

WI English 494-- African American Literature

Spring Term 2004
MWF 11-11:50, UCB 331
Registration Number: 73308

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Introduction:

Welcome to a class such as never been taught at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo. You are about to embark on a discovery of a canon that cannot be understood by using conventional (Anglo-Western) definitions of art, history, or literary development. In this class, certain terminology will be liberated from traditional and Eurocentric perspectives (i.e. "renaissance" will not refer back to the 1500s), while "racial consciousness," as opposed to "universal (and therefore non-racial) truth," will serve as the guideline for understanding the emergence of an artistic body of texts that address and confront a dynamic if not often ugly history surrounding African Americans. Neither intentional immigrant/colonizer nor indigenous to this continent, African Americans occupy a sometimes ambivalent space in America, and for that reason our journey will follow difficult and painful debates over alienation, the longing for a homeland, assimilation, exoticization, cultural exploitation, stereotypes, misogyny, and class elitism. Given the cultural, social, political, and economic

struggle of African Americans towards claiming a legitimate place in this country, African American Literature serves as a reminder about how precious and vicarious the written word can be for people of color.

Required Texts

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, eds. The Norton Anthology of African American Literature. New York: W.W. Norton, 1997.

Recommended Texts

Gibaldi, Joseph. MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. 6th ed. New York: MLA, 2001.

Course Requirements

Because this class is restricted to upper classmen, enrollment for this course is predicated on the student's completion of ENG 100 and a 200-level English class. These prerequisites can be waived; however, keep in mind that grades will be based on the ability of students to engage in a fair amount of advanced readings and to submit writing that is reflective of "senior" standing—in other words, since this has been designated as a W.I. course, you will be expected to turn in a fair amount of technically clean (i.e. proper MLA format, correct use of citations, grammatically sound) and academically sound writing. If there are any questions about previous training and preparation, please see me as soon as possible.

Your performance in this class will depend upon attendance, participation, and the completion of assignments. Regular attendance and participation are essential. Six (6) unexcused absences will result in a full grade deduction. Beyond five, failure is likely. However, if there is a pressing emergency or if there are other matters that require your absence, please see me and bring the proper documentation (i.e. a signed doctor's note).

If you are in need of academic support because of a documented disability (whether it be psychiatric, learning, mobility, health-related or sensory), please see me. Any student with a documented disability who would like to request accommodations should contact the University Disability Services Office at 933-0816 (V), 933-3334 (TTY), Campus Center Room 311, as early in the semester as possible.

All assignments must be turned in at the **beginning** of class on the day they are due (in other words, don't walk into class 20 minutes late and expect to turn work in). Be advised, I will accept late papers, but I will deduct one full letter grade; I will not accept late homework writing assignments. Failure to bring required materials (i.e. rough drafts, textbook, etc.) will result in a failing grade for participation. All work, including written homework assignments and formal papers, must be typed, double-spaced with 1" margins, and completed upon submission. Assignments which utilize over-sized fonts (such as the one used above for "Course Requirements") and/or extra wide margins will be returned and considered late. Work which does not meet the minimum length requirement or is technically flawed will also be rejected.

For students who do not own computers, the University maintains several computer labs across campus. Contact the Computing Center (ext. 7437) for locations and hours.

As far as grades are concerned:

Paper 1 (4-5 pages)	15%
Paper 2 (7-8 pages)	15%
Paper 3 (15-20 pages)	30%
Miscellaneous writing assignments	20%
Attendance	20%
TOTAL	100%

DO NOT RESORT TO PLAGIARISM UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCE! All work submitted in this course must be your own and must be written exclusively for this class. Papers that have been downloaded off the Internet, prepared for other classes or borrowed from third parties are not acceptable. Because this course includes research, the use of outside sources (ideas, quotes, paraphrases, etc.) must be properly documented. Failure to do so may result in an automatic failing grade for either an assignment or for the entire class.

Finally, disorderly conduct will not be tolerated. Be aware that your actions can have a detrimental effect on everyone. Hostile attitudes, threatening body language, and inconsiderate behavior (i.e. cell phones, speaking out of turn during class, sleeping, etc.) can be a “real drag.” So let’s all do our part to make the most of our academic endeavors.

