



ENGL 447 (Section 32749R): African American Narrative: The African American Novel and the Nadir

Units: 4

Spring 2021; M & W 12:00-12:50 PM

***Note: We will not meet via Zoom on Fridays, as they will be reserved for asynchronous independent work.**

Location: Online

Instructor: Dr. Melissa Daniels-Rauterkus,
Assistant Professor of English

Office: THH 439

Office Hours: Fridays 10:00 am-12:00 pm by appointment

Contact Info: rauterku@usc.edu

IT Help: USC Information Technology Services

Hours of Service: Telephone support available 24 hours a day, 7 days per week; Email support available Mon-Fri. 8:00am-6:00 pm.

Contact Info: consult@usc.edu; (213)-740-5555

Course Description: In his 1954 book, *The Negro in American Life and Thought*, the celebrated African American historian and activist Rayford Logan dubbed the period from the end of Reconstruction through the early 20th century the “Nadir” because it was without a doubt one of the lowest moments in the history of American race relations since the Civil War. Having lost many of the civil rights acquired in the aftermath of emancipation, African Americans were introduced to a new form of racial oppression vis-à-vis Jim Crow. Predicated on the premise that segregation was necessary to preserve white supremacy and racial purity, Jim Crow found its most virulent expression in the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case, *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which not only implemented the infamous “separate but equal” ruling, but also gave legal sanction to racial discrimination, violence, and disenfranchisement against blacks. This course will explore how African American writers responded to and transformed these events through the artistic and political space of the novel. In the course of reading a selection of representative work, we will consider many questions, including, What did it mean to be a black American at the turn of the century? What is the relationship between literature and society? Can literature affect social change?



Learning Objectives

Students who successfully complete this class will be able to:

- Identify the narrative elements and interpretive problems that distinguish a literary work
- Locate imaginative and critical works within their appropriate contexts and traditions, and thus therefore, better understand literary history and intellectual genealogy
- Perform a close reading of a literary text
- Come up with a cogent thesis and write a sustained analysis of a text or group of texts
- Conduct scholarly research and use secondary sources to support an original argument



Course Notes

Grading Type: Letter

This is a web-enhanced course that utilizes Blackboard. I will post assignments, supplemental readings, and links to digital content on the platform.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

Beginner; access to Blackboard, Zoom, and the ability to stream digital content on Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, etc.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials:

Pauline Hopkins, *Contending Forces* (1900) ISBN: 978-0-195-06785-9

Charles W. Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901) ISBN: 978-0-393-93414-4

Paul Laurence Dunbar, *The Sport of the Gods* (1902) ISBN: 978-0-812-97279-5

James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) ISBN: 978-0-393-97286-3

*Scholarly essays/excerpts on Blackboard

**All books are available for purchase/rent at the USC Bookstore: 840 Childs Way, Los Angeles 90089 (213) 740-0066.

Description and Assessment of Assignments:

1. First Assignment: “The Present Past” (5-7 pages)—In many ways, contemporary America shockingly resembles post-Reconstruction America. From 1865-1877, African Americans enjoyed the rights of citizenship and newly-acquired political power only to have these freedoms severely curtailed with the rise of white supremacy, segregation, and racial violence. Today, we are witnessing similar trends as neo-Nazism and white nationalism threaten to undue the progress we’ve made as well as our democracy. Compose a short essay that discusses how the legacy of the nadir impacts American life today? Why do you think that racial tensions have persisted and/or have been reignited and what might be done to address the problem?
2. Midterm Assignment: Critical Analysis Paper (5-7 pages)—In this essay, you will construct a critical analysis on one of the literary works we’ve already read and discussed by mid-semester. Your analysis must address one of the following concerns: a) issues of aesthetics (e.g. formal/literary attributes such as genre, i.e. the historical romance or realist novel, or narrative strategies like the tragic mulatto/a device or the passing plot), b) historical matters (e.g. Reconstruction, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the Hayes-Tilden Compromise, the Great Migration), or c) cultural/social problems (e.g. segregation, minstrelsy/racial caricature, lynching). You may, and should, consult a few secondary sources to support your argument, but you should draw the bulk of your information from the literary work itself. The objective of this assignment is twofold: 1) to strengthen your analytical skills, and 2) to identify and articulate the concrete, practical value of literature and its ability to teach us about the world.
3. End of Term Assignment: Seminar Paper (10 pages)—This course culminates in a seminar paper. This essay should reflect your mastery of the content we studied over the course of the semester. Towards this end, it should be your best and most sophisticated work. In terms of structure, it should have an introduction that provides background and contextual information about your topic and announces your thesis, it should demonstrate your ability to develop an argument across multiple paragraphs (using relevant examples and evidentiary material in the form of primary and secondary sources), it should connect the literature to its relevant cultural and political contexts, and finally, it should have a conclusion that underscores the significance of your argument. For example, you may choose to focus on how your essay contributes to/or intervenes in the existing scholarly conversation about your topic or you may choose to discuss the implications of your argument in the context of the current political moment. Why does this matter outside of this class? Why does this matter now? I will provide a more detailed assignment sheet/guide well in advance of the due date.

