

AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

English 2143, Fall 2021

M/W/F 10-10:50 and 11-11:50, Dunlap Hall 313

Instructor: Dr. Ian Afflerbach

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Office Hours: MW 3-5:00 and by appointment, Dunlap 206D

Course Prerequisites: ENGL 1101/1102

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In his book, *What Was African American Literature?*, Kenneth Warren argues that the category “African American literature” emerged in the nineteenth century as an attempt to demonstrate the equality of races by showing, through written language, that black Americans possessed as much creative intellect and emotional depth as whites. This class will survey African American literature from its beginning under slavery, through desegregation, the Harlem Renaissance, the Great Migration, onto the Civil Rights and Black Arts Movements of the mid-twentieth century. According to Warren, this literary tradition ended in the 1960s, when the Supreme Court struck down Jim Crow segregation. Our class, however, will consider how African American literature remains a vital category even today. As we move towards our contemporary era, considering topics such as social protest, authorship, gender, immigration, tourism, global culture, colonial struggle, and “color-blind” racism, our class will consistently grapple with a set of enduring questions: What is race and how do we “see” it? How do writers engage with contemporary political problems, and how can we use literature to grapple with our own political moment? What does it mean when people say this is a “post-racial” era? As we work through these questions, we will learn to situate literature within historical contexts, intellectual trends, and political debates. At the same time, we will also pay close attention to the form of writing and the aesthetic effects it has upon us as readers.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

These two books must be purchased either at the [bookstore](#) or online. They must be print copies, not digital copies or ebooks, and they must be the correct edition (use ISBN numbers to make sure):

- Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (ISBN: 9780143107309)
- James Weldon Johnson *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (ISBN: 9780140184020)
- Nella Larsen *Passing* (ISBN: 9780142437278)
- Toni Morrison *Beloved* (ISBN: 9781400033416)

All other readings available on D2L (Content/modules/readings).

ASSIGNMENTS

Exams 1, 2, 3 (20% each)

Final “TED Talk” Essay (20%)

Participation (20%) Attending and actively participating will be vital for succeeding in this class. All students start with a default grade of 75, which can climb or fall as follows:

- A: Always prepared. Consistently responds to texts with insightful comments or relevant questions. Dialogues with instructor and peers.
- B: Always prepared. Listens actively in class and comments occasionally.
- C: Usually prepared, but sometimes late or tardy. Disengages, uses phone or laptop for purposes not related to class.
- D: Frequently tardy, absent, or unprepared. Appears consistently checked-out.
- F: Doesn’t attend class often, or is disruptive when present.

STUDENT OUTCOMES

Literary History: You will gain familiarity with major works in the African American literary tradition and with the historical contexts to which they were responding.

Reading: You will develop more sophisticated habits for interpreting fiction and poetry, leaning to unpack connotations in language, grapple with ambiguity, and form judgments about meaning.

Speaking: During our discussions, you will be able to work on (a) building comfort in fluid group conversation, (b) preparing questions to contribute (c) eliminating verbal fillers.

Writing: Through our assignments, you can expect to work on (a) clear, concise expression of your ideas in prose, (b) detail-driven argument (c) readerly engagement, and (d) citation practices.

HOW TO APPROACH THIS COURSE

Active Participation: Because our course will be driven by discussions, it is vital that you show up ready to be actively involved. This means volunteering your ideas and questions, commenting on and challenging our readings, and drawing upon your individual interpretations and experiences.

Active Reading: All of our online readings must be printed, marked up, and brought to class with you. Marking up, or “annotating” a text, means taking notes, creating questions, and just recording places that interest, confused, amuse, or otherwise move you.

Professionalism: The classroom is a professional space and demands the same forms of etiquette as you would bring to a workplace. Your participation grade will decrease—or I may mark you absent—if you cannot (a) be on time each day, (b) come prepared each day with readings and notes, (c) respect your peers by refraining from any background chatter.

Technology in the Classroom: We will conduct discussions without laptops. At all times, cell phones should be kept out of sight (and silent); failure to do so will lead to lowered participation grade, or even an absence for the day.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance: Students can miss three classes over the course of the semester, for any reason, without penalty. Each of the next three additional unexcused absences will deduct half a letter grade from the student’s final grade. Missing seven classes results in automatic failure. Absences can only be exempted by the provost or vice president (e.g., participation in official athletics, religious observance, other campus activities). Students who have not done the pre-writing required or who sleep during class or who arrive late may be counted absent.

Late Work: If you anticipate a situation that will prevent you from finishing a project, you need to e-mail me *before* your due date, explain the situation, and propose a new deadline.

Plagiarism: Whether you intend to do so or not, passing off the words or ideas of others as your own is a serious academic offense. Pleading ignorance is no defense. If you are the least bit unsure about what constitutes plagiarism, please ask me and/or check [this website](#). Please also consult UNG’s [Student Code of Conduct](#).

FINDING SUPPORT

Instructor Contact: Please try to visit office hours. If you have a scheduling conflict, let me know and we can find another time. Even one meeting per unit can have an enormous impact on your purpose and goals going forward. Email is the best way to reach me for any simple questions; I try to respond within 24 hours.

