



ENGL 446 (Section 32753R): Afro-American Poetry and Drama: “Contemporary African American Literature”

Units: 4

Fall 2023; T, Th 12:30-1:50 pm

Location: DMC 155

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

Office: THH 449D

Office Hours: Wednesdays 9am-12pm on Zoom; please email me for an 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. 8:00 am-6:00 pm.

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

see also Dornsife Technology Services at: dornsife.usc.edu/contact-cts/

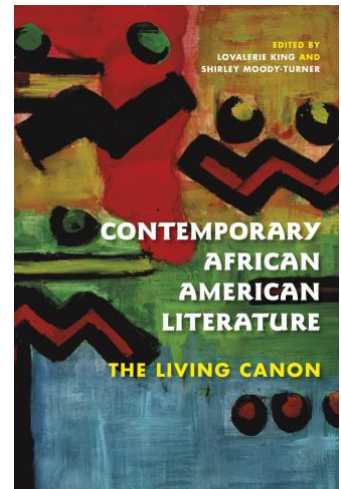
Course Description

African American literature has always told the truth about Black racialized experience in the U.S. One crucial facet of this aesthetic-political project has been shining a light on racial oppression. But in the years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a new generation of African American authors came of age, one that would broaden how we think about African American literature.

Known as the “post-soul generation,” this group of writers, born in the 1970s and later, grew up in a very different America from that of earlier generations of African Americans. Whereas their ancestors endured the hardships of segregation, lynching, and slavery, this younger cohort navigated a new racial landscape structured by affirmative action, busing, and multiculturalism. This is not to say that they didn’t experience racism or that their writings disavow its ongoing nature, but rather to acknowledge that social and political changes over the last fifty years have altered what it means to be African American and what it means to write African American literature.

This class is a study of these changes. Approaching both Blackness and literature as diverse and capacious concepts, we’ll identify the key authors and texts (print and media) that constitute contemporary African American literature. We’ll trace the emergence of new genres like street fiction and the graphic novel as well as extra-canonical themes like racial alienation, fluidity, class privilege, and Black queer and/or interracial desire. We’ll discuss the rise of corporate aesthetics and the changing politics of the literary marketplace. We’ll examine how the literary opens up to include tv, film, music, and other forms of cultural production during this time. We’ll determine what, if any, relationship this literary production has to previous periods of African American literature like the Black Arts Movement, the Harlem Renaissance, and the postbellum and antebellum periods.

We’ll discuss work by: Trey Ellis, Bertram D. Ashe, Andrea Lee, Cheryl Dunye, Nelson George, ZZ Packer, Dana Johnson, and Danzy Senna. Students will write a short reaction paper at midterm (3-5 pages) and a longer reflective essay at the end of the semester (10-12 pages).



Learning Objectives

- Understand African American literature as an aesthetic, political, and intellectual project
- Trace African American literary history in terms of periodization and aesthetic developments
- Identify the aesthetic, narrative, and interpretive elements that characterize African American literature
- Historicize and contextualize literary and cultural production
- Use scholarly criticism as an interpretive tool to analyze literature

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 Supplemental Materials

Books:

1. Andrea Lee, *Sarah Phillips* (1984)
2. ZZ Packer, *Drinking Coffee Elsewhere* (2003)
3. Dana Johnson, *In the Not Quite Dark* (2016)
4. Danzy Senna, *New People* (2017)

Essays:

1. Trey Ellis, "The New Black Aesthetic"
2. Bertram D. Ashe, "Theorizing the Post-Soul Aesthetic"
3. Mary Helen Washington, "Young, Gifted, and Black" Rev. of Sarah Phillips
4. Melissa Daniels-Rauterkus, "Andrea Lee's Europe"
5. Laura Sullivan, "Chasing Fae: The Watermelon Woman and Black Lesbian Possibility"
6. Melissa Daniels-Rauterkus, "The New Jack Renaissance: Black Literary and Cultural Production and the Institutionalization of African American Literary Studies"
7. Martha Southgate, "Someday We'll All Be Free: Considering Post-Oppression Fiction"
8. Derek Adams, "The Pass of Least Resistance: Sexual Orientation and Race in ZZ Packer's *Drinking Coffee Elsewhere*"

