

## Humanities 321: Major Works of Literature—The Modern World

### African American Literature and Aesthetic Discourse

Instructor: Kelly Todd Brewer

Office Hours: Wednesday by appointment

Humanities 321 this semester surveys African American literature and aesthetic discourse through selected readings from 1700 to the present. The course will enable students to understand how African American literature and discourse are ungirded by a life/death struggle towards liberation and equality through the politicization of writing, music and religion in a segregated space or what Hanna Arendt called the “Space of Appearance” (“where the people meet”). The course surveys early poetry and slave narratives of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Harlem Renaissance and the awakening of the “New Negro” during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as well as literary works born of Black nationalisms and the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and beyond. Men and women alike author the literary works in the course. While the primary focus of the course is literature, the lectures will ground the readings in the corresponding and accompanying development of music, as African American discourse is inseparable from the musical traditions that evince the lived experience. To this end, students will learn about religious hymns of death, Blues, Jazz, R&B and Rap; how literature and music echo one another and how they changed over time as the culture experienced a renaissance as it migrated from country to city and eventually became increasingly radical politically. The course will tell a particular story, the story of the plight of African Americans through literature, and comparatively demonstrate how this particular story reverberates with the universal “human” condition in the spirit of the humanities.

In addition to the selected readings, students will be required to view several documentaries that provide the historical backdrop for the periods in question as well as listen to recordings (of music and sermons) from the periods that have shaped the zeitgeist and ethos of African American literature and aesthetic discourse from the 1700s to the present.

#### **The Goal of the Course**

By the end of the course, students will 1) have broad range of knowledge on African American literature and on the socio-cultural dynamics of the politics of difference in the United States, 2) understand the interdependent relationship between literature and music (and how both manifest an experience born of struggle and resistance), 3) broaden the scope of the English language and another vernaculars and 4) practice their writing skills through a series of short papers.

#### **Course Requirements:**

Students attend ALL classes having done the necessary preparatory work. Class participation is a substantial portion of the final grade. This is a seminar, which means that your regular, active participation is expected. Attendance is compulsory in lectures and discussion sections. Failure to attend more than two times results in points taken off the overall grade. Students who miss more

than 3 classes in total will automatically receive an N/A grade. Medical reports are subject to the approval of the instructor. The instructor retains the right to decline a medical report.

PFD files are available in the resources section of the course on SUCourse.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: Plagiarism will not be tolerated. If you are suspected of submitting work that is not your own, you will be either asked to do an oral exam, fail the assignment (potentially the course) or be brought up before the ethics committee of the university.**

**Students with disabilities** will be accommodated according to their special needs. In such cases, students should write to ([specialneeds@sabanciuniv.edu](mailto:specialneeds@sabanciuniv.edu)) in order to arrange for accommodations.

### **Zoom Meeting Room**

<https://sabanciuniv.zoom.us/j/2527723710?pwd=NEtFVE9FaVZMSVJvSGlFN3hlcHA4UT09>

Meeting ID: 252 772 3710

Passcode: H241SU

### **Breakdown of grades:**

30 % Response papers (10 points each)

20 % Midterm Exam

35 % Final Exam

15 % Participation and attendance

### **Letter Grade Scale:**

Average	59	64	68	72	76	80	84	88	92	96
Letter Grade	D	D+	C-	C	C+	B-	B	B+	A-	A

Week 1: October 6/8 Introduction

Documentary: The Story of American Slavery: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=shm3CtkmNig>

Documentary: Slavery and the Making of America-- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aAkepKdMiz0>

### **From Slavery to Freedom: Writing the Rough Road**

Week 2: October 13/15

Oludah Equiano (1745-1797) “The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African.

Phillis Wheatley, “On Being Brought from Africa to America,” To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth

Week 3: October 20/22

Sojourner Truth (1787-1883) “Ar’nt I a Woman?” Speech to the Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, 1851

Frederic Douglass *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Chapters 1-3)

Documentary: John Brown, Holy War: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWS\\_Jrjh11s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWS_Jrjh11s)

Week 4: October 28

Frederic Douglass *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Chapters 7-10)

Harriet Jacobs (c.1813-1897) *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (read preface and the chapters included).

October 29<sup>th</sup> National Holiday

Online Take-home Writing Assignment I (TBA)

### **Reconstruction, Jim Crow and the New Struggle**

Week 5: November 3/5

Documentary: Reconstruction Parts 1 and 2:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uspD-d0DxGc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97JqxwjTuf8>

Booker T. Washington (1856-1915) “Up from Slavery,” and “A Slave among Slaves”

Paul Lawrence Dunbar (1872-1906) “The Colored Soldier,” “When Malindy Sings,” “We Wear the Mask”

W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1963) *The Souls of Black Folks* “The Forethought” and “Our Spiritual Strivings”

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Week 6: November 10/12

Documentary: “America After the Civil War” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97JqxwjTuf8>

James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938) “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing” and *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*

Online Take-home Writing Assignment II (TBA)

Week 7: November 17/19

Alaine Locke (1886-1954) *The New Negro*

James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938) “The Creation” and *The Book of American Negro Poetry*

Online Take-home Writing Assignment II (TBA)

Week 8: November 24/26

**The Harlem Renaissance**

Documentary: The Great Migration and the Harlem Renaissance—Country Folks and City Folks

Documentary: Frantz Fanon—Black Skin, White Masks.

Claude McKay “If We Must Die,” “America”

Langston Hughes (1902-1967), “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” “The Weary Blues,” “I Too Sing America,” “Song for a Dark Girl”

Midterm Exam TBA

**The Harlem Renaissance, Black Internationalism and the Jazz Age**

Week 9: December 1/3

Countee Cullen (1903-1946), “The Shroud of Color”

Helene Johnson (1907-1995), “Sonnet to a Negro in Harlem”

Week 10: December 8/10

Zora Neal Hurston (1891-1960), “How It Feels to Be Colored Me”

Documentary, Josephine Baker: The First Black Superstar  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ggb\\_wGTvZoU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ggb_wGTvZoU)

Documentary, Billie Holiday: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CG\\_cxm\\_19OE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CG_cxm_19OE)

Documentary: The Scottsboro Boys <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cp9R648zfkI>

## The Civil Rights Movement

Week 11: December 15/17

James Baldwin (1924-1987), “Every Body’s Protest Novel,” “Notes of a Native Son” and “Sonny’s Blues”

Documentary: James Baldwin vs. William F. Buckley <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Tek9h3a5wQ>

Documentary: James Baldwin vs. Paul Weiss <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzH5IDnLaBA>

### Online Take-home Writing Assignment III (TBA)

Week: 12: December 22/24: The Political Clerics—Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr. and the Legacy of Sermon

Malcom X (1925-1965) The Ballot of the Bullet,”  
[http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/speeches/malcolm\\_x\\_ballot.html](http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/speeches/malcolm_x_ballot.html)

Documentary: “Make It Plain” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=csWByunwVI8>

Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968), “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”  
[https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\\_Gen/Letter\\_Birmingham.html](https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html)

Documentary: “The Martin Luther King Story” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cUNzUHIPqSY>

Week 13: December 29/30

Amiri Baraka (1934-2014) *Dutchman*

Documentary: All Power to the People—The Black Panther Party

Maya Angelou “Still I Rise”

Week 14: Review