ENGLISH 203
HARLEM RENAISSANCE
UC BERKELEY - FALL 2020

Professor Bryan Wagner, bwagner@berkeley.edu
Course Hours: Thu 3:30-6:30, Barrows 180
Office Hours: Thu 12:00-2:00, Wheeler 416

The Harlem Renaissance was a cultural movement of black artists and writers in the 1920s and 1930s. Centered in New York, the movement extended outward through international collaboration. We will be reading works by writers including Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Nella Larsen, and Zora Neale Hurston and as well as manifestos about the nature and function of black art. Course themes include migration and metropolitan living, primitivism and the avant garde, diaspora and exile, passing and identity, sexuality and secrecy, and the relationship between modern art and vernacular tradition.

BOOKS

Jean Toomer, Cane (Liveright)
Jessie Fauset, There is Confusion (Modern Library)
James Weldon Johnson, The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man (Penguin)
Nella Larsen, Passing and Quicksand (Penguin)
Zora Neