



**ENGL 504 (Section 32776D):  
Theories of Race, Class, and Gender:  
“Black Life & 21<sup>st</sup>-Century African American Literature”**

**Units:** 4  
**Fall 2022; Mondays 4:30-6:50 PM**  
**Location:** THH 203  
**Instructor:** Dr. Melissa Daniels-Rauterkus,  
Associate Professor of English

**Office:** Taper Hall of Humanities 449D

**Office Hours:** Fridays 9:00 am -12 pm on Zoom; please email me for an appointment

**Contact Info:** [rauterku@usc.edu](mailto: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. 8:00 am - 6:00 pm.

**Contact Info:** [consult@usc.edu](mailto:consult@usc.edu); (213)-740-5555

**Course Description:** As static and essentialist notions of identity have been supplanted by more dynamic and fluid accounts, the task of defining Blackness has never been more complicated or contested. Scholars working at the forefront of African American literary studies agree that old approaches to subjectivity and periodization can no longer offer a coherent framework for assessing contemporary Black life or literature. But there really is no scholarly consensus on what it means to be Black in America today or just what to call this current outpouring of African American literary production.

Viewing Black life as a generative site of inquiry, this seminar explores how recent African American writings conceptualize Black identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Acknowledging that there is no singular, universal Black experience, this course surveys a wide range of writings, in an effort to take stock of, the sheer diversity of Black life in modern America. Adopting an intersectional approach, this course examines Blackness through the interlocking and overlapping lenses of race, class, and gender.

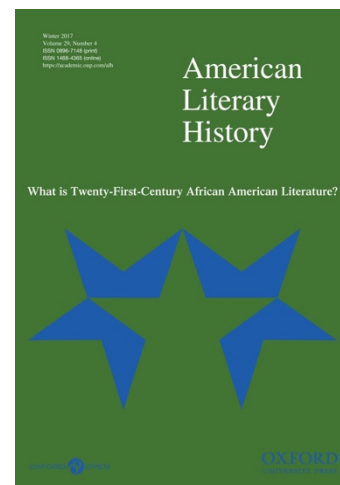
Understanding these categories as mutually constitutive forces, this seminar stresses the cumulative significance of these social constructs in the making of Black subjects, aesthetics, and critical theories.

The objective of this course is to familiarize students with both established and emergent theories of race, class, and gender; provide an in-depth treatment of key works of 21<sup>st</sup>-century African American literature; and determine what, if any, relationship this current production has to previous periods of African American literature and culture like the New Black Aesthetic, the Black Arts Movement, the Harlem Renaissance, the Nadir, and the antebellum period.

### Learning Objectives

Students who successfully complete this class will be able to:

- Think and write critically about literature
- Read criticism/theory and explain how it enhances our understanding of the literary text
- Engage with literary works in relationship to their relevant cultural, historical, intellectual, and political contexts
- Develop an original argument about a literary/critical work and situate it within the existing scholarship/developments within the field



## Course Notes

This is a web-enhanced course that utilizes Blackboard. I will post links to supplemental readings 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:

### Fiction/Creative Non-Fiction:

1. Marci Blackman, *Po Man's Child* (1999)
2. Andrea Lee, *Interesting Women* (2002)
3. ZZ Packer, *Drinking Coffee Elsewhere* (2003)
4. Michael Thomas, *Man Gone Down* (2006)
5. Chimamanda Adichie, *Americanah* (2013)
6. Dana Johnson, *In the Not Quite Dark* (2016)
7. Danzy Senna, *New People* (2017)
8. Tayari Jones, *An American Marriage* (2018)
9. Michelle Obama, *Becoming* (2018)
10. Kiese Laymon, *Heavy* (2018)
11. Nafissa Thompson-Spires, *Heads of the Colored People* (2018)
12. Raven Leilani, *Luster* (2020)

### Scholarly Criticism:

1. Kenneth Warren, *What Was African American Literature?*
2. Kevin Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture*
3. Michele Elam, *The Souls of Mixed Folk: Race, Politics, and Aesthetics in the New Millennium*
4. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*
5. Koritha Mitchell, *From Slave Cabins to the White House: Homemade Citizenship in African American Culture*
6. Ariane Cruz, *The Color of Kink: Black Women, BDSM, and Pornography*

\*Scholarly essays will appear 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. Blackboard Posts (1-2 pages)—For each week's reading assignment, you will need to draft a 1-2 page response to it and post it on Blackboard. (Please draft in MS Word and then copy and paste into Blackboard.) Privileging your own voice and perspective, tell me what you think about what you read. What is your personal position in relationship to the material? How does the work affirm or challenge your own experience or viewpoint? How did the work affect you? The purpose of this activity is to establish a personal connection with the assigned texts and to help you contribute to in-class discussions. This is a more informal, subjective exercise. Focus on what you think and what you have to say about what you read. Please post your comments to the appropriate discussion thread on Blackboard. **Posts are due by Saturday at 10 pm.** Please note that you are exempt from posting a Blackboard response during the week you are scheduled to deliver your seminar presentation.
2. Midterm Assignment: Abstract (300 words)—Draft an abstract for your conference paper. Your abstract should have a working title, provide a summary of the paper's argument, explain its intervention and why it matters, how it adds to or shifts the existing scholarly conversation about the text(s)/relevant discourses, and its relevance/potential impact on the fields of Black studies, African American literary studies, and/or any other disciplines you choose to engage. Start thinking about this early and read ahead!

3. Seminar Presentation (40 min.)—During one class session this semester, you will be responsible for delivering a 40 min. presentation on the assigned reading for that week. The presentation should do the work of a seminar paper. Towards this end, your presentation should include the following: 1) advance an argumentative claim about the work and support it with examples from the text itself, walking us through your argument and providing two to three brief close readings; 2) identify and explain the theoretical approaches that are most helpful or relevant to interpreting and understanding the reading, e.g. Black feminism, Afro-pessimism, Black postmodernism or post-Blackness, etc.; and 3) summarize the critical conversation about the work (you will need to do some additional reading/research beyond the assigned materials to accomplish this). Tell us what remains unsaid or unsatisfying. Offer your own critical assessment. Tell us what the readings do for us and how they contribute to our understanding of contemporary Black life and twenty-first-century African American literature. In addition to this, you should feel free to bring in any relevant teaching materials/aids (a handout or PowerPoint presentation) that will enhance your remarks and make them more accessible for your audience. After you deliver your presentation, you will then lead a guided discussion of the material for about 40 minutes. Please prepare several questions, in the form of a handout, for us to answer. During our first meeting, you will select a presentation date. Given the limited number of class meetings, it is imperative that you come to class on the day that you are scheduled to deliver your presentation. You will not be able to reschedule your presentation. Please plan accordingly. I recommend that you meet with me during office hours to discuss your presentation.
  
4. Conference Paper (10-12 pages)—This course culminates in a conference paper. Like the more traditional seminar paper, the conference paper makes an argument that draws on secondary sources, but it's more tightly focused on a few examples, has a more conversational tone, and engages with recent trends/debates/concerns in the field (which is in this case African American literary studies). You may choose to build off your seminar presentation—provided you add a substantial amount of new work and enhance your earlier arguments.

### Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Attendance & Participation	100	10
Blackboard Posts	100	20
Abstract	100	20
Seminar Presentation	100	20
Conference Paper	100	30
TOTAL	500	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, political, or theoretical issues relevant to its discussion. The essay is well-written and highly polished. The essay is formatted according to Chicago or 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 critical, 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 critical, 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 critical, 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.

### Additional Policies

1. **Attendance and Participation:** Consistent attendance and participation is critical to your success in this class. You are allotted one unexcused absence—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. If you need to arrive late or leave early on a specific day, please let me know as soon as possible.

2. **Course Format/Meeting Structure:**

This course is a graduate “seminar.” This means that you are expected to make substantial contributions to class discussion. In a course at this level, my role is more of a guide than an instructor. Accordingly, I will not lecture or tell you what you need to know or what you should think about a particular work. Instead, we will work collectively to make sense of the material. This requires that everyone come to class having read all the assigned literature and Blackboard posts. It also demands that we come to class ready and prepared to have serious and sustained conversations about the work. To achieve this, our sessions will proceed as follows:

Time	Segment	Activity
4:30-5:00	30 min.	Discussion of the Blackboard posts
5:00-5:40	40 min.	Seminar presentation
5:40-5:55	15 min.	Break
5:55-6:40	40 min.	Guided discussion
6:40-6:50	10 min.	Closing remarks

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. **Office Hours:** I am available, by appointment, for virtual office hour visits via Zoom. If you’d like to schedule a virtual visit, please email me. In office hours, I can elaborate on class discussions and offer assistance with assignments.
6. **In-class Behavior:** You are expected to demonstrate proper academic/professional 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 views 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.*

