there specific reasons why those African-American students in Bartlesville lived on the other side of the tracks? Why were there so few African Americans in Concord? What factors might make such segregation possible, and why did most of my high school teachers and even some of my college professors seem to assume (at least publicly) that race and ethnicity were no longer of any consequence in America?

The novel had a powerful effect on me, and it spurred my interest in African-American literature as a field, especially since until I encountered Invisible Man, I had read no other literary works by African Americans. When I attended graduate school at Indiana University a few years later, I thus took an advanced seminar in African-American literature, and whenever I have had a chance since then, I have included African-American literature in many of the English courses that I teach.

### **Guiding Questions for Our Exploration of African-American Literature**

This course will explore a rich sampling of African-American literature, including a slave narrative, an autobiography, poetry, short stories, and one novel. When it is useful for our work, we will also interpret these literary works in relation to artifacts of popular culture, such as songs, paintings, advertisements, and other social practices. As we explore this literature together, we will pursue several crucial questions:

1. How is race perceived by the “inner eyes” of both individuals and society as a whole?
2. How have racial difference and racism shaped the experience of African-American writers and thinkers?
3. How do African-American writers craft works that are both politically engaging and aesthetically pleasing?
4. How does our own transaction with African-American literature challenge our thinking about race relations in American culture?
5. To what extent does race play a determinative role in human identity?
6. How does African-American literature deepen our appreciation for the power of all literature?

### **Broad Goals for this Section of English 350:**

- \*To increase our appreciation for the aesthetic beauty of African-American literature.
- \*To explore socially relevant themes through the work of important African-American authors.
- \*To expand our repertoire of reading and writing practices.
- \*To help us interpret literary texts through techniques of close reading, critical thinking, and other methods of literary analysis.
- \*To create together a positive classroom atmosphere where reading, writing, thinking, and interpretation are fostered.
- \*To continue to hone our skills in writing and argumentation.
- \*To continue to learn how to express our ideas in a rhetorically informed style that is also clear, effective, and pleasing to the academic community.

### **California Lutheran University Learning Outcomes**

At the end of this course, students will be able to . . .

- \*Apply **Interpersonal & Teamwork Skills** to in-class and online discussion-based activities about literature.
- \*Engage successfully in **Written and Oral Communication** by applying literary concepts and theories to literature through informal Blackboard postings, a more formal paper, and in class discussions.
- \*Develop **Critical Thinking** skills by generating and seeking answers to questions about the ideological terrain of African-American literary works.
- \*Foster **Cross-Cultural Competency** through investigating the specific historical and cultural context of each work we study.

**Note: English 350 satisfies two CLU Core 21 Requirements: Literature and U.S. Diversity.**

### **Required Texts**

*Note: To help facilitate more productive class discussions, please purchase only the editions listed below, which are available at the campus bookstore and through online bookstores:*

Clarke, John Henrik. Black American Short Stories. New York: Hill and Wang, 1993.

ISBN-13: 978-0374523541.

Jacobs, Harriet. Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Belknap Press, 2009.

ISBN-13: 978-0674035836.

Morrison, Toni. The Bluest Eye. New York: Vintage, 2007. ISBN-13: 978-0307278449

Rampersad, Arnold, ed. The Oxford Anthology of African-American Poetry. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. ISBN-13: 978-0195125634

Wright, Richard. Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2007. ISBN-13: 978-0061130243

### **Surgeon General's Warning! (Attendance & Participation)**

This is a course that requires your active participation in intensive reading, writing, discussion, and collaboration. The course grows out of an inquiry model of learning, a model based on the understanding that we all learn best what we actively seek to know. Folks in education have remarked that one retains some 10% of what one reads; 20% of what one hears; 30% of what one sees; and 95% of what one teaches. Notice that this says "teaches," rather than "is taught." The learner who teaches learns the most. What you engage in actively enough to share with others, you will understand more fully than that which you only passively "absorb," especially if you "absorb" only to spew it back on some test. If you don't have the time or energy to be so actively engaged this semester in this kind of course, you need to either drop the course now or arrange your schedule so that you do have time (in other words, this is not a couch potato class!).

Since whole-class discussion and small-group collaboration will be the norm in this class, strong attendance is required and active participation is expected. Absences should be kept to an absolute minimum. **If you miss more than two class meetings over the course of this condensed term, you will receive minimal credit for attendance and participation. Students who have excessive absences (i.e., more than two) will have a report filed with the appropriate academic advisor and the director of the program. They also risk failure in the course.** If you cannot attend a particular class meeting, I expect that you will let me know ahead of time by e-mail. It is your responsibility to make up all work that you have missed during your absence.