Films:

1. Cheryl Dunye, *The Watermelon Woman* (1997)
2. Nelson George and Diane Paragas, *Brooklyn Boheme* (2011)

**Note: links to essays and films 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. **Midterm Assignment: Reaction Paper (3-5 pages)**—Select one of the following: a chapter from a novel, a short story, a scholarly essay, or a film; and draft a creative or critical response to it. Prioritize your personal experience reading and thinking about the work. What experiences and/or feelings did it evoke? What impact did it have on you? What are the major takeaways?
2. **End of Term Assignment: Reflective Essay (10-12 pages)**—Write a reflective essay in which you discuss what you learned in this class. How has it changed your perspective? How did you grow? Which reading/viewing assignments made the biggest impression on you? How will you take what you learned in this class and apply it to your life going forward and/or use it to bring about positive change? I will provide a more detailed assignment sheet well in advance of the due date.

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Attendance & Participation	100	20
Midterm Paper	100	40
Final Paper	100	40
TOTAL	300	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

Grading Philosophy

For each written assignment you complete and submit, you will receive a score and a brief narrative statement (about 3-4 sentences) summarizing the strengths and weaknesses of your paper. My comments will address content (i.e. the quality and rigor of your ideas or argument) and composition (i.e. how well you write, including organization, grammar, mechanics, and usage). If you'd like to receive more substantive feedback, then make an appointment to meet with me during office hours.

Assignment Submission Policy

Assignments are due on the day listed on the syllabus. Please submit all work directly to me via email. Your work should be submitted as a MS Word document so that I can use the "reviewing" feature to comment on your paper. The file name should be: your first and last name_the name of the class_and the name of the assignment.

Grading Timeline

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

Additional Policies

1. **Attendance and Participation:** Consistent attendance and participation is critical to your success in this class. If you miss a class, then you should reach out to another student in the class for notes or make an appointment to see me during office hours. 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:** 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, or engage in a freewriting activity. After this, I/or another student might present important information in the form of a mini-lecture, guided discussion, or a reaction paper. Other times, I will give you an applied learning activity to work on in a pair or smaller group. Class will end with a summary/wrap-up of the material discussed.
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 for a 20-minute consultation. In office hours, I can elaborate on class discussions and help with assignments.
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/In-Class Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable
Week 1	T 8/22: Introductions, course overview, and syllabus Th 8/24: What is Contemporary African American Literature?	Review the syllabus and course Blackboard pages Trey Ellis, "The New Black Aesthetic"	
Week 2	T 8/29: Ellis and the NBA Th 8/31: Ashe and the Post-Soul	Bertram D. Ashe, "Theorizing the Post-Soul Aesthetic" Valerie Smith, "Foreword" to Andrea Lee's <i>Sarah Phillips</i> , pp. ix-xxii	
Week 3	T 9/05: Lee and the Black Feminist Literary Imagination Th 9/07: <i>Sarah Phillips</i> , pp. 3-38	<i>Sarah Phillips</i> , pp. 3-38 ("In France," "New African," and "Mother") <i>Sarah Phillips</i> , pp. 39-80 ("Gypsies," "Marching," "Servant Problems," "Matthew and Martha," and "The Days of the Thunderbirds")	