Schedule (subject to change)

THE VENACULAR

- 1/12 VIDEO--The Color Purple
- 1/14 John Henry Clarke’s “Reclaiming the African Heritage” (handouts); “Preface,” xxvii-xli. VIDEO--The Color Purple continued.
- 1/16* “Sermons,” 69-70, Hurston’s “Faith hasn’t go no eyes,” 78-79, King’s “I Have a Dream,” 80-83, and Malcolm X’s “The Ballot or the Bullet,” 90-101. Written assignment due (1-2 pages): How does the film The Color Purple try to “reclaim a rich and ancient African heritage” (Clarke 11)?
- 1/19 MARTIN LUTHER KING’S B-DAY
- 1/21 “Gospel,” 16-17, “Take My Precious Hand,” 20, “Spirituals,” 5-7, “God’s A-Gonna Trouble the Water,” 8, “Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel?” 10-11, “Soon I Will Be Done,” 11-12, “No More Auction Block,” 12.
- 1/23 “Folktales,” 102-03, “All God’s Chillen Had Wings,” 103-05, “Big Talk,” 105, “How to Write a Letter,” 107, Ah’ll Beatcher Makin’ Money,” 108-11, “You Talk Too Much, Anyhow,” 115-16, The Wonderful Tar Baby Story,” 120-23, “What the Rabbit Learned,” 125.
- 1/26* “Secular Rhymes and Songs, Ballads, and Work Songs,” 37, “We raise de wheat,” 38, “Jack and Dinah Want Freedom,” 39, “Learn to Count,” 40, “Poor Lazarus,” 41-42, “The Signifying Monkey,” 42-44, “Stackolee,” 50, “Sinking the Titanic,” 51, “Shine and the Titanic,” 51-52. Written assignment due (1-2 pages): The editors of the Norton cite Ralph Ellison, who “argued that the vernacular account, to a large degree, for the Black American’s legacy of self-awareness and endurance” (2). How does this selection of literature attest to both? And what is the role, if any, of the African American vernacular in perpetuating the African heritage?

THE LITERATURE OF SLAVERY AND FREEDOM (1746-1865)

- 1/28 Introduction to the Literature of Slavery and Freedom, 127-36; Lucy Terry's "Bars Fight," 137-38; Phillis Wheatley's "To the University of Cambridge," 170-71, "On Being Brought from African to America," 171, "To S.M.," 175, "To His Excellency Gen. Washington," 176-77; Frances Harper's "Ethiopia," 412, Eliza Harris," 412-14, "The Slave Mother," 414, Learning to Read," 418-19, and "A Double Standard," 419-21.
- 1/30* Entire section on David Walker, 178-90. Written assignment due (1-2 pages): Read the introduction to this section very carefully, the answer the following--What are the literary issues that faced early African American writers, and how do these issues play out in their works?
- 2/2 Selections from Olaudah Equiano's The Interesting Narrative, 138-64.
- 2/4 Sojourner Truth's "Ar'n't I a Woman?" 196-201; Selections from Harriet Wilson's Our Nig, 439-59.
- 2/6* DRAFT SESSION: Take one of your written assignments and expand into a longer 4-5 page paper. Minimum requirements for paper: one short in-sentence and one longer block indented citation; must make use of 3-4 separate poems; proper bibliography (works cited page does not count towards overall page length). Bring two copies of your COMPLETED paper to class for peer editing session. Full credit only given to completed drafts. Submit revised paper with drafts on 2/9.

