

AAEN 121J, Section A
Introduction to African American Literature

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Time: T/Th 8:00am–9:20am
Room: Pettengill 257
Office Hours: T/Th 1-2pm,
or by appointment.

Course Description:

This course will survey African American literature from the 1700s to the present. Beginning with Phillis Wheatley and Frederick Douglass, we will examine the uneasy relationship between race and writing by asking: What role has writing by African Americans played in the long fight for political freedom and equality? How has that writing changed over time—stylistically or otherwise—to reflect the different political needs of its historical moment? How has that writing been shaped by different ways of thinking about race? How has race, in turn, been shaped or constructed by that writing? And how do representations of gender and sexuality participate in a literary construction of race?

Though this course is a survey of African American literary self-representations, we will keep in mind how these representations respond to and interact with the “majority culture’s” efforts to define race in a different set of terms. We will focus throughout on literature as a site where this struggle over definition takes place—where African American writers have reappropriated and revised words and ideas that had been used to exclude them from both American literary history and America itself. Course requirements include active engagement with the reading demonstrated through daily class participation and the writing of weekly discussion board posts, weekly in-class discussion questions, a group presentation, a midterm paper, and a final paper.

Course Goals:

By the end of this course, students will be able to: 1) discuss, compare, and analyze a broad range of African American texts in a variety of genres, including poetry, fiction, drama, autobiography, and criticism; 2) deduce and describe the arguments of literary texts and the political ramifications of literary techniques, genres, and productions; and 3) practice and develop their skills in oral and written argumentation and the analysis of textual evidence.

Course Requirements—Class Participation:

The main requirement for the class is an intense engagement with the readings, not only in writing but in class discussion as well. Because class discussion is an opportunity to practice the critical skills that we will be developing in the course, attendance and active participation—which entails listening and responding to one another—at every class session are expected. Students who are late to class will be marked as absent, and students who do not speak of their own volition **at least once a week** will be called on. If a student cannot attend a particular class, he or she must let me know in advance and make arrangements for another student to take notes and collect handouts on his or her behalf. Missing more than two classes will negatively affect a student’s participation grade. Finally, because students must be able to support the claims they make about the texts with evidence from those texts, all students must bring the reading to class every day **in printed form**. No laptops or cell phones in class, please.

Course Requirements—Weekly Writing and Discussion Questions:

By 9pm each Monday (starting in **Week 3**), students will post a one-to-three paragraph informal response on the lyceum forum for that week. These responses offer students the opportunity to follow up on loose threads from previous class discussions, or to propose new lines of inquiry for our Tuesday discussion. Students will receive written feedback on all of their posts, so these posts are an excellent opportunity to practice the skills required for longer writing assignments. All posts that engage thoughtfully with the reading will receive full credit, but extra credit will be given to posts that demonstrate proficiency in the central skills of argumentative writing by 1) making a contestable claim about a text or texts 2) supporting that claim with evidence from the text and 3) explaining the significance of that claim. Partial credit will be given only on those rare occasions when posts are consistently underdeveloped. There will be ten opportunities to submit forum posts throughout the quarter, but students are only **required to submit eight**. Late postings will not be accepted.

In preparation for class on Thursday (starting in **Week 2**), students are also required to prepare two or three discussion questions based on the day's reading. These questions should refer to, and demand responses that refer to, specific moments in the texts (have page numbers ready!). Students will meet in small groups at the beginning of class each Thursday to discuss one another's questions. Please write your questions down, as I will collect them at the end of class for participation credit.

Course Requirements—Group Presentation

By Friday of **Week 4**, all students must enter in their journal on lyceum the top three authors whom they would like to present on in class, in order of preference. Students may choose from among any of the authors we will be reading between Week 8 and Week 14, and will be assigned to groups of two to three based on their preferences.

Starting in **Week 8**, these groups will be asked to present a brief (5-10 minute) presentation on one or more of the texts that are part of a particular day's reading, and to lead class discussion on that reading for a further 5-10 minutes. Much like your most polished weekly writing assignments, these presentations should advance a contestable and significant argument about the text that is supported by evidence from the text. However, they should also push further by opening up questions or problems for whole class discussion, questions that follow from their initial claim. For example, since students are working in groups they may choose to present a debate between two possible readings or interpretations of the text. Or they may choose to present one reading they both agree on, but then complicate that reading by identifying contradictory evidence. When thinking about what kinds of questions to ask, students should consider what kinds of questions have been most interesting and stimulating in previous class discussions. They should also have relevant places in the text ready to help direct class discussion. Students are welcome (but not required) to bring outside research into the presentation, provided that it is relevant, properly cited, and helpful in furthering their own argument. Each group must prepare a clear and visually appealing **handout or PowerPoint** to go along with their oral presentation (more on this later), and **must email this to me** as an attachment by 9pm the night before their presentation.

Course Requirements—Formal Paper Assignments:

There are two formal paper assignments: a midterm (3-5 pages) and a final paper (4-6 pages). Although prompts for both papers will be provided, students are welcome to use ideas developed in weekly writing assignments as the basis for these papers provided that those ideas help them to address the prompt. All papers must be posted on lyceum. Late papers will be penalized by up to 1/3 of a letter grade for each day they are late. Paper topics and a grading rubric will be handed out in class and posted on lyceum.

Course Requirements—Academic Honesty:

Intellectual honesty is fundamental to scholarship. Accordingly, the College views plagiarism or cheating of any kind in academic work as among the most serious offenses that a student can commit. Plagiarism occurs when one presents work—ideas and/or specific language—which is taken from another person who is not given due credit. Students who are uncertain in any specific situation as to whether plagiarism may be involved should discuss the matter with me.