Week 4	T 9/12: <i>Sarah Phillips</i> , pp. 39-80 Th 9/14: <i>Sarah Phillips</i> , pp. 81-117	<i>Sarah Phillips</i> , pp. 81-117 (“An Old Woman,” “Negatives,” “Fine Points,” and “A Funeral at New African”) Mary Helen Washington, “Young, Gifted, and Black” Rev. of <i>Sarah Phillips</i> ; Melissa Daniels-Rauterkus, “Andrea Lee’s Europe”	
Week 5	T 9/19: Washington and Daniels-Rauterkus Th 9/21: <i>The Watermelon Woman</i>	Watch Cheryl Dunye’s film, <i>The Watermelon Woman</i> , available on Amazon and Hulu Laura Sullivan, “Chasing Fae: The Watermelon Woman and Black Lesbian Possibility”	
Week 6	T 9/26: Dunye and Sullivan Th 9/28: <i>Brooklyn Boheme</i>	Watch Nelson George and Diane Paragas’s film, <i>Brooklyn Boheme</i> , available online at USC Libraries Melissa Daniels-Rauterkus, “The New Jack Renaissance: Black Literary and Cultural Production and the Institutionalization of African American Literary Studies” (forthcoming)	
Week 7	T 10/03: Daniels-Rauterkus Th 10/05: Packer and <i>Drinking Coffee Elsewhere</i> , pp. 1-53	ZZ Packer, <i>Drinking Coffee Elsewhere</i> , pp. 1-53 (“Brownies” and “Every Tongue Shall Confess”) <i>Drinking Coffee Elsewhere</i> , pp. 54-116 (“Our Lady of Peace” and “The Ant of the Self”)	Midterm Paper Due on Fri., Oct. 6th by email
Week 8	T 10/10: <i>Drinking Coffee Elsewhere</i> , pp. 54-116 Th 10/12: No Class/Fall Recess	<i>Drinking Coffee Elsewhere</i> , pp. 117-209 (“Drinking Coffee Elsewhere” and “Speaking in Tongues”) <i>Drinking Coffee Elsewhere</i> , pp. 210-265 (“Geese” and “Doris is Coming”)	
Week 9	T 10/17: <i>Drinking Coffee Elsewhere</i> , pp. 117-265	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> ”	

	Th 10/19: Southgate and Adams	Dana Johnson, <i>In the Not Quite Dark</i> , pp. 1-22 (“Rogues”)	
Week 10	T 10/24: Johnson and <i>In the Not Quite Dark</i> , pp. 1-22 Th 10/26: <i>In the Not Quite Dark</i> , pp. 23-66	<i>In the Not Quite Dark</i> , pp. 23-66 (“Sunshine” and “Now, in the Not Quite Dark”) <i>In the Not Quite Dark</i> , pp. 67-100 (“Because That’s Just Easier” and “No Blaming the Harvard Boys”)	
Week 11	T 10/31: <i>In the Not Quite Dark</i> , pp. 67-100 Th 11/02: <i>In the Not Quite Dark</i> , pp. 101-120	<i>In the Not Quite Dark</i> , pp. 101-120 (“Buildings Talk” and “Art is Always and Everywhere the Secret Confession”) <i>In the Not Quite Dark</i> , pp. 121-158 (“The Liberace Museum” and “She Deserves Everything She Gets”)	
Week 12	T 11/07: <i>In the Not Quite Dark</i> , pp. 121-158 Th 11/09: <i>In the Not Quite Dark</i> , pp. 159-202	<i>In the Not Quite Dark</i> , pp. 159-202 (“Two Crazy Whores” and “The Story of Biddy Mason”) Danzy Senna, <i>New People</i> , pp. 1-40	
Week 13	T 11/14: Senna and <i>New People</i> , pp. 1-40 Th 11/16: <i>New People</i> , pp. 41-78	<i>New People</i> , pp. 41-78 <i>New People</i> , pp. 79-126	
Week 14	T 11/21: <i>New People</i> , pp. 79-126 Th 11/23: No Class/Thanksgiving Holiday	<i>New People</i> , pp. 127-186 <i>New People</i> , pp. 187-229	
Week 15	T 11/28: <i>New People</i> , pp. 187-229 Th 11/30: Course wrap-up and reflections		
FINAL			Final Paper Due on Fri., Dec. 8th by email

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