### **Classroom Civility**

During classroom activities and discussions, **one person should have the floor at a time**. In other words, a class meeting is not an occasion to carry on extraneous conversations with classmates, nor is it a time to engage in a discussion while someone else in the class has the floor. During the hours of class, all classroom discussions and conversations should be civil. If you wish to talk with another class member about a personal matter (e.g., one's dating or marital life), please do so before or after class. **Failure to behave in a civil and courteous manner will result in your being asked to drop the course.**

### **Cell Phone Use, Text Messaging, and E-Mailing during Class**

Probably all of us use cell phones, send text messages, and correspond through e-mail, and we often do so to keep in touch with family and friends. However, because we have limited time together in our classroom community, **please either turn your cell phones and PDA devices off or put them in silent mode (non-vibrating mode) during class meetings.** If you have a family emergency (e.g., an impending death in the family, or a child who is seriously ill, etc.) and must have your cell phone on, please let me know ahead of time, and be prepared to leave the room to take care of the emergency if it is absolutely necessary. **Other than emergency situations, it is unacceptable in this class to talk on your cell phone, text message, or e-mail during class. Please take care of your familial and business obligations before or after class.**

### **Format and Submission of the Interpretive Essay**

The interpretive essay for this course should be submitted in **hard copy** or sent to me as a Microsoft Word attachment to an e-mail message. Your paper should be word-processed in a standard 10- or 12-point font. Please use standard 1-inch margins on all pages except for the first one, on which you should reserve some additional space at the top for basic identifying information: your name, the course number, the specific assignment number, my name, and the date. Underneath that information, please include an appropriate title for your essay. All subsequent pages should have page numbers printed in the top right corner. The main text of your paper should be double-spaced throughout, **with no gaps between paragraphs.** Use a one-inch or five-space indentation to indicate the beginning of each paragraph. If the paper requires documentation, be sure to use the Modern Language Association system of documentation, with parenthetical references throughout the text and a Works Cited list as your final page. (Information about the MLA system of documentation is available on the Pearson Library Website, and from tutors at the Writing Center, which is located in Pearson Library.

### **Informal Response Papers on Blackboard**

A strong part of the participation grade for this course stems from coming to class with the appropriate materials, having read those materials and interacted with them in some way so that you can contribute to class discussion. During the semester I will ask you to compose a series of informal response papers on the various readings for the course. We'll compose the response papers on Blackboard, and we'll be composing **at least** one nearly every week of the semester. (I'll announce them in class during the class period prior to the due date).

Each time I assign a response paper, you should usually write two or three substantial paragraphs (5-8 sentences per paragraph) for the upcoming reading or discussion. At times I will assign a specific question for you to explore in your writing, but sometimes your task will be to focus on whatever strikes you as interesting, significant, puzzling, useful, or problematic from the particular selection or topic. You may raise questions, propose tentative theories, or speculate about what a particular reading is intended to convey to us. Rather than merely summarizing what a particular reading "contains," your task will be to step beyond that, to try to articulate how the selection complicates our inquiry. You may also critique specific claims or

theories with which you disagree (or partially disagree), point out problems in the claims being made, and analyze the possible motives of the writer.

Please make sure that each informal response paper provides some degree of detail about the text or issue we're discussing, and also make sure that it ultimately takes some kind of a larger stand or position on what you've noticed. I normally will not comment directly on these responses, but I may draw from them or ask you to use them in some way in our discussions. **It will thus be important for you to print a copy of your response paper to bring with you to class or to take notes on your response paper if a printer is not available.**

==> **Each Blackboard response paper should be posted at least one hour prior to our class meeting on the day it is due. If Blackboard is down or you cannot resolve a technical problem prior to class, please compose your response paper in a standard e-mail message and send it to me at <[jabond@callutheran.edu](mailto:jabond@callutheran.edu)>** (Be sure to also send a copy to yourself, so that you may save and print a hard copy of your response). **Once the technical problem is resolved, be sure to post your response paper to Blackboard so that you will receive full credit for the assignment.**

==> **Please remember that it is your responsibility to ensure that your response is posted to Blackboard. If you have technical difficulties, you will need to contact the Help Desk for assistance: [helpdesk@callutheran.edu](mailto:helpdesk@callutheran.edu) or (805) 493-3698.**

### **Late Papers and Assignments**

Short of the polar ice caps melting (or some equally catastrophic event in your life), I will not accept late papers and assignments. If some major catastrophe does strike, you should contact me well ahead of the deadline (e-mail is best). **Always keep a hard copy and an electronic copy of every assignment you submit to me.**