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Attendance & Participation	100	10
First Essay	100	25
Midterm Essay	100	30
Final Essay	100	35
TOTAL	400	100

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

A	93-100	C	73-76
A-	90-92	C-	70-72
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	83-86	D	63-66
B-	80-82	D-	60-62
C+	77-79	F	59 and below

Assignment Rubric

A-range (90-100): Essay provides a sophisticated analysis of the topic or work in question; contains an identifiable argument and engages with the material in a complex way to illuminate cultural, historical or political issues relevant to its discussion. The essay is well-written and highly polished. The essay is formatted according to MLA citation guidelines.

B-range (80-89): Essay provides a solid analysis of the topic or work in question and attempts to engage with the material in a complex and thorough manner, but it does not fully address all of the relevant issues or does not provide a thorough accounting of the cultural, historical, or political factors involved. The essay may have a few compositional, structural, or grammatical errors. The essay may contain minor citation errors.

C-range (70-79): Essay does not provide a compelling analysis of the topic or work in question and does not earnestly attempt to address the cultural, historical, or political realms in a complex way. The argument is underdeveloped. The essay may have several compositional, structural, or grammatical errors. The essay may have multiple citation errors or may not properly cite sources or include a bibliography.

D-range (60-69): Essay lacks an argument and does not do the work of analysis. The essay does not engage with the relevant material and does not address cultural, historical, or political issues. The essay may be rife with compositional, structural, or grammatical errors. The essay may not reflect the use of a citation method.

F (59 and below): The essay does not demonstrate appropriate scholarly effort/critical engagement, or the student failed to submit the assignment.

Grading Philosophy

For each written assignment you complete and submit you will receive a brief narrative statement (about 3-4 sentences) summarizing the strengths and weaknesses of your paper. You will also receive two scores: one for content (i.e. the quality and rigor of your ideas or argument), and another for composition (i.e. how well you write, including organization, grammar, mechanics, and usage). At the end of the semester when I compute final grades, I will average the two scores to calculate a final composite score for each assignment. The rationale for this particular grading scheme lies in my acknowledgement of the very subjective nature of grading. It is extremely difficult to assess learning, and personally, I believe that our current educational

system encourages students to place too much focus on the grade and too little focus on the learning. This is an earnest attempt to prioritize the learning and to de-emphasize the grade.

Assignment Submission Policy

Assignments are due on the day listed on the syllabus. Please submit all work directly to me via email. Essays must be typed and formatted according to MLA guidelines. Your work should be submitted as a MS Word document so that I can use the “reviewing” feature to comment on your paper. I will not accept other file formats.

Grading Timeline

All assignments will be graded and returned no later than two weeks after submission. Final seminar papers will not be returned unless requested.

