

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN



CAAS

CENTER FOR AFROAMERICAN AND AFRICAN STUDIES

New Course
Fall 1993

AAS 558.002/English 553

The Politics of Race and Writing in the
Baldwin Era, 1954-1974

Prof. Marlon Ross

This course explores the relation between political strategies and literary media in African American writing during the civil rights era, 1954-1974. Focusing on issues of "representation," as both a political and an aesthetic concept, the course examines how Black writers of the period are put in the position of becoming "spokesmen" for the race, and how they exploit traditional and non-traditional forms in attempting to represent the race. Controversies over integration, voting rights, civil disobedience, Black power, Black liberation, and Black nationalism all shape writing theories and practices, while spawning a range of larger cultural controversies. Such issues include the limits of protest fiction; the economic relations between writers and their communities vs. their reading audiences; the function of class, sex, and sexuality in racial role modeling; the representation of the sexes, intra-racial sex, cross-racial sexuality, and same-sex desire; and the uses of modernity vs. folklore, street dialect, and religious sentiment. While concentrating on the career of the dominant literary figure of the period, James Baldwin, we will also analyze works by Gwendolyn Brooks, Paule Marshall, Lorraine Hansberry, Amiri Baraka, Eldridge Cleaver, Kwame Ture, and Chester Himes. The final section of the course will examine the role of popular media, especially the Sidney Poitier phenomenon, in shaping attitudes toward racial representation.

Mondays, 6-9:00 P.M.
2601 Haven Hall