### **Information for Students with Disabilities**

California Lutheran University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations in compliance with ADA of 1990 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to students with documented disabilities. If you are a student requesting accommodations for this course, please contact your professor at the beginning of the semester and register with the Disability Support Services Coordinator, Wendy Jimenez, for the facilitation and verification of need. The Disability Support Services Coordinator is located in the Center for Student Success Office at 3259 Pioneer Street, and can be contacted by calling (805) 493-3878 or e-mailing her at [wjimene@callutheran.edu](mailto:wjimene@callutheran.edu)

### **Sexual Misconduct**

California Lutheran University does not tolerate any degree of sexual misconduct on or off-campus. We encourage you to report if you know of, or have been the victim of, sexual harassment, misconduct, and/or assault. If you report this to a faculty member, she or he must

notify Cal Lutheran's Title IX Coordinator about the basic facts of the incident. More information about your options for reporting can be found at: <http://www.callutheran.edu/title-ix/>

### **Pearson Library**

Pearson Library provides access to scholarly books, journals, ebooks, and databases of full text articles from scholarly journals. To begin using these materials, visit the library web page <http://www.callutheran.edu/library>

There are many ways to contact Pearson Library for research assistance, no matter where you are!

- ∇ Email Ψωποννε Ωιλβερ (Προφεςσιοναλσ λιαισον) ατ ψωιλβερ≡χαλλυτηεραν.εδυ
- ∇ Γενεραλ Λιβραρυ εμαιλ: [XLYlibrarian@callutheran.edu](mailto:XLYlibrarian@callutheran.edu)
- ∇ Πεαρσον Λιβραρυ μαιν πηονε: 805.493.3250
- ∇ Τεξτ υσ ψουρ θυεστιον: 805.493.3867
- ∇ Γετ μορε ηελπ ατ: <http://www.callutheran.edu/library/help/>

### **Cal Lutheran Writing Center**

The Writing Center provides 1:1 writing consultations, in-person and online, with trained undergraduate and graduate writing consultants. We welcome all writing-related projects at any stage of the writing process across the diverse disciplines of study at Cal Lutheran. The Writing Center also hosts writing workshops, provides in-class visits, facilitates writing groups, and offers a writer's studio option for longer, sustained projects. Services suit writers of all levels, including traditional undergraduates, graduate students from all fields, all English language learners, and accomplished scholars alike. All members of the Cal Lutheran community with an @callutheran.edu email address are welcome to make use of our services. For more information, please visit at [www.callutheran.edu/writing\\_center](http://www.callutheran.edu/writing_center) or call 805.493.3257. Please schedule appointments online through MyCLU Blackboard with the yellow "The Writing Center" icon in "Tools," or stop by The Writing Center itself, located in the Darling Collaboration Suite of Pearson Library.

### **Veterans Resources**

If you are a veteran, military member, or a family member of a veteran or military member, please refer to Cal Lutheran's Veterans Resources webpage for important information: <http://www.callutheran.edu/veterans/>. Also, if you are a veteran receiving benefits and you are struggling in a class, you most likely qualify for free tutoring. Please contact the Veterans Coordinator, Jenn Zimmerman, [veterans@callutheran.edu](mailto:veterans@callutheran.edu) or 805.493.3648, for more information.

### **Help Desk**

Students may contact the Help Desk about telephone, network, wireless network, software questions password problems, hardware problems, and general consultation (i.e. you cannot log into your MyCLU portal, or you are having problems with Blackboard). Please email specific details about your problems to [helpdesk@callutheran.edu](mailto:helpdesk@callutheran.edu), click on the following link for more

information [http://www.callutheran.edu/iss/technology\\_services/helpdesk.php](http://www.callutheran.edu/iss/technology_services/helpdesk.php) or call: 805.493.3698

### **Documentation and Plagiarism**

Whenever you are quoting, paraphrasing, or using someone else's idea (even if that idea came from your roommate or classmate), be sure to credit your source. Whenever you use the internet, be sure to keep track of the websites you visit and whether or not you use information from those websites.