LITERATURE OF RECONSTRUCTION TO THE NEW NEGRO RENAISSANCE (1865-1919)

- 2/9* PAPER ONE DUE. Introduction to The Literature of Reconstruction, 461-72; James Weldon Johnson's "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing," 768-69; "Fifty Years," 770-73; "The Creation," 775-77, Preface from The Book of American Negro Poetry, 861-84. VIDEO--excerpts from Birth of a Nation
- 2/11 Paul Lawrence Dunbar's "Ode to Ethiopia," 886-87, "The Colored Soldiers," 889-91, "We Wear the Mask," 896 "The Haunted Oak," 901-03, "Philosophy," 903-04 "Christmas on the Plantation" and "Trouble in De Kitchen" (handouts); William Stanley Braithwaite's "Sic Vita," 922; Alice Moore Dunbar Nelson's "I Sit and Sew," 916.
- 2/13 Booker T. Washington's Up From Slavery, 490-519.
- 2/16 PRESIDENT'S DAY
- 2/18* W.E.B. Dubois's "The Souls of Black Folk," 613-721. Written assignment due (1-2 pages): Compare and contrast Washington and Dubois. What are the issues they bring up and what are the implications of their arguments for African American art and literature?

THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE (1919-1940)

- 2/20 Introduction to the Harlem Renaissance, "929-36; Arthur A. Schomburg's "The Negro Digs up his Past," 937-42; Alain Locke's "The New Negro," 961-70; Garvey's "Africa for the Africans," 974-77, "The Future as I See It," 977-80.

- 2/23 Entire poetry section on Claude McKay, 984-88; Countee Cullen's "Yet Do I Marvel," 1305, "Incident," 1306, "Heritage," 1311-14, "To John Keats, Poet at Spring Time," 1314-15, "From the Dark Tower," 1315; Gwendolyn Bennett's "To A Dark Girl," 1228, "Sonnet--2," 1228-29, "Hatred," 1229.
- 2/25 VIDEO--The Emperor Jones.
- 2/27 Entire section on Zora Neale Hurston except selections from Their Eyes Were Watching God and Dust Tracks on a Road, 999-1041.
- 3/1* Sterling Brown's "Long Gone," 1212-13, "Strong Men," 1215-16, "Ma Rainey," 1220-21, "Cabaret," 1222-24, "Sam Smiley," 1225-26; Langston Hughes's "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," 1254, "Mother to Son," 1254-55, "Jazzonia," 1255-56, "The Weary Blues," 1257, "I Too," 1258, "Song for a Dark Girl," 1262-63 "Ballad of the Landlord," 1265, "Harlem," 1267, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," 1267-71. VIDEO--Hallelujah. Written assignment due (1-2 pages): Discuss the problem of cultural representation (i.e. dialect, caricature, subject matter, tone) and literary form (i.e. sonnet, ballad) for African American writers of this era. Are you inclined to agree with Locke in that the figure of the African American has been a "stock figure perpetuated as an historical fiction partly in innocent sentimentalism, partly in deliberate reactionism" (961)?
- 3/3* DRAFT SESSION: Take two of your written assignments and combine them into a coherent 7-8 page paper that deals with BOTH the Era of Reconstruction and the Harlem Renaissance. The question before you is this--just how much of a "renaissance" was the Harem Renaissance? Minimum requirements for paper: 2-3 in-sentence and block indented citations each; must make use of 2-3 essays and 2-3 poems and/or short stories; proper bibliography (works cited page does not count towards overall page length).

REALISM, NATURALISM, MODERNISM (1940-1960)

- 3/5 * PAPER TWO DUE. Introduction to Realism, Naturalism, and Modernism, 1319-28; Gwendolyn Brooks's "The Mother," 1579-80, "Sadie and Maud," 1580-81, "We Real Cool," 1591, "Malcolm X," 1593, "Riot," 1596, "Young Heroes," 1599-602.
- 3/8* Richard Wright's "Blueprint for Negro Writing," 1380-88, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," 1388-96, "The Man Who Lived Underground,": 1414-50; James Baldwin's "Everybody's Protest Novel," 1654-59, "Notes of a Native Son," 1679-94. Written assignment due (1-2 pages):
- 3/10 VIDEO--Cabin in the Sky
- 3/12 VIDEO--A Patch of Blue
- 3/15 VIDEO--A Raisin in the Sun
- 3/17 Excerpts from Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man, 1518-40, "The World and the Jug," 1459-71.
- 3/19 Lorraine Hansbury's A Raisin in the Sun, 1728-89.

