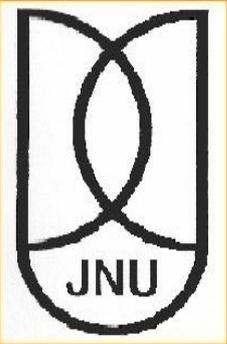


**GIAN (MHRD) course on  
Twentieth Century Narratives:  
Five African American Practitioners**

**12 - 18 February, 2018**

**Committee Room, SLL&CS - I, Jawaharlal Nehru University**



**Teaching Faculty  
Amritjit Singh, Ohio University**

## **MHRD Scheme on Global Initiative on Academic Network (GIAN)**

### **Twentieth Century Narrative: Five African American Practitioners**

#### **Overview**

In his 1946 essay, “Twentieth Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity,” Ralph Ellison had proposed that “we view the whole of American life as a drama acted out upon the body of a Negro giant, who, lying trussed up like Gulliver, forms the stage and the scene upon which and within which the action unfolds.” This course will explore major developments in 20<sup>th</sup>-century U.S. culture and literature by focusing on five major black American novelists whose work spans half a century from the 1920s at the peak of the Harlem Renaissance to the post-Civil Rights 1970s. The writers carefully chosen for examination are: Jean Toomer, Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Toni Morrison. Not only have these writers created powerful works of fiction and/or autobiographical narrative, they have also participated energetically in the central debates on aesthetic and intertextuality, race and gender, politics and ideology, that help us to appreciate “the network of complex relationships” that divide or bind people as individuals and groups in the diverse, pluralistic society that is the United States. In addition to one longer work by each writer, discussions will also reference critical commentaries and theoretical readings, as well as selected poems, essays, interviews, and short fiction by these and other writers from *Black Voices*. These additional readings would illuminate the processes by which these writers shaped their art and vision by cleaving *to* and *from* their predecessors—and by learning from both their “relatives” and “ancestors,” in Ellison’s terminology. The course aims to explore the personal relationships among some of these writers, but even more their ideological and inter-textual responses to one another.

#### **Objectives**

The primary objectives of the course are as follows:

- i) Understanding the significance of African American writing
- ii) Exploring issues of race and gender in the U.S.
- iii) Critical reading of specific African American writers to unpack issues of race and gender, aesthetic and intertextuality, and politics and ideology
- iv) Tracing literary and socio-cultural networks and movements from the Harlem Renaissance to Civil Rights and beyond.

## Required Readings

- Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*. Vintage.
- Abraham Chapman, ed. *Black Voices*. Signet Classics.
- Richard Wright, *Black Boy*. Harper Collins.
- Jean Toomer, *Cane*. Norton Critical Edition edited by Rudolph Byrd and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Norton.
- Toni Morrison, *Sula*. Vintage.
- Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Harper Collins.

## Selected Recommended Readings from *Black Voices* (in addition to required readings that will form part of the eight discussion sessions)

- W.E. B. Du Bois, poems, 358-63
- \*Jean Toomer, three poems, 375-78; two short stories, 63-73
- \*Arna Bontemps, short story, "A Summer Tragedy," 87-96
- Langston Hughes, *Tales*, "Foreword," "Feet" "Bop," 96-101, 105-06; four poems: "Afro-American Fragment," "Daybreak in Alabama," "Theme for English B," and "Harlem," 425-26, 427-28, 429-31; essay, "Writers, Black and White," 618-22
- Richard Wright, story, "The Man Who Lived Underground," 113-160; autobiography, "Ethics of Living Jim Crow," 288-98 (later integrated into *Black Boy*); \*poem, "Between the World and Me," 436-38; \*essay, "How 'Bigger' Was Born," 538-563 (Read with Ellison and Baldwin essays/interviews mentioned below. Both Ellison and Baldwin mention Wright.)
- Ralph Waldo Ellison, Interview with Richard G. Stern, 645-59
- \*Frederick Douglass, *Narrative*, 231-69
- Malcolm X, *Autobiography*, 332-47
- Paul Laurence Dunbar, poems, 354-357
- \*Claude McKay, four poems, "Baptism," "If We Must Die," "America," "The White House," 371-75
- \*Countee Cullen, two poems, "And Yet Do I Marvel," "Incident," 381-385
- \*Sterling A. Brown, four poems, "Slim in Hell," "Southern Road," "Southern Cop," "Strong Men," 407-420
- \*Robert Hayden, three poems, "Tour 5," "Middle Passage," "Frederick Douglass," 438-49
- \*Margaret Walker, poem, "For My People," 458-460
- Gwendolyn Brooks, two poems, "We Real Cool," "The Chicago Defender," 465-67
- \*Dudley Randall, poems, 468-71 (esp. "Booker T and W.E. B.")
- \*Baldwin, James, essay, "Many Thousands Gone," 590-604; interview with Dan Georgakas, 660-68
- George E. Kent, essay, "Ethnic Impact," 690-97 (includes brief comment on *Black Boy*—beware!)
- \*Clarence Major, essay, "Black Criterion," 698-99

## Course Details

**Each session will include discussion and Q&A. Each session will include shorter readings from *Black Voices* (BV) as indicated below.**

**Dates: 12 – 18 February, 2018**

**Venue: Room 212 (Committee Room) SLL&CS – I, JNU, New Delhi**

### Day 1

Lecture 1: 4:00 pm -7:00 pm  
Backgrounds: How American is African American Literature?; Du Bois, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” BV, 493; Locke, “The New Negro,” BV, 512; Randall, “Booker T & W. E. B.,” BV, 465

### Day 2

Lecture 2: 4:00 pm - 7:00 pm  
Jean Toomer and the Harlem Renaissance (1920s); McKay poems, BV, 371; Hughes, poems, BV, 425; Hughes, “The Negro Writer and the Racial Mountain” (handout); Marita Bonner, “On Being Young—a Woman—and Colored” (handout)

### Day 3

Lecture 3: 4:00 pm - 7:00 pm  
Zora Neale Hurston and Richard Wright (1930s/1940s); Hurston, “How It Feels to be Colored Me” (handout); Wright, “Blueprint for Negro Writing” (handout)

### Day 4

Lecture 4: 4:00 pm - 7:00 pm  
Ralph Ellison (1950s/1960s); Ellison, “The World and the Jug” (handout); Ellison, “Twentieth Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity” (handout)

### Day 5

Lecture 5: 4:00 pm - 7:00 pm  
Toni Morrison (1970s/1980s); Morrison, excerpt from *Playing in the Dark* (handout); Morrison, “Site of Memory” (handout)

### Day 6

10.00 am - 1.00 pm  
Examination/Participant Presentations and Certificate Distribution

## Teaching Faculty

**Amritjit Singh** (Ph.D., New York University) is the Langston Hughes Professor of English and African American Studies at Ohio University. Past President of MELUS and SALA (South Asian Literary Association), Singh received the MELUS Lifetime Achievement Award in March 2007 and the SALA Distinguished Achievement Award in Scholarship in January 2014. He has published dozens of essays and authored, edited, or co-edited over 20 books, including *The Novels of the Harlem Renaissance* (1976, 1994); *Conversations with Ralph Ellison* (1995); *Postcolonial Theory and the United States* (2000); *The Collected Writings of Wallace Thurman* (2003); *Interviews with Edward Said* (2004); and *Revisiting India's Partition: Essays on Culture, Memory, and Politics* (2016). Singh has been the recipient of many prestigious fellowships, including the following: Ford Foundation Ethnic Studies Fellowship (1972-73) at NYU; American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) Fellowship at Yale University (1983-84); NEH Fellowship at the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute, Harvard University (1991-92); Rockefeller Foundation Residency Fellowship in Bellagio, Italy (May-June 1994). An internationally known literary critic and scholar, Singh has lectured and/or taught widely at many universities in Europe, Asia, Africa, and North America. In 2002, Singh was a Senior Fulbright Professor at the JFK Institute of North American Studies, Freie University, Berlin. He also served as the Fulbright Senior Specialist in American Studies at the University of Graz, Austria (October-November 2007) and at the University of Alexandria in Egypt (February-March 2010).

## Who Can Attend

- Students at all levels (Bachelors/Masters/M.Phil/Ph.D.)
- Faculty from academic institutions
- Professionals/researchers in Media/research institutions
- Students/scholars of American Literature

## Registration Fees

In addition to **Rs 500/-** registration fee at IIT Kharagpur GIAN site --

JNU M.Sc./ M.A. students: **Free**

JNU Research Scholars (M.Phil. & Ph.D.): **Rs. 1000/-**

JNU Faculty: **Rs. 2000/-**

Other educational institutions:

Research Scholars: **Rs. 2000/-**

Faculty: **Rs. 4000/-**

Participants from outside India: **US\$ 500/-**

Participation is limited to 50

Registration does not include boarding and lodging charges. The above fee includes all additional instructional materials.

## Course Coordinators

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Front Cover: Taken from the customised jacket designed by Juniper Books for the set *African American Literature*. The design was based on the original painting by Jacob Lawrence titled *The Library* (1960).

Back Cover: Taken from the series titled *Migrations* (1941) by Jacob Lawrence.