Proper documentation is a way to honor your sources, to point readers to further information, and to support your own statements. Whenever you credit a source, use the MLA system of documentation, which uses parenthetical references and a list of works cited (major writing handbooks used on campus explain this system, and personnel at the Writing Center can assist you in using it in your writing assignments). **To fail to document adequately is to plagiarize—a serious offense inside and outside the university. If you plagiarize for any assignment in this course, you will receive a failing grade for the semester, and a report will be filed with the Provost. If you are uncertain about whether or not your use of sources violates common standards for plagiarism, ask me for assistance. Unacknowledged use of any outside source (including a friend or spouse) is unacceptable for this class.**

### **Course Work and Grading**

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|--|-----|
| 1. Attendance and <u>active</u> participation in class activities  | 15% |
| 2. Informal Response Papers on Blackboard*   | 20% |
| 3. Midterm Exam (identifications, short answer questions, “medium” essay questions)                                      | 20% |
| 4. Interpretive Essay  | 25% |
| 5. Final Exam (identifications, short answer, one or two “medium” essay questions, and one comprehensive essay question) | 20% |

**\*Blackboard responses will be announced in class, and prompts will be available online at least three days prior to the next class meeting. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to find out what work is due for the next class meeting.**

*Most grades for this course will be given as letter grades, which will be converted to a standard percentage value at the end of the course. Exam grades will be calculated on the basis of 100 points and treated as percentages. Final grades will be calculated using the following percentage grading scale:*

- A = 94-100
- A- = 90-93
- B+ = 88-89
- B = 84-87
- B- = 80-83
- C+ = 78-79
- C = 74-77

C- = 70-73  
D+ = 68-69  
D = 64-67  
D- = 60-63

### **Number of Hours of Required Study Outside of Class**

**Independent Study Time for Reading.** This course is designed with the assumption that each week, students will devote **a minimum of 3 hours of independent study time for reading for every hour of our weekly class meetings.** In other words, because we meet for 3.5 hours on a weekly basis, the expectation is that students will devote **at least seven hours of independent study** (reading, notetaking, and review for the exams) to this course each week of the term.

**Total Required Independent Study Hours for Reading during the Term: 77 Hours.**

### **2. Independent Study Time for Writing Papers and Online Informal Response Papers.**

The assigned paper for this course will require additional reading, drafting, and revising. For the interpretive essay, you will be spending **at least eight (60-minute) hours** preparing and composing your assignment (more time may be necessary). **In addition to those eight hours,** most weeks will require an additional 1 ½ hours for you to review your notes and compose and post an **informal response paper.** We will be doing at least ten of these informal response papers this term. **Total Required Independent Study Hours for Writing: 23.**

**Total Independent Study Hours for the Term: 100 Hours**

### **Required Online Instructional Discussions through Blackboard**

To increase the amount of instructional time in our compressed Professionals term, each week I will lead a discussion board forum that will require your active participation. We will discuss our initial impressions of the course readings, review concepts and ideas, and pose questions to one another through a live Blackboard session online. Please be prepared to participate in **online instructional activities for a minimum of 75 minutes per week of the term.**

**Total Required Online Instructional Discussions through Blackboard: 13 ¾ hours.**

**Syllabus** (Subject to revision).

**(Week 1)**

May

23 M Course introduction. Film Screening: Scottsboro: An American Tragedy.

**(Week 2)**

30 M **Memorial Day Holiday: No class meeting.** Additional online activities and assignments will be substituted for this class meeting.

**(Week 3)**

June

6 M Reading due: Morrison, The Bluest Eye. **Please read all of the novel for this class meeting.**

**(Week 4)**

13 M Reading due: The Oxford Anthology of African-American Poetry, 1-18, 95-119, and 347-367.

**(Week 5)**

20 F Reading due: Richard Wright, "Almos' a Man" (photocopied short story); Mary Elizabeth Vroman, "See How They Run," Black American Short Stories, 176-197; Eugenia W. Collier, "Marigolds," Black American Short Stories, 354-363.

**(Week 6)**

27 M **Midterm Exam: Exam must be taken at this time.** Film screening: Excerpt from Africans in America.

**(Week 7)**

July

4 M **Independence Day Holiday: No Class Meeting.** Additional online activities and assignments will be substituted for this class meeting.

**(Week 8)**

11 M Reading due: Harriet Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, facsimile of original title page and 1-264 (through Chapter XLI and the Appendix). **Please read all of Incidents for this class meeting.**

**(Week 9)**

18 M Reading due: Richard Wright, Black Boy, 1-121.

**(Week 10)**

25 M Reading due: Richard Wright, Black Boy, 122-257.

**(Week 11)**

August

- 1 M **Final Exam: Exam must be taken at this time.** Interpretive Essay tutorials will be held after the exam.
- 4 Th Interpretive Essay due. You may submit your essay in one of two ways:  
(1) Turn in a hard copy to my office (Humanities 212); **or** (2) Send your essay to my e-mail address as a Microsoft Word attachment— [jabond@callutheran.edu](mailto:jabond@callutheran.edu)