Outside Help: Students should have a basic understanding of English grammar and a familiarity with the rules of standard English. If you are concerned about your basic grammar and mechanics, or would simply like [additional support](#) for your writing, please contact the [Writing Center](#) or Gainesville’s Academic Computing Tutoring and Testing Center ([ACIT Center](#)). I also wholeheartedly recommend the grammar, citation, and style guide offered by the [Owl at Purdue](#).

Disability Services: University of North Georgia is committed to equal access to its programs, services, and activities. Students who require accommodations must register with Disability Services and submit supporting documentation. Disability Services provides accommodation memos for eligible students to give to their instructors. Students are responsible for making arrangements with instructors, and must give reasonable prior notice of the need for accommodation

Feeling Overwhelmed: College can be a stressful time; don’t hesitate to ask for help if you’re feeling overly anxious, stressed, or depressed. UNG has two main ways to seek support: through the [Office of the Dean of Students](#) and through the counseling services offered by the [Student Center](#).

Please consult [UNG’s Supplemental Syllabus](#) for campus-wide regulations.

COURSE CALENDAR

Week 1	Aug 23	Introduce Course
	Aug 25	NYTimes “ National Museum of African American History and Culture ” and Langston Hughes “I, Too”
UP FROM SLAVERY: REVOLT AND RECONSTRUCTION		
	Aug 27	Phillis Wheatley “Preface,” “Letter Sent by the Author’s Master,” “To the Publick,” “On Being Brought from Africa to America” (1773)
2	Aug 31	Frederick Douglass <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i> (1845) 3-50
	Sep 1	Frederick Douglass <i>Narrative</i> 51-93
	Sep 3	Frederick Douglass <i>Narrative</i> 90-End
3	Sep 6	Labor Day
	Sep 8	Charles Chestnut “The Wife of His Youth” (1898)
	Sep 10	Charles Chestnut “Goophered Grapevine” (1887)

4	Sep 13	James Weldon Johnson <i>Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man</i> (1912) 1-40
	Sep 15	James Weldon Johnson <i>Autobiography</i> 40-70
	Sep 17	James Weldon Johnson <i>Autobiography</i> 70-100
5	Sep 20	James Weldon Johnson <i>Autobiography</i> 100-End
	Sep 22	W.E.B. DuBois "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" from <i>Souls of Black Folk</i> (1903) and "The Comet" (1920)
	Sep 24	Exam 1
THE NEW NEGRO MOVEMENT: MIGRATION AND MODERN LIFE		
6	Sep 27	Claude McKay "Harlem Shadows," "Harlem Dancer" and Langston Hughes "Harlem"
	Sep 29	Jean Toomer (1923): "Reapers," "Portrait in Georgia" and "Karintha"
	Oct 1	Zora Neale Hurston "Sweat" (1926)
7	Oct 4	Nella Larsen <i>Passing</i> Part One (1929)
	Oct 6	Nella Larsen <i>Passing</i> Part Two
	Oct 8	Nella Larsen <i>Passing</i> Part Three
8	Oct 11	Pauline Hopkins "Talma Gordon" (1900)
	Oct 13	Gwendolyn Brooks "kitchenette building," "a song in the front yard," "the vacant lot" from <i>A Street in Bronzeville</i> (1945)
	Oct 15	Gwendolyn Brooks "A Bronzeville Mother..." and "Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmett Till" (1960)
9	Oct 18	Henry Dumas "The Marchers" and "Harlem" (1968-79)
	Oct 20	Alice Walker "Everyday Use" (1973)
	Oct 22	Exam 2
LOOKING AT THE PAST, LOOKING TO THE FUTURE		
10	Oct 25	Toni Morrison <i>Beloved</i> (1986, 1-51)
	Oct 27	Toni Morrison <i>Beloved</i> (51-86)
	Oct 29	Toni Morrison <i>Beloved</i> (86-124)
11	Nov 1	Final Paper Discussion (and a reading catch-up day)
	Nov 3	Toni Morrison <i>Beloved</i> (124-235)
	Nov 5	No Class

12	Nov 8	Toni Morrison <i>Beloved</i> (236-277)
	Nov 10	Toni Morrison <i>Beloved</i> (281-End)
	Nov 12	Toni Morrison “Recitatif” (1983)
13	Nov 15	Mark Dery “Black to the Future” (1994) and Derrick A. Bell Jr. “After We’re Gone” (1992)
	Nov 17	Samuel Delany “Aye, and Gomorrah...” (1967) and “Racism and Science Fiction” (1998)
	Nov 19	Octavia Butler, “Bloodchild” (1984)
14	Nov 22	Fall Break
	Nov 24	Fall Break
	Nov 26	Fall Break
15	Nov 29	N.K. Jemisin, “ How Long Til Black Future Month? ” and “The Ones Who Stay and Fight” (2018)
	Dec 1	<i>Student Selected Writer</i>
	Dec 3	Exam 3
FORWARD FROM TODAY: DEBATING AND REFLECTING		
16	Dec 6	Claudia Rankine, selected work from <i>Citizen</i> (2014-)
	Dec 8	Kendrick Lamar, “ DNA ” (2017) and “ Alright ” (2015) “ Street Kid to Pulitzer Winner: Why Kendrick Lamar Deserves the Prize ”
	Dec 10	Final Essay Workshop and Wrap-Up

**FINAL ESSAY DUE – Hard Copy in Dunlap 206D
by Tuesday December 14th at 1:00PM**