	<b>Topics/Readings Due</b>	<b>Deliverable/ Due</b>
<b>Week 1</b>	8/22: Introductions, course overview, and syllabus; sign up for seminar presentations	
<b>Week 2</b>	8/29: Race, Class, and Gender in African American Literary and Cultural History; Trey Ellis, “The New Black Aesthetic”; Bertram D. Ashe, “Theorizing the Post-Soul”; and Stephanie Li, “Introduction: What is Twenty-First-Century African American Literature” (available online; see Blackboard)	<b>BB post (due by Sat. 10 pm)</b>
<b>Week 3</b>	9/05: <b>No Class/ Labor Day</b>	
<b>Week 4</b>	9/12: Marci Blackman, <i>Po Man’s Child</i> (1999); Carmen Phelps, “Variations on the Theme: Black Family, Nationhood, Lesbianism, and Sodomasochistic Desire in Marci Blackman’s <i>Po Man’s Child</i> ”; and Marlon M. Bailey and L.H. Stallings, “Sexuality” from <i>Keywords for African American Studies</i> (available online; see Blackboard)	<b>BB post</b>
<b>Week 5</b>	9/19: Andrea Lee, <i>Interesting Women</i> (2002); Jennifer D. Williams, “An Interesting Woman: A Conversation with Andrea Lee”; and Quito Swan, “Transnationalism” from <i>Keywords for African American Studies</i> (available online; see Blackboard)	<b>BB post</b>
<b>Week 6</b>	9/26: ZZ Packer, <i>Drinking Coffee Elsewhere</i> (2003); Martha Southgate, “Someday We’ll All Be Free: Considering Post-Oppression Fiction”; and Derek Adams, “The Pass of Least Resistance: Sexual Orientation and Race in ZZ Packer’s <i>Drinking Coffee Elsewhere</i> ” (available online; see Blackboard)	<b>BB post</b>

<b>Week 7</b>	10/03: Michael Thomas, <i>Man Gone Down</i> (2006); Kenneth Warren, <i>What Was African American Literature?</i>	<b>BB post</b>
<b>Week 8</b>	10/10: Chimamanda Adichie, <i>Americanah</i> (2013); Yogita Goyal, “We Need New Diasporas”; Shana L. Redmond, “Diaspora” from <i>Keywords for African American Studies</i> (available online; see Blackboard)	<b>BB post</b>
<b>Week 9</b>	10/17: Dana Johnson, <i>In the Not Quite Dark</i> (2016); introduction, and chapter one from Kevin Quashie’s, <i>The Sovereignty of Quiet</i>	<b>Abstract</b>
<b>Week 10</b>	10/24: Danzy Senna, <i>New People</i> (2017); preface and chapter one from Michele Elam’s, <i>The Souls of Mixed Folk</i>	<b>BB post</b>
<b>Week 11</b>	10/31: Tayari Jones, <i>An American Marriage</i> (2018); introduction and chapter five from Michelle Alexander’s, <i>The New Jim Crow</i>	<b>BB post</b>
<b>Week 12</b>	11/07: Michelle Obama, <i>Becoming</i> (2018); introduction and chapter six from Koritha Mitchell’s, <i>From Slave Cabins to the White House</i>	<b>BB post</b>
<b>Week 13</b>	11/14: Kiese Laymon, <i>Heavy</i> (2018); chapters one and four from Christina Sharpe’s <i>In the Wake</i>	<b>BB post</b>
<b>Week 14</b>	11/21: Nafissa Thompson-Spires, <i>Heads of the Colored People</i> (2018); Alexander G. Weheliye, “Post-Integration Blues: Black Geeks and Afro-Diasporic Humanism” (available online; see Blackboard)	<b>BB post</b>
<b>Week 15</b>	11/28: Raven Leilani, <i>Luster</i> (2020); introduction, and chapter one from Ariane Cruz’s, <i>The Color of Kink</i>	<b>BB post</b>
	<i>*End of Semester Happy Hour at Rock and Reilly’s USC Village TBD</i>	<b>Final Paper 12/05</b>

### 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 Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* (see <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions>). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct (at <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>).

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* (see <http://equity.usc.edu>) or to the *Department of Public Safety* (see <http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/departement-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>). This is important for the safety whole USC community.

Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* provides 24/7 confidential support (see <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm>), and the sexual assault resource center webpage describes reporting options and other resources (see [sarc@usc.edu](mailto:sarc@usc.edu)).

### **Support Systems:**

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students (see <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>). *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations (see [http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home\\_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html)). If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology (see <http://emergency.usc.edu/>).

*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. <https://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. <http://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.

<https://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: <http://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. <https://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.

<https://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. <http://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. <https://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. <https://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, <http://emergency.usc.edu>

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