

## English 66f : *"The Weary Blues" — Mourning and Loss in African American Literature and Culture*

As a population generally familiar with the facts of living too hard and dying too soon, how have African Americans used their literary and cultural traditions to memorialize—to articulate and often to work through conditions of pain and loss? Using a variety of literary and cultural texts, including RIP murals, poetry, and music, we will look at the various ways African Americans express and aestheticize loss; how mourning often works as a foundation for militancy; and, most importantly, how loss is often recuperated through ideologies of art, love, and memory.

### Books are available at Amherst books.

We will also be working with a wide range of cultural texts: songs, poems, and public art. These texts are online and in a multilith that will be available in the English office as of 9/14. You will be billed mid-semester.

Author	Title	Publisher
Baldwin, James	<i>Another Country</i>	Vintage
Dixon, Melvin	<i>Love's Instruments</i>	Tia Chucha Press
Holloway, Karla F.C.	<i>Passed On</i>	Duke UP
Keenan, Randall	<i>A Visitation of Spirits</i>	Vintage

### Workload & Grading

The greatest requirement of this class is that you pay *close* attention—in class as well as while reading, listening, or viewing. You will also complete three short (max. 3 pp) essays, the focus of each you will choose. These papers will be submitted as a final portfolio, along with one additional 5p paper. *Productive* participation, which includes a fair amount of online writing, will also count toward your final grade.

Because this class is discussion-based, attendance is vital. I will not, however, detract from your final grade until you have 3 absences, after which you will lose 1/3 of a point for every subsequent absence (so, for instance, an A would become an A- and so on down the line). This logic of threes does have an end: 6 absences will mean automatic failure. As well, 3 tardies = 1 absence.

Assignments

### Papers due

### Films

*When the Levees Broke*, Spike Lee

*Killer of Sheep*, Charles Burnett

*The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till*, Keith Beauchamp

Professor Marisa Parham : 10 Johnson Chapel : office hours - T & Th 2-3 : mparham@amherst.edu

### Schedule of Work

t	Spirituals <i>RIP: Memorial Wall Art</i> Various Album Covers <i>The Harlem Book of the Dead</i>  "Oh Mary Don't You Weep" "Rosie" "O Death" "Didn't Leave Nobody but the Baby" "Motherless Child"	Unknown  Sciorra, ed.  James Van Der Meer  Aretha Franklin Parchman Farm Inmates Unknown/ Ralph Stanley Unknown/ Emmylou Harris, et al. Mahalia Jackson	t	<i>Without Sanctuary</i> (selections) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ "...The Lynching of Emmett Till"</li> </ul>	Jacqueline Goldsby
th	"Gone 'Til November" "Tha Crossroads" "One Love" "They Reminisce Over You (T.R.O.Y.)"	Wyclef Jean Bone, Thugs, n' Harmony Nas Pete Rock & CL Smooth	th	<i>Passed On</i> (ch. 4) "Remorse: The 14 Stories of Eric Jones"	Newman and Jones (NPR)
t	"My Mind's Playin' Tricks on Me" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ "Ghetto Miasma"</li> </ul>	The Geto Boys  Helen Epstein (online)	t	<i>Killer of Sheep</i> "Inner City Blues (Make me wanna holler)"	Charles Burnett, dir. Marvin Gaye
th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ "Mourning and Melancholia"</li> <li>▪ "Of the Passing of the First Born" &amp; "Of Our Spiritual Strivings"</li> </ul>	Sigmund Freud  W.E.B. Dubois recommended: Feld, "Pygmy Pop"	th	<i>Sheep</i> , cont'd	... <i>Sheep</i> will be at screened at the Amherst Cinema.
t	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ "Like a Winding Sheet"</li> <li>▪ "The Typewriter"</li> <li>▪ "Alienated Labor"</li> <li> "Livin' for the City"</li> </ul>	Ann Petry Dorothy West Karl Marx Stevie Wonder	t	<i>When the Levees Broke</i>	Spike Lee, dir.
th	"I've Been to the Mountaintop" Poetry	Martin Luther King Jr.  Various writers (in multilith)	th	<i>Levees</i> , cont'd	... <i>Levees</i> will be at screened at the Amherst Cinema.
t	Poetry	recommended: Holland, "Death and the Nation's Subjects"	t	<i>A Tale of God's Will</i> – The ghost interludes: "Ghost of Congo Square," "Ghost of Betsey," & "Ghost of 1927" + "Funeral Dirge"	Terence Blanchard
th	"Backwater Blues" "All of Me" <i>Another Country</i> (pp. 1-126)	Bessie Smith  Billie Holiday  James Baldwin	th	<i>Another Country</i> (pp. 1-126), cont'd	
th	<i>The Ohio State Murders</i>	Adrienne Kennedy	th	<i>Another Country</i> (pp. 1-126), cont'd	
t	<i>Ohio State</i> , cont'd		<b>Thanksgiving break</b>		
th	<i>Ohio State</i> , cont'd	recommended: Cheng, "The Melancholy of Race"	t	<i>A Visitation of Spirits</i>	Randall Keenan
<b>Fall Break</b>			th	<i>Visitation</i> , cont'd	
th	<i>Passed On</i> (ch. 1-3) <i>The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till</i>	Karla FC Holloway  Keith Beauchamp, dir.	t	<i>Visitation</i> , cont'd <i>Passed On</i> (ch. 5)	
th			th	"I'll be Listening for My Name" & "Heartbeats"	Melvin Dixon
t			t	Wrap-Up "Sign o' the Times"	Prince