3/22-26 SPRING BREAK (use the time wisely as we are going to double up on the readings for the next section)

THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT (1960-1970)

- 3/29 Introduction to The Black Arts Movement, 1791-806; Addison Gayle, Jr.'s "The Black Aesthetic," 1870-77; Larry Neal's "The Black Arts Movement," 1960-72; Maulana Karenga's "Black Art," 1973-77.
- 3/31* Excerpts from Malcolm X's The Autobiography, 1817-33; Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail," 1854-66. Written assignment due (1-2 pages): Compare and contrast Malcolm X's and King's approach to defining the African American community in relation to other races. How do they envision "white" and "black" consciousness and/or identity?
- 4/2 Etheridge Knight's "'The Idea of Ancestry," 1867-68, "For Black Poets Who Think of Suicide," 1869; Eldridge Cleaver's "Soul on Ice," 1947-55; Amiri Baraka's "Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note," 1879, "A Poem for Black Hearts," 1881, "I Don't Love You," 1881, "SOS," 1883, "Black Art," 1883-84.
- 4/5 Quincy Troupe's "In Texas Grass," 2003, "Conversations Overheard," 2004-06, "Impressions," 2006-07. VIDEO--Quincy Troupe in Hilo (2002).
- 4/7* Entire section on Sonia Sanchez, 1903-06; Mari Evan's "I Am a Black Woman," 1808; entire section on Nikki Giovanni, 1983-85. Written assignment due (1-2 pages): Choose from the following--(1) Discuss how the sentiments expressed by Gayle, Neal, and Karenga are specifically developed in the poetry and prose of this era, or (2) Many critics have argued that the Black Arts movement was both patriarchal and misogynistic. Would you agree? (Use specific references to both the prose and poetry of this section to make your point).
- 4/9 GOOD FRIDAY

LITERATURE SINCE 1970

- 4/12 VIDEO-- Sweet Sweetback's Baad Asssss Song.
- 4/14 VIDEO-- Sweet Sweetback's Baad Asssss Song continued.
- 4/16 VIDEO--Brown Sugar
- 4/19 VIDEO-- Brown Sugar continued.
- 4/21* FINAL PAPER PROPOSAL DUE: In preparation for the final 15-20 page paper, chose a major scholarly issue/topic that pertains to African American literature that you would like to further research (i.e. the African American "queer" literary canon; the problem of literary theory in African American literature; feminist readings; class and the problem of the educated elite; "white" sponsorship). Then, for 4/21, submit a short paper proposal and an annotated bibliography of 4-5 scholarly articles that you have found on the topic of your choice. Introduction to Literature Since 1970, 2011-20; entire section on Ishmael Reed, 2286-96; entire section on Maya Angelou, 2039-50.
- 4/23* Entire section on Audre Lorde, 2204-12; entire section on Lucille Clifton, 2220-27; Alice Walker's "Women," 2377-78, "In Search of Our Mother's Garden's," 2380-86, first chapter from Paradise (handout). Written assignment due (1-2 pages): How does Walker's essay change the overall perception of the way earlier writers are viewed? Can her sympathetic reading be applied to male writers of the Black Arts Movement?

- 4/26 Entire section on June Jordan, 2229-41; Rita Dove's "David Walker," 2584, "Receiving the Stigmata," 2587, "*From Thomas and Beulah*," 2587-88.
- 4/28 Entire section on Ntozake Shange, 2519-24; entire section on Yusef Komunyakaa, 2494-98.
- 4/30* Excerpts from Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*, 2526-35. Written assignment due (1-2 pages): From your perspective, where does the post-70s literature stand with respect to the issues raised by earlier critics (i.e. Harlem Renaissance, Black Arts)? And what do you think African American literature might likely (have to) address in the future? (Be sure to make specific references to key poems and essays).
- 5/3 August Wilson's *Fences*, 2409-62.
- 5/5* DRAFT SESSION: Bring just one copy of your completed draft for peer review. Minimum requirements for paper: 4-5 in-sentence and block indented citations each; must make use of 4-5 essays, poems, and/or short stories from the anthology; must make use of at least 3 outside sources; proper bibliography (works cited page does not count towards the overall page length).
- 5/12 Final Papers due in my office by 11:50 am.