

HUMS 630

The Traditions of African American Literature

Course Description:

This course undertakes to look at the history and traditions of African American literature from its folk origins to its postmodern manifestations. We will examine the forms of folk production that preceded and informed the written literature (musical forms such as spirituals, blues, and secular ballads; and narrative forms such as folktales). We will then turn to the written tradition of African American literature, looking at the poetry and fiction written by people of African descent from the eighteenth to the twenty-first centuries. This course will focus on the ways African Americans used literature to respond to historical conditions like slavery, to help shape social movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and to address the key questions concerning what literature can do to reflect, represent, and challenge an American mainstream tradition that excluded writers of African descent.

Required Texts:

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

Examinations and Assignments:

2 short essays (4-6 pages)
1 longer paper (6-8 pages)

AFAM 202 Syllabus

Section One: The Vernacular Tradition

January 28 “No More Auction Block” (Norton 12)
 “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” (Norton 13)
 “Steal Away to Jesus” (Norton 13)
 “Go Down, Moses” (Norton 14)
 “Been in the Storm So Long” (Norton 14)
 “Oh, Freedom!” (Norton 15)

“This Little Light of Mine” (Norton 17)
“Down By the Riverside” (Norton 18)
“St. Louis Blues” (Norton 24)
“Beale Street Blues” (Norton 25)
“See, See Rider” (Norton 27)
“Prove It on Me Blues” (Norton 27)
“Trouble in Mind” (Norton 29)

Section Two: The Literature of Slavery

February 4 Terry, “Bars Fight” (Norton 137)
 Wheatley, Poems (Norton 164-76)
 Horton, Poems (Norton 190-95)
 Whitfield, Poems (Norton 401-08)
 Harper, Poems (Norton 408-38)

 Douglass, “What to The Slave Is the Fourth of July” (Norton 379-91)
 Walker, David Walker’s Appeal (Norton 179-90)

February 11 Douglass, Narrative (Norton 302-69)

Section Three: The New Negro of Reconstruction and After

February 18 Chesnut, “The Goophered Grapevine” (Norton 523-32)
 Chesnut, “The Passing of Grandison” (Norton 532-45)
 Chesnut, “The Wife of His Youth” (Norton 545-52)
 Johnson, Poems (Norton 768-77)
 Dunbar, Poems (Norton 886-905)
 Dunbar-Nelson, Poems (Norton 914-18)

 Cooper, “Womanhood a Vital Element” (Norton 554-68)
 Hopkins, “Famous Men of the Negro Race” (Norton 581-88)
 Hopkins, “Famous Women of the Negro Race” (Norton 588-93)
 DuBois, “A Litany of Atlanta” (Norton 609-12)
 DuBois, Souls of Black Folk (selections TBA)
 Wells, A Red Record (Norton 596-604)

February 25 Johnson, The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man (Norton, 777-861)

Section Four: The Harlem Renaissance

March 4 Schomburg, “The Negro Digs Up His Past” (Norton 937-42)
 Locke, “The New Negro” (Norton 961-69)
 Garvey, “Africa for the Africans” (Norton 974-77)
 Garvey, “The Future As I See It” (Norton 977-80)
 Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (Norton 1267-71)

Schuyler, "The Negro Art-Hokum" (Norton 1171-73)
Hurston, "Characteristics of Negro Expression" (Norton 1019-32)

Hughes, The Big Sea (Norton 1282-96)
Thurman, Infants of the Spring (Norton 1231-38)
Fisher, "The Caucasian Storms Harlem" (Norton 1187-94)
Bonner, "On Being Young – a Woman – and Colored" (Norton 1206-09)

March 11-20

SPRING BREAK

March 25
McKay, Poems (Norton 984-88)
Brown, Poems (Norton 1211-26)
Bennett, Poems (Norton 1227-29)
Bontemps, Poems (Norton 1240-44)
Hughes, Poems (Norton 1254-64)
Cullen, Poems (Norton 1305-15)
Johnson, Poems (Norton 1316-18)

Section Five: Post-War Realism, Naturalism, Modernism

April 1
Wright, "Blueprint for Negro Writing" (Norton 1380-88)
Ellison, "Change the Joke" (Norton 1541-49)
Ellison, "The World and the Jug" (Norton 1549-71)
Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel" (Norton 1654-59)

Wright, "The Man Who Lived Underground" (Norton 1414-50)
Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues" (Norton 1694-1716)
Petty, "Like a Winding Sheet" (Norton 1478-84)
Hayden, Poems (Norton 1499-1514)
Brooks, Poems (Norton 1579-1602)

Section Six: The Black Arts Movement

April 8
Fuller, "Towards a Black Aesthetic" (Norton 1810-15)
Gayle, The Black Aesthetic (Norton 1870-77)
Baraka, "Black Art" (Norton 1883-84)
Neal, "The Black Arts Movement" (Norton 1960-72)
Karenga, "Black Art" (Norton 1973-77)

Baraka, "Revolutionary Theatre" (Norton 1899-1902)
Baraka, Dutchman (Norton 1885-99)

April 15
Evans, Poems (Norton 1807-08)
Rodgers, Poems (Norton 2007-10)

Knight, Poems (Norton 1867-69)
Spellman, “Did John’s Music Kill Him?” (Norton 1955-56)
Cortez, “How Long Has Trane Been Gone” (Norton 1957-59)

Sanchez, Poems (Norton 1903-06)
Madhubuti, Poems (Norton 1978-82)
Giovanni, Poems (Norton 1982-85)

Section Seven: The New Renaissance, Post-1970

April 22

Lorde, Poems (Norton 2204-11)
Clifton, Poems (Norton 2220-26)
Jordan, Poems (Norton 2229-37)
Harper, Poems (Norton 2277-84)

Young, “A Dance for Ma Rainey” (Norton 2314-15)
Coleman, “Emmett Till” (Norton 2473-76)
Dove, Poems (Norton 2584-94)

April 29

Marshall, “The Making of a Writer” (Norton 2072-78)
Walker, “In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens” (Norton 2380-87)

Morrison, Sula (Norton 2098-2180)

May 6

Conclusion