Additional Policies

1. **Attendance and Participation:** Consistent attendance and participation is absolutely critical to your success in this class. You are allotted three unexcused absences—without penalty—for the duration of the semester. Unexcused absences beyond this number will result in a penalty of a 5% grade reduction off your final grade for each class session that you miss. Please do not come to class late or leave early, as this is disruptive to me and your fellow classmates. Excessively late arrivals and early departures will be counted as absences. If you need to arrive late or leave early on a specific day, please let me know as soon as possible.
2. **Late/Missing Work:** In order to receive full credit, all assignments must be submitted by or on their respective due dates. Late assignments will be docked by 5% for each week that they are late. Any outstanding work that you want included in the final grade must be submitted before the last week of class.
3. **Course Format/Meeting Structure:** The format of this course is a mixture of lecture, discussion, and applied learning activities. I’m a big fan of the “flipped” classroom, in which activities that would traditionally be assigned as homework are completed during class time. Towards this end, I may use freewriting exercises, media, visual art, op-eds, supplemental readings, or other aids to enhance our understanding of the material and structure our time in class. Always bring your reading and writing materials to our meetings. Class will generally begin with an ice-breaker/warm up activity—e.g. we might discuss a quote, screen a clip, perform a close reading on a passage, or engage in a freewriting activity. After this, I might present important information in the form of a mini-lecture, lead a discussion of the assigned reading, or engage you in an applied learning activity, e.g. “think-pair-share” or “group text reading” or “roundtable.”
4. **Email:** I will respond to emails during normal business hours, Monday through Friday, from 9 am to 5 pm. Emails sent outside of this window will be responded to during the next business day. I generally reply to emails within a day, but if it takes me longer, please be patient.
5. **Zoom Office Hours:** If you’d like to meet with me during my Zoom office hours, Fridays from 10 am to 12 pm, please sign up at <https://melissadaniels-rauterkus.youcanbook.me> for a 20-minute consultation.
6. **In-class Behavior:** You are expected to demonstrate proper academic etiquette at all times. Please do not check and/or send emails while in class, text-message, or complete assignments for other classes. Please refrain from voicing opinions that may be perceived as being offensive or insensitive.
7. **Synchronous Session Recording Notice:**
All synchronous sessions will be recorded and provided to all students asynchronously. USC prohibits the sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment. Please take note of the following policy:

S Campus Section 11.12(B)

Distribution or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a violation of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribution by services publishing class notes. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the Internet or via any other media. (See Section C.1 Class Notes Policy).

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

***Note: Assignments are subject to change at the instructor’s discretion.**

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings/Homework	Deliverable/ Due
Week 0	F 1/15: Introductions, Course Overview, and Syllabus	Read Patricia McGuire essay on Charlottesville; Watch episodes 1 and 2 of <i>Reconstruction: America After the Civil War</i> (YouTube)	
Week 1	M 1/18: MLK Day/No Class W 1/20: <i>Reconstruction</i> , episodes 1-2	Watch episodes 3 and 4 of <i>Reconstruction: America After the Civil War</i> (YouTube)	
Week 2	M 1/25: <i>Reconstruction</i> , episodes 3-4 W 1/27: Literature of Reconstruction	“Literature of the Reconstruction to the New Negro Renaissance, 1865-1919,” pp. 541-554 Richard Yarborough, Introduction to <i>Contending Forces</i> , pp. xxvii-xlvi	
Week 3	M 2/01: Introduction to Pauline Hopkins and <i>Contending Forces</i> W 2/03: <i>Contending Forces</i> , (preface, Ch. I-III), pp. 13-64	<i>Contending Forces</i> , (preface, Ch. I-III), pp. 13-64 <i>Contending Forces</i> , (Ch. IV-VII), pp. 65-140	First Essay 2/03
Week 4	M 2/08: <i>Contending Forces</i> , (Ch. IV-VII), pp. 65-140 W 2/10: <i>Contending Forces</i> , (Ch. VIII-IX), pp. 141-182	<i>Contending Forces</i> , (Ch. VIII-IX), pp. 141-182 <i>Contending Forces</i> , (Ch. X-XIV), pp. 183-262	
Week 5	M 2/15: <i>Contending Forces</i> , (Ch. X-XIV), pp. 183-262 W 2/17: <i>Contending Forces</i> , (Ch. XV-XVII), pp. 263-302	<i>Contending Forces</i> , (Ch. XV-XVII), pp. 263-302 <i>Contending Forces</i> , (Ch. XVIII-XXII), pp. 303-402	

