

Humanities 321: Major Works of Literature—The Modern World

African American Literature and Aesthetic Discourse

Instructor: Kelly Todd Brewer

Office Hours: Wednesday or by appointment

Lecture: Tuesday 2:30-4:30

Discussion: Thursday 1:40-2:30

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 slave narratives and testimonies of the 18th and 19th centuries, the Harlem Renaissance and the awakening of the “New Negro” during the first half of the 20th, century as well as literary works born of (Black) nationalisms and the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and beyond. In addition, and more importantly, the course engages questions of modernity and paradoxical socio-cultural norms that arise in the Renaissance through the Enlightenment or the “Age of Reason.” 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 the existentialist dimensions of religious hymns of death, the angst of Blues, the social awakening of the Jazz Age and 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 of African American literature and the socio-cultural dynamics of the politics of difference in the United States and beyond, 2) understand the interdependent relationship between literature and music (and how both manifest an experience born of struggle and resistance), 3) have an understanding of how humanity—both good and

bad—is interconnected globally 4) demonstrate comprehension of the materials 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 will result in a reduction of points from the overall grade. Students who miss more than 9 hours of classes/discussions in total will automatically lose the participation 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) in order to arrange for accommodations.

Zoom Meeting Room

<https://sabanciuniv.zoom.us/j/2527723710>

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: February 23/25

Introduction and overview

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

From Slavery to Freedom: Writing the Rough Road

Week 2: March 2/4

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

Phillis Wheatley (c. 1753-1784) “On Being Brought from Africa to America,” To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth

Week 3: March 9/11

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

Frederic Douglass (died 1895) *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Chapters 1-3)

Discussion: Documentary—John Brown, Holy War: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWS_Jrjh11s

Week 4: 16/18

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

Film Discussion: Steve McQueen *Twelve Years a Slave*

Online Take-home Writing Assignment I (TBA)

Reconstruction, Jim Crow and the New Struggle

Week 5: March 23/25

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

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

Discussion: Documentary: Reconstruction Parts 1 and 2:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uspD-d0DxGc>

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

Week 6: March 30-April 1

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: April 6/8

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

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

Week 8: April 13 **Midterm Exam**

The Harlem Renaissance

Week 9: April 20/22

Claude McKay (1889-1948) “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”

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

Midterm Exam TBA

The Harlem Renaissance, Black Internationalism and the Jazz Age

Week 10: April 27/29

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

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

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

Week 11: May 4/6

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

Discussion: Documentary—Josephine Baker “The First Black Superstar”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ggb_wGTvZoU

The Civil Rights Movement

Week 12: Ramadan

Week 13: May 18/20

James Baldwin (1924-1987), “Every Body’s Protest Novel,” and “*Sonny’s Blues*”

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

Online Take-home Writing Assignment III (TBA)

Week 14: May 25/27

The Political Clerics—Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr. and the Legacy of Sermon

Malcolm X (1925-1965) (El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz), “The Ballot of the Bullet,” “Field Negro—House Negro.”

Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968), “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”

Week 14: December 29/30

Amiri Baraka (1934-2014) *Dutchman*

Maya Angelou “Still I Rise”