**Engl. 254--African American Literature**

Prof. Gwen Bergner \* Fall 2017 \* T/Th 10:00-11:15

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 Office Hours: T, Th 11:30-1:30, & by appt.

**Course Description**

This course surveys the African‑American literary tradition, covering the periods of slavery, post‑Reconstruction, the Harlem Renaissance, the Black Arts Movement, and postmodernism. We will examine how literary expression addresses the changing place of African Americans within U.S. culture and politics to argue that black lives matter. We’ll read novels that offer resistance to racism, celebrate African‑American cultural practices, give voice to individual identity, and navigate the relationship between self and community. We’ll also trace the major themes and structural elements of the African‑American literary tradition including double consciousness, uplift, folklore, passing, signifying, blues aesthetic, and the neo-slave narrative. One of our primary goals will be to consider the relationship between artistic form and political content.

**Primary Readings**

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

James Weldon Johnson, *Autobiography of an Ex‑Colored Man*

Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

Colson Whitehead, *Underground Railroad*

**Note**: All other assigned readings are available on eCampus.



Kara Walker

 [Above: Romare Bearden]

**Course Text Availability**

* Primary texts (books) are available at local bookstores unless otherwise noted.
* Other required readings, assignment guidelines, and contextual documents are on eCampus.
* You are required to bring books and eCampus readings to class in hard or electronic copy.

Note: The bookstores will return to distributors all unsold books, so buy books before midterms if you want to get them locally. Alternately, you can borrow them from a library or purchase them online. Please be sure to get them before they are due for class discussion.

**English Program Goals**—This course is designed to help students achieve the following goals:

Upon completing a B.A. in English, a student should be able to:

* Interpret texts within diverse literary, cultural, and historical contexts.
	+ Identify genre conventions and analyze their effects.
	+ Identify and analyze effects of complexity or ambiguity.
	+ Locate texts in social / economic / political / literary history.
	+ Connect texts to other literary or cultural texts.
* Demonstrate a general knowledge of the social & structural aspects of the English language.
* Demonstrate a range of contextually effective writing strategies.

**Learning Outcomes—**By the end of the course, students should be able to:

* Characterize the historical, political, and cultural contexts of African American literature.
* Identify the generic conventions of African American literature.
* Define major concepts, terms, and reading strategies of African American literary studies.
* Use the skills embodied in the first three objectives to analyze African American literature.
* Write unified, coherent, thesis-driven, analytic paragraphs that:
	+ Apply terms and concepts from African American literary study to specific texts.
	+ Consider the relationship between a novel’s context and its structure and meaning.
	+ Analyze texts closely and critically with attention to language and specific passages.
	+ Synthesize and cite primary and secondary sources to support textual analysis.
	+ Demonstrate mastery of the mechanics of quotation and citation.
* Connect course texts to contemporary political and cultural issues.

**Course Work Points**

Discussion Questions (12 DQs @ 2 pts. ea.) 24

Analytic Paragraphs (6 Pars @ 10 pts. ea.) 60

Context Blog Post 16

**Total 100**

Grade Scale\*

A 90-100 pts. B 80-89 pts. C 70-79 pts. D 60-69 pts. F < 60 pts.

*\*You must complete all assignments and attend class regularly for a passing grade.*

Participation

In classes of this small size, learning comes primarily from the quality of discussion rather than from lectures. This means that students bear a responsibility to themselves and each other to attend class and participate meaningfully in discussion and in-class work. We will be analyzing course readings closely and referring to specific passages in detail, so you must **bring the texts for discussion to each class** either in hard copy (print them) or electronic format (yes: laptops and tablets; **no: cell phones**). One point is deducted from your course total if you do not bring assigned texts to class on a given day. No texting, Web surfing, or FBing in class, please.

Discussion Questions (DQ)

On twelve (12) occasions over the course of the semester, you will submit two (2) questions on the reading for that day. If you are absent on a DQ due date, you must submit a full analytic paragraph on the reading you missed the next day that you are in class. Each assignment is worth two points of your final grade. I read these assignments carefully and use them to shape class discussion, but they are not graded. You get full credit for each assignment you complete on time and according to guidelines (including bringing the reading[s] to class).

Analytic Paragraphs

 Over the course of the semester, you will write six (6) analytic paragraphs, one on each of the primary texts. Each paragraph will be about a single double-spaced page and must incorporate quotations from the primary and a secondary text and cite them properly. These assignments work to strengthen paragraph structure and close textual analysis (see learning outcomes above).

Grading Criteria for Analytic Paragraphs:

* A complete paragraph that engages with a difficult, original, or complex question.
* A clear thesis, which is suitably complex and provides a blueprint for the paragraph.
* Smooth and grammatical integration of primary and secondary sources.
* Evidence from your primary text (quotation and paraphrase) to support your interpretation.
* Consistent use of parenthetical page citation for quotations and proper punctuation of titles.
* Use of terms and concepts from a secondary source to advance your analysis.
* Paragraph unity and coherence.
* A polished paragraph free of grammatical and surface errors.

Context Blog Post

Each student will write one blog-style post (250-500 words) that connects a contemporary document (e.g., article, photo, website, video, song), chosen by the student, to a primary course text. The blog post and a link to the contemporary document will be posted on eCampus for class access and discussion. In these posts, students can express their critical and personal relationship to course concepts but must strive to make that personal response relevant to a larger audience. Students are responsible for reading each others’ posts each day. This assignment connects course texts to our place in the world today, thereby increasing course relevance and student engagement. Due dates will vary according to the sign-up schedule.

* *Additional guidelines and grading criteria will be provided for all graded course work.*
* *All due dates, except for the individual blog post, are noted on the syllabus below.*

**The Writing Studio** in Colson G02 is available for writing assistance. To make an appointment, drop in, call: 304.293.5788, or go online: <https://wvu.campus.eab.com/>.

Submission of Assignments

1. Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date specified (in bold) on the syllabus.

2. Assignment guidelines specify whether to submit to eCampus and/or in hard copy (not email).

3. Upload word processed documents to eCampus; do not type them into eCampus directly.

4. Double space all written work, use 12-point font, and number pages.

**Policies**

Attendance and Late Policy

Consistent class attendance helps students succeed academically and enriches our class dynamics. Therefore, attendance is required. You are granted **five** absences without penalty. Use these for school trips, illness, family emergencies, etc. You do not need to clear these absences with me. Each additional absence costs you two points from your total for the class. More than nine absences triggers an automaticF for the course. If you miss a class, you are still responsible for graded and ungraded assignments due in the next class and for finding out whether changes were made to the syllabus or schedule. If you have an emergency or serious health problem during the semester, please contact the Office of Student Life in E. Moore Hall (293-5611). The Dean of Student Life will communicate with me and authorize arrangements for you.

At the beginning of each class we will discuss upcoming assignments, due dates, and questions on graded work. Therefore, it is important that you arrive on time. Everyone has an emergency now and then, so you get **three** late arrivals without penalty. Additional late arrivals count as half a class absence and cost you one point from your class total.

Late Work

 No late assignments will be accepted unless you make prior arrangements with me.

Academic Integrity

 The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the

West Virginia University Academic Catalog at: http://catalog.wvu.edu/undergraduate/coursecreditstermsclassification/#academicintegritytext.

Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me before the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

Inclusivity

 The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion.

 If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (293-6700). If a Day of Special Concern conflicts with a test or assignment due date, please notify me in advance to make alternative arrangements.

For more information on West Virginia University's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, please see <http://diversity.wvu.edu>.

Sale or Distribution of Course Material

All course materials, including lectures, class notes, quizzes, exams, handouts, presentations, and other materials provided to students for this course are protected intellectual property. As such, the unauthorized purchase or sale of these materials may result in disciplinary sanctions under the Campus Student Code.

Sexual Misconduct and Resources

West Virginia University does not tolerate sexual misconduct, including harassment, stalking, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, or relationship violence [BOG Policy 44]. It is important for you to know that there are resources available if you or someone you know needs assistance. You may speak to a member of university administration, faculty, or staff, but keep in mind that they have an obligation to report the incident to the Title IX Coordinator. If you want to speak to someone who is permitted to keep your disclosure confidential, please seek assistance from the **Carruth Center**, **304-293-9355** or **304-293-4431** (24-hour hotline), and locally within the community at the **Rape and Domestic Violence Information Center** (RDVIC), **304-292-5100** or **304-292-4431** (24-hour hotline). For more information please consult WVU policies at <http://titleix.wvu.edu>.

**Syllabus** (subject to change, if necessary)—readings and assignments are due on the day listed.

**Week 1**

 Th, Aug. 17 Introduction

**Week 2**

 T, Aug. 22 Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Frederick Douglass and the Language of the Self”

 (eC)

 Th, Aug. 24 Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

 (Preface-Ch. VIII)

**DQ #1**

**Week 3**

 T, Aug. 29 Douglass, *Narrative* (to end)

 Th, Aug. 31 **Par. #1**

**Week 4**

 T, Sept. 5 Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Preface—Ch. XIV)

 **DQ #2**

 Th, Sept. 7 Jacobs, *Incidents* (Ch. XV—XXVIII)

**Week 5**

 T, Sept. 12 Jacobs, *Incidents* (to end, incl. Appendix)

 Th, Sept. 14 Valerie Smith, “’Loopholes of Retreat’: Architecture and Ideology in

 Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*” (eC)

 **DQ #3**

**Week 6**

 T, Sept. 19 **Par. #2**

 Film: “Ethnic Notions,” Marlon Riggs (57 min., in class)

 Th, Sept. 21 James Weldon Johnson, “The Dilemma of the Negro Writer” (eC)

 **DQ #4** (on Riggs and Johnson)

**Week 7**

T, Sept. 26 James Weldon Johnson, *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (Ch. I-VI)

 Th, Sept. 28 Johnson, *Autobiography* (Ch. X-to end)

 **DQ #5**

**Week 8**

T, Oct. 3 Dennis Tyler, Jr., “Jim Crow’s Disabilities: Racial Injury, Immobility, and

 the ‘Terrible Handicap’” (eC)

 **DQ #6**

 Th, Oct. 5 **Par. #3**

**Week 9**

 T, Oct. 10 Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Ch. 1-9)

 Th, Oct. 12 Hurston, *Their Eyes* (Ch. 10-18)

 **DQ #7**

**Week 10**

 T, Oct. 17Hurston, *Their Eyes* (to end)

Alice Walker, “Zora Neale Hurston: A Cautionary Tale and a Partisan

 View”

 **DQ #8**

 Th, Oct. 19 **Par. #4**

**Week 11**

 T, Oct. 24 Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (Prologue-Ch.4)

 Booker T. Washington, “The Atlanta Exposition Address” (eC)

 W.E.B. Du Bois, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” and “Of Mr. Booker T.

 Washington” (eC)

 **DQ #9**

 Th, Oct. 26 Ellison, *Invisible Man* (Ch. 5-10)

**Week 12**

 T, Oct. 31 Ellison, *Invisible Man* (Ch. 11-16)

 Th, Nov. 2 Ellison, *Invisible Man* (Ch. 17-21)

 **DQ #10**

**Week 13**

 T, Nov. 7 Ellison, *Invisible Man* (Ch. 22-Epilogue)

 Th, Nov. 9 **Par. 5**

**Week 14**

 T, Nov. 14 Ta-Nehisi Coates, from *Between the World and Me* (eC)

 **DQ #11**

 Th, Nov. 16 Reading Day

**Thanksgiving Break!**

**Week 15**

 T, Nov. 28 Colson Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad* (through “Ridgeway,” p.82)

 **DQ #12**

 Th, Nov. 30 Whitehead, *Underground Railroad* (through “Ethel,” p.196)

**Week 16**

 T, Dec. 5 Whitehead, *Underground Railroad* (to end)

 Roxane Gay, “I Don’t Want to Watch Slavery Fan Fiction” (eC)

 **DQ #13** (optional, extra credit)

 Th, Dec. 7 **Par. 6** (no class)