Week 6	M 2/22: <i>Contending Forces</i> , (Ch. XVIII-XXII), pp. 303-402 W 2/24: Introduction to Charles Chesnutt and <i>The Marrow of Tradition</i>	Werner Sollors, Introduction to <i>The Marrow of Tradition</i> , xi-xxxviii <i>The Marrow of Tradition</i> , (Ch. I-VIII), pp. 5-54	
Week 7	M 3/01: <i>The Marrow of Tradition</i> , (Ch. I-VIII), pp. 5-54 W 3/03: <i>The Marrow of Tradition</i> , (Ch. IX-XVIII), pp. 54-101	<i>The Marrow of Tradition</i> , (Ch. IX-XVIII), pp. 54-101 <i>The Marrow of Tradition</i> , (Ch. XVIII-XXXV), pp. 101-177	
Week 8	M 3/08: <i>The Marrow of Tradition</i> , (Ch. XVIII-XXXV), pp. 101-177 W 3/10: <i>The Marrow of Tradition</i> , (Ch. XXXV-XXXVII), pp. 177-195	<i>The Marrow of Tradition</i> , (Ch. XXXV-XXXVII), pp. 177-195 Jae Roe, "Keeping an Old Wound Alive: <i>The Marrow of Tradition</i> and the Legacy of Wilmington"	Midterm Essay 3/10
Week 9	M 3/15: Jae Roe, "Keeping an Old Wound Alive: <i>The Marrow of Tradition</i> and the Legacy of Wilmington" W 3/17: Introduction to Paul Laurence Dunbar and <i>The Sport of the Gods</i>	Lawrence Rodgers, Ch. 1 "The Early Migration Novel," from <i>Canaan Bound</i> <i>The Sport of the Gods</i> , (Ch. I-VII), pp. 321-362	
Week 10	M 3/22: <i>The Sport of the Gods</i> , (Ch. I-VII), pp. 321-362 W 3/24: <i>The Sport of the Gods</i> , (Ch. VIII-XIII), pp. 363-406	<i>The Sport of the Gods</i> , (Ch. VIII-XIII), pp. 363-406 <i>The Sport of the Gods</i> , (Ch. XIV-XVIII), pp. 407-433	
Week 11	M 3/29: <i>The Sport of the Gods</i> , (Ch. XIV-XVIII), pp. 407-433 W 3/31: Introduction to James Weldon Johnson and <i>The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man</i>	Thomas L. Morgan, "The City as Refuge: Constructing Urban Blackness" <i>The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man</i> (Preface, Ch. I-V), pp. 3-48	

Week 12	M 4/05: <i>The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man</i> (Preface, Ch. I-V), pp. 3-48 W 4/07: Wellness Day/No Class	<i>The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man</i> (Ch. VI-IX), pp. 48-77	
Week 13	M 4/12: <i>The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man</i> (Ch. VI-IX), pp. 48-77 W 4/14: <i>The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man</i> (Ch. X-XI), pp. 78-110	<i>The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man</i> (Ch. X-XI), pp. 78-110 Martin Japtok, “Between Race as Construct and Race as Essence”	
Week 14	M 4/19: Martin Japtok, “Between Race as Construct and Race as Essence” W 4/21: Marlon Riggs, <i>Ethnic Notions</i> (Kanopy)	Marlon Riggs, <i>Ethnic Notions</i> (Kanopy) <i>Documenting Hate: Charlottesville</i> (PBS/Frontline)	
Week 15	M 4/26: The New Nadir: <i>Documenting Hate: Charlottesville</i> (Frontline) W 4/28: Course Wrap-up and Learning Experience Evals	Work on your final paper	
FINAL			Final Essay 5/05

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Support Systems:

Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: sarc.usc.edu

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. equity.usc.edu

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. dsp.usc.edu *Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710*

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. diversity.usc.edu

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. emergency.usc.edu

USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime. Provides overall safety to USC community. dps.usc.edu