

Eng. 254 – African American Literature

The 21st Century

Prof. Gwen Bergner

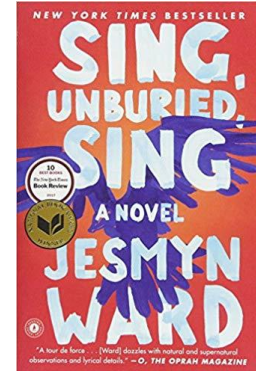
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Fall 2021

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T/Th 10:00-11:15

The first decades of the twenty-first century have seen the first Black president and the resurgence of white nationalism, claims that the US is “post-racial” and that #BlackLivesMatter. The Supreme Court has ruled the Voting Rights Act and affirmative action largely obsolete, even as states enact laws to restrict voting access and the school-to-prison pipeline flows. Protesters clash in the streets over Confederate monuments and on opinion pages over NFL players taking a knee. How do African American writers reckon with these contradictions and conflicts that form the backdrop to the daily life of individuals, families, and communities?



Reading a selection of recent novels, poetry, and essays, we will explore how African American writers address racial politics, personal agency, ties to family, and responsibility to community right now, in the twenty-first century. We will consider what this literature offers as the grounds for cultural and political affiliation, that is, for defining Black identity, in the age of multiculturalism under siege, widening economic inequality, and widespread cultural appropriation. How does it reckon with memory and history even as it carves out the future? And how does it celebrate the power and joy of American Blackness?

Books

Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014)

Paul Beatty, *The Sellout* (2016)

Yaa Gyasi, *Homegoing* (2016)

Jesmyn Ward, *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (2017)

Colson Whitehead, *The Nickel Boys* (2020)

Danielle Evans, *The Department of Historical Corrections* (2020)

Films

Bessie, dir. Dee Rees (2016)

Moonlight, dir. Barry Jenkins (2016)

Get Out!, dir. Jordan Peele (2017)