All students are responsible for reading the College’s statement on plagiarism, found here:

<http://abacus.bates.edu/pubs/Plagiarism/plagiarism.html#0>

For all members of the academic community, citing sources not only protects them and their ideas, but it helps them to know when they do have a new idea, or whether they have achieved a meaningful synthesis of other people’s ideas. It also helps their readers, by providing means whereby he or she can verify their account, seek further knowledge on their topic, and understand how they arrived at your conclusions. To cite sources in your own work, please **follow carefully the MLA guidelines**, found here:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

Course Requirements—Email:

Students are required to check their Bates email regularly, as I will be emailing the class with information, updates, and reminders throughout the semester. In the event of an emergency class cancellation, I will also notify students via email.

Grades will be calculated as follows:

15%	Attendance & participation	10%	Group presentation
15%	Weekly writing & discussion questions	20%	Midterm paper (3-5 pages)
		40%	Final paper (4-6 pages)

Required Texts (available at the Bates Bookstore in Chase Hall):

James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie McKay, *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature, 2nd Edition*

George S. Schuyler, *Black No More*

All readings marked with an* will be available on lyceum in the “Additional Readings” folder.

Class Schedule:

Week 1: Slavery and Abolition: Writing the Way to Freedom

Thurs 9/9: Phillis Wheatley, Preface, "On Being Brought from Africa to America," "To the Right Honourable William, Earl of Dartmouth, His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for North America, etc."

Week 2:

Tues, 9/14: Frederick Douglass, from *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (read preface and chapters 1–2 and 7–10)

Thurs, 9/16: Sojourner Truth, "Ar'n't I a Woman?" Speech to the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio, 1851 (read both accounts of the speech)
Harriet Jacobs, from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (read entire excerpt in the anthology)

Week 3: Reconstruction and Jim Crow: Representing the Race

Tues, 9/21: Booker T. Washington, from *Up From Slavery*: "A Slave among Slaves," "The Atlanta Exposition Address"

W.E.B. Du Bois, from *The Souls of Black Folk*: "The Forethought," "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," "The Sorrow Songs"

Thurs, 9/23: Paul Laurence Dunbar, "When Malindy Sings," "We Wear the Mask," "Sympathy"
Charles W. Chesnutt, "The Goophered Grapevine," "The Passing of Grandison"

Week 4:

Tues, 9/28: James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (read Preface and chapters 1–8)

Thurs. 9/30: James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (read chapters 9–11)

Week 5: The New Negro: Art for Art's Sake?

Tues, 10/5: James Weldon Johnson, from Preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (read only pages 901–902)

Alain Locke, "The New Negro"

W. E. B. Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art"

James Weldon Johnson, "The Creation"

Thurs, 10/7: Jessie Fauset, "The Sleeper Wakes"*
Jean Toomer, "Song of the Son," "Portrait in Georgia," "Her Lips are Copper Wire"
Countee Cullen, "Heritage"

Week 6:

Tues, 10/12: Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "Dream Variations," "The Weary Blues"
Zora Neale Hurston, "Color Struck," "Characteristics of Negro Expression"

Thurs, 10/14: George S. Schuyler, "The Negro-Art Hokum," *Black No More*

Week 7: Midterm Paper due by 9am on Monday, 10/18

Tues, 10/19: George Schuyler, *Black No More* (finish the book)

Thurs, 10/21: Fall Recess (No Class)

Week 8: Shades of Realism: The Politics of Protest, the Politics of Art

Tues, 10/26: Richard Wright, "Blueprint for Negro Writing," *Native Son* (pages 3-29)*
Ann Petry, "The Apartment" from *The Street*

Thurs, 10/28: Richard Wright, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," "The Man Who Lived Underground"

Week 9:

Tues, 11/2: Ralph Ellison, from *Invisible Man*: "Prologue," "Battle Royal"; "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke"

Thurs, 11/4: James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel," "Sonny's Blues"

Week 10: Civil Rights and Black Arts: Acts of Solidarity

Tues, 11/9: Gwendolyn Brooks, "kitchenette building," "the mother"
Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*

Thurs, 11/11: James Baldwin, selection from *The Fire Next Time*
Gwendolyn Brooks, "We Real Cool," "Riot," "Malcolm X"

Week 11:

Tues, 11/16: Amiri Baraka, *Dutchman*

Thurs, 11/18: Hoyt Fuller, "Towards a Black Aesthetic"
Addison Gayle, Introduction to *The Black Aesthetic*
Amiri Baraka, "Black Art"
Haki Madhubuti, "Malcolm Spoke/who listened?"
Nikki Giovanni, "For Sandra," "Nikki-Rosa"

Week 12: Thanksgiving Break (No Class)

Week 13: Black Feminism and Beyond: Writing the Past, the Self, and the Future

Tues, 11/30: Audre Lorde, "A Litany for Survival," "Poetry is Not a Luxury," "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House"*
Alice Walker, "Women," "Everyday Use," "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens"

Thurs, 12/2: Paule Marshall, "To Da-Duh, In Memoriam," "From the Poets of the Kitchen"
Jamaica Kincaid, selection from *Lucy**

Week 14:

Tues, 12/7: Toni Morrison, "Recitatif,"* "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature"

Thurs, 12/9: Samuel R. Delaney, "Aye, and Gomorrah..."*
Octavia Butler, "Bloodchild"

Week 15: Final Paper due by 9am on Wednesday, 12/15