

ENGL 227: Survey of African American Literature's "Themes of Social injustice, Legalized Discrimination, Racial Profiling, and the Struggle for Civil Equality in African American Literary Works—Shots Heard Around the World"

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### The Big Idea

The issues that we face are not our own, or even those independent of the US; they in fact eclipse the entire globe. Therefore, by reading literary works by foreign authors, considering outside media sources, and remaining aware of the human struggle outside of the US, one can actually gain a greater awareness of US issues, and how they are interconnected through a shared humanity with neighbors abroad who face similar struggles. Similarly, the trends, patterns, and historical incidents that have influenced recurrent themes in African American literature are not limited to the African American experience, or America. These are things that are shared, experienced, and remain prevalent in the collective ether of our global neighbors.

### Global Content

Increased global content may be tapped from ENGL 227 by accentuating examples that reveal that African American literature stems from writers and influences that are international in origin—Africa, the Caribbean, Central America, Europe and South America. Immersed in the course textbook, *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, are works that represent intercultural contexts, minority groups and global perspectives; even with the US as the major focus, the universal themes in the literature—social injustice, legalized discrimination, racial profiling, and the struggle for civil equality—lend themselves to international perspectives. These same perspectives are shared by the diverse student group with experiences that traverse well beyond the confines of America. Authors from abroad, and their experiences with social inequality, link them closely to their African American counterparts. In *The Quest for a Moral Compass: A Global History of Ethics* (2014), UK author Kenin Malik notes that “the French youth in the 2005 riots were driven by a sense of social injustice, by the experience of unremitting unemployment and of unforgiving policy brutality . . . they were taking collective action against an oppressive system.” This sounds very familiar. The voices of African American writers and African American youth today share the sense of urgency for improved measures for social justice. Consider the recent protests in Baltimore as a case in point.



With the global version, I desire to even further expand the content and literature, beyond what is provided by the *Norton Anthology*, and France will be used as a comparative analysis with the US. Although these are citizens from different parts of the globe, they have a shared experience, even struggle, which is undeniable. Students will explore this with research of their own; yet, prior to doing so, I will bring forth comparative issues in



France; I choose France due to its similarities with the US: 1) shared history of colonization throughout the world, as well as serving as a magnet for immigrants; 2) highly developed nations with very diverse citizens; 3) both recently entangled in protests, civil unrest, and legal decisions that have resulted in negative ramifications (Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Ferguson, New York, Washington, DC and other US cities have brought protests resulting from questionable police procedures and court rulings concerning civil justice (*The Guardian*); the French riots of 2005, alone, impacted 274 towns, 8,972 vehicles were torched, 2,888 arrested, 1 death, and 126 injured police and firefighters (*BBC News*); and 4) France, in particular, provides a good backdrop for a Study Abroad program to follow up this pilot course.

I intend to use Meier and Hawes' article, “Ethnic Conflict in France: A Case Study for Representative Bureaucracy” (2008) as a backdrop to make a comparison/link between African American literary themes with events and writers outside of the US, with France as the main focus. These themes include issues of social injustice, legalized discrimination, racial profiling, and the struggle for civil equality; this will take place through readings, research, discussion and essay writing.

### Enabling Outcomes

To demonstrate achievement of the Globalized Student Learning Outcomes, students will need to be able to:

- Find online and periodical resources on trends, patterns, and historical incidents around the world that mirror themes studied in African American literature;
- Lead a class discussion as they make the cultural connections noted in the first bullet; two classes prior to serving as the Discussion Leader, the student will need to see an MC Librarian to discuss their assigned theme from African American Literature, and inquire about finding resources that reflect a similar theme happening abroad;
- Complete a Comparative Analysis research writing on findings; students will take class discussion, research readings, and their own findings to compare similar themes/struggles voiced in African American literature, which is also reflected from literary voices abroad; the instructor will provide themes.