

Survey of African American Literatures I: Beginnings through the Harlem Renaissance

Professor Delia Steverson

AML 3605 sec 1C09/AFA 3930 sec 159D

Office Hours: T, R 10:30-11:30 or by appointment

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Course Description and Objectives

This course is designed as an introductory survey of texts and discourses within the African American literary tradition. As we explore critical works within this tradition, from the earliest slavery to the Harlem Renaissance, we will frame our close textual readings and literary analyses within the context of critical movements and discourses in social, cultural, and literary history. We will be particularly engaged in examining the manner in which literary works and other forms of African American cultural production reveal and respond to social and cultural ideologies, especially those that impact constructions of difference and the formation of identity, subjectivity, and/or the notion of the self.

Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

- ✚ Produce a literary close reading that addresses both the form and the content of one or more text(s) in the construction of an argument about the text's meaning.
- ✚ Become familiar with critical periods, discourses, and writers in the African American literary tradition and develop an understanding of the historical and cultural contexts that shape that tradition, specifically in the early national, reconstruction and early twentieth-century periods.
- ✚ Gain the confidence and ability to speak in a sophisticated and critical fashion about African American literature.
- ✚ Develop effective written communication skills.

Required Texts

- Norton Anthology of African American Literature 3rd Edition (only Volume 1)—edited by Henry L. Gates (2014)
- *Black No More*—George Schuyler (1931)

Course Requirements and Grades Distribution

Critical Responses (3)—30%

- ✚ Students will write **THREE 4-5 page (1000-1250 words)** critical responses throughout the semester. These will require close-reading skills and argument analysis. I will create prompts based on your readings and in-class assignments. Critical Responses are due on Canvas by 5pm Friday of the due date. Each day that the paper is late, I will subtract half a letter grade (5 points). No papers will be accepted a week after the due date. Please note that late papers for the final critical response will **not** be accepted.

Evaluations (2)—30%

- ✚ It will consist of identification, short answer, and essay questions. No worries, we will review beforehand. Make sure you take good notes in class!

Quizzes and In-Class Assignments—30%

- ✚ Be prepared to take a short reading comprehension quiz most days that I assign readings (5 points per quiz). In-class assignments will often serve as a place of departure for our discussion and are usually in the form of handouts. You will work individually, with a partner, or with a group. Twice throughout the semester, we will be having class at the HARN museum. Points will be double for those days, and missing the HARN visit will result in two absences.

Attendance and Participation—10%

- ✚ It should go without saying that attendance and participation are mandatory for your success in this class. It is imperative that you are present and on time. You are allowed 3 absences. After the third absence, (that means absence number 4 and 5) I will subtract

two points per absence from your final grade. If you have **6 or more** absences, you will fail the course. Remember that quizzes CANNOT be made up, regardless of the circumstance. In-class assignments can be made up, but must be turned in a week after your absence—otherwise it’s a zero. Make sure you get with a classmate to catch you up. If you are on time and have perfect attendance, you will be rewarded **FIVE** extra points on your final exam.

Tentative Syllabus

Week 1	UNIT 1—The Oral Tradition
1/9	Introduction, Syllabus Review, Call and Response
1/11	“All God’s Chillen Had Wings,” “Big Talk,” “Brer Rabbit Tricks Brer Fox Again,” “How Mr. Rabbit Was Too Sharp for Mr. Fox” (pages 57-60, 67, 69)
Week 2	UNIT 2—Writing From Slavery
1/16	Frederick Douglass— <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i> Preface and Chapters 1-9 (pages 330-362)
1/18	Frederick Douglass— <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i> Chapters 10-11 and appendix (pages 362-393)
Week 3	
1/23	Harriet Jacobs-- <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> Preface, Chapters I, II, V, X, XII, XIV, XVII, XXI, XXIX (Pages 224-251)
1/25	Harriet Jacobs-- <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> Chapters XXIX, XL, XLI (pages 251-261)
Week 4	
1/30	S—“Theresa, A Haytien Tale” (pages 152-159) Victor Séjour —“The Mulatto” (pages 298-309)
2/1	William and Ellen Craft— <i>Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom</i> (pages 431-444)
Week 5	
2/6	MEET AT THE HARN (directions on Canvas)
2/8	Rough Draft Critical Response 1 Due in class (paper copy)

Week 6 **UNIT 3—Literature of the Reconstruction to the New Negro Renaissance**

2/13 Booker T. Washington—*Up From Slavery*
Chapters I, II, III, XIV (pages 550-580)

2/15 Ida B. Wells—*A Red Record* Chapters 1, 10 (pages 670-679)

Critical Response 1 Due Friday by 5pm

Week 7

2/20 W.E.B. DuBois—*The Souls of Black Folk*: “The Forethought,” “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” and
“Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others” (pages 687-703)

2/22 Evaluation 1 Review

Week 8

2/27 **Evaluation 1**

3/1 Charles Chesnutt—“The Goophered Grapevine,” “The Passing of Grandison,” “The Wife of
His Youth” (pages 582-610)

Week 9 **SPRING BREAK NO CLASS**

Week 10

3/13 Alice Dunbar Nelson—“Brass Ankles Speaks,” “Stones of the Village” (both on Canvas)

3/15 **Rough Draft Critical Response 2 Due in Class (paper copy)**

Week 11 **Unit 4—Writing from the Harlem Renaissance**

3/20 Nella Larsen—*Passing* Part 1 (pages 1080-1110)

3/22 Nella Larsen—*Passing* Parts 2 and 3 (pages 1110-1141)

Critical Response 2 due Friday by 5pm

Week 12

3/27 **MEET AT THE HARN (directions on Canvas)**

3/29 Langston Hughes—“The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” (pages 1320-1324) “Mother
to Son,” “I, Too,” “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” “The Weary Blues,” “Harlem,” “Madam and
the Rent Man” (pages 1304, 1305, 1307, 1308, 1319, 1316)

Week 13

4/3 Zora Neale Hurston—“Characteristics of Negro Expression,” “The Gilded Six-Bits,” “Sweat”
(pages 1032-1040, 1043-1062)

Short Film: *The Gilded Six-Bits*

4/5 **No Class—Dr. Dee at a Conference**

Week 14

4/10 George Schuyler—"The Negro-Art Hokum," *Black No More* Chapters 1-5

4/12 George Schuyler—*Black No More* Chapters 6-8

Week 15

4/17 George Schuyler—*Black No More* Chapters 9-13
Rough Draft Critical Response 3 due in class (paper copy)

4/19 Evaluation 2 Review

Week 16

4/24 **Evaluation 2**
Critical Response 3 due SUNDAY 5/29 by 5pm (No late papers will be accepted)