

THE ETHICS OF TONI MORRISON

IST3091-1-WI16 ■ Fall 2016 ■ 06.00P-9.30P ■ ILIFF HALL 201 ■ Iliff School of Theology

JENNIFER S. LEATH, Ph.D.

OFFICE HOURS: BY APPOINTMENT ON TUESDAYS

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Contemplating the evolving literary genius of Toni Morrison, this course identifies the moral constellation that underpins Morrison's work. Specifically, this course traces Morrison's treatment of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, region, and religion. The course also gives attention to the ways that Morrison integrates a treatment of these subjects through critical historical analysis and draws from creative archives to lay a foundation for her work. This course invites students to consider the relationship between race and ethics, ethics and time, religion and sexuality, color and gender, and literature and place.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. To reflect on the intersections of race, color, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, and religion and the relationship of these to the work of writing – both fiction and nonfiction, especially as it is manifested in the work of Toni Morrison.
2. To identify, articulate, and analyze ethical frameworks functioning in Morrison's work.
3. To explore Morrison's integration of social and moral histories of people of African descent in the United States across chronological and regional boundaries and borders.
4. To form an understanding of the capacity of fiction and nonfiction writing to inform social ethics within and outside of, in relation to and distinct from, religious spaces.
5. To imagine the intersections between race, class, gender, sexuality, region, time, and religion through new social interventions that name and disrupt violence and are grounded in a vision human dignity.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- **COMPLETION OF READING ASSIGNMENTS PRIOR TO THE FIRST CLASS MEETING OF THE WEEK FOR WHICH THE READINGS ARE ASSIGNED – INCLUDING READING THE WEEK'S DISCUSSANT'S RESPONSE PAPER.**
- **ACTIVE PARTICIPATION AND PUNCTUAL ATTENDANCE FOR THE CLASS SESSIONS.**
- **IN-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS.**
 - There will be 10 in-class opportunities to reflect your preparation, participation, attendance, and engagement with the course and course materials.
 - These opportunities will not be announced prior to the class session during which they are offered.
 - These assignments will vary and will test your capacity to synthesize what you have learned in different ways. There will be opportunities to write independently and collectively. There will be opportunities to do group work. There will be opportunities to use the texts we have been studying. There will be opportunities to demonstrate your recall of the material we have been studying.

EVALUATION

- You will be graded according to Iliff School of Theology standards on a letter grading scale. For more information see: www.iliff.edu
- Your grade will be determined as follows:
 - Preparedness, Participation, Attendance, Completion of In-Class Assignments: 100%
 - While each opportunity will be worth 10% of your class grade, at the last class you will be given the option to have one of your assignments (i.e., your lowest graded assignment) count for 5% and one of your assignments count for 15% (i.e., your highest graded assignment).
 - Ph.D. will have the option of writing a 15-page paper due on 15 November at 11.59 PM that may substitute for the two lowest graded assignments.

OTHER IMPORTANT MATTERS

1. **DO NOT plagiarize!** If you have any questions about whether or not what you are doing is plagiarism, ask. NO ASSIGNMENTS FOUND TO REFLECT COMPROMISED ACADEMIC INTEGRITY WILL RECEIVE ANY CREDIT.
2. If you are unable to complete the assignments due to physical or mental health reasons, please notify me prior to the due date for the assignment.
3. Pick a form of citation. Indicate which form you will use. Use it consistently.
4. All course assignments should be emailed the instructor by the designated time at jleath@iliff.edu.
5. Please save and submit your work for assignments in the following format:
 - a. [last-name].[assignment-name].morrison
 - b. e.g. leath.discussant.morrison or leath.response1.morrison
6. I am glad to meet to discuss your written work.

COURSE READINGS

Race & Ethics

Week 1 – Playing in the Dark (Part 1)

Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Morrison, Toni. *The Dancing Mind: Speech upon Acceptance of the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters*. 1 edition. New York: Knopf, 1996.

Week 2 – Playing in the Dark (Part 2)

Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992. ENTIRETY.

Morrison, Toni. "The Official Story: Dead Man Golfing" in *Birth of a Nation'hood: Gaze, Script, and Spectacle in the O. J. Simpson Case*. First Edition edition. New York: Pantheon, 1997.

"O.J.: Made in America -- A Five Part 30 for 30 Documentary Event -- ESPN." *ESPN.com*. Accessed September 13, 2016. <http://www.espn.com/30for30/ojsimpsonmadeinamerica/>. PART 1.

Family & Time

Week 3 – Beloved (Part 1)

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved: A Novel*. 1st ed. New York: Knopf; Distributed by Random House, 1987. FIRST HALF.

Morrison, Toni. *What Moves at the Margin: Selected Nonfiction*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008. 3-82.

Week 4 – Beloved (Part 2)

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved: A Novel*. 1st ed. New York: Knopf; Distributed by Random House, 1987. ENTIRETY.

Morrison, Toni. "On the Backs of Blacks" and "How Can Values Be Taught in the University" in *What Moves at the Margin: Selected Nonfiction*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008.

"O.J.: Made in America -- A Five Part 30 for 30 Documentary Event -- ESPN." *ESPN.com*. Accessed September 13, 2016. <http://www.espn.com/30for30/ojsimpsonmadeinamerica/>. PART 2.

Religion & Sexuality

Week 5 – Song of Solomon (Part 1)

Morrison, Toni. *Song of Solomon*. New York: Knopf, 1977. FIRST HALF.

Stave, Shirley A., ed. *Toni Morrison and the Bible: Contested Intertextualities*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2006. ANY THREE ESSAYS.

Week 6 – Song of Solomon (Part 2)

Morrison, Toni. *Song of Solomon*. New York: Knopf, 1977. ENTIRETY.

Mayberry, Susan Neal. *Can't I Love What I Criticize?: The Masculine and Morrison*. University of Georgia Press, 2007. 71-115.

Bennett, Juda. *Toni Morrison and the Queer Pleasure of Ghosts*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2015. 1-18; 37-52; 69-86 OR 87-104.

“O.J.: Made in America -- A Five Part 30 for 30 Documentary Event -- ESPN.” *ESPN.com*. Accessed September 13, 2016. <http://www.espn.com/30for30/ojsimpsonmadeinamerica/>. PART 3.

Color & Gender

Week 7 – The Bluest Eye (Part 1)

Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. New York: Plume Book, 1994. FIRST HALF.

Higginbotham, Jr A. Leon, Andrew Ross, Manning Marable, Michael Thelwell, Claudia Brodsky Lacour, Patricia J. Williams, Gayle Pemberton, Nell Irvin Painter, and Carol M. Swain. *Race-Ing Justice, En-Gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality*. Edited by Toni Morrison. 1st edition. New York: Pantheon, 1992. vii-xxx.

Mayberry, Susan Neal. *Can't I Love What I Criticize?: The Masculine and Morrison*. University of Georgia Press, 2007. 15-50.

Week 8 – The Bluest Eye (Part 2)

Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. New York: Plume Book, 1994. ENTIRETY.

Bennett, Juda. *Toni Morrison and the Queer Pleasure of Ghosts*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2015. 141-166.

“O.J.: Made in America -- A Five Part 30 for 30 Documentary Event -- ESPN.” *ESPN.com*. Accessed September 13, 2016. <http://www.espn.com/30for30/ojsimpsonmadeinamerica/>. PART 4.

Literature & Place

Week 9 – Paradise (Part 1)

Morrison, Toni. *Paradise*. Reprint edition. New York: Vintage, 2014. FIRST HALF.

Christiansë, Yvette. *Toni Morrison: An Ethical Poetics*. 1 edition. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012. 1-157.

Week 10 – Paradise (Part 2)

Morrison, Toni. *Paradise*. Reprint edition. New York: Vintage, 2014. ENTIRETY.

Christiansë, Yvette. *Toni Morrison: An Ethical Poetics*. 1 edition. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012. 158-251.

“O.J.: Made in America -- A Five Part 30 for 30 Documentary Event -- ESPN.” *ESPN.com*. Accessed September 13, 2016. <http://www.espn.com/30for30/ojsimpsonmadeinamerica/>. PART 5.

IT IS NOT ESSENTIAL THAT YOU BUY THE HIGHLIGHTED BOOKS, BUT PHOTOCOPIES OF THESE SELECTIONS WILL NOT BE PROVIDED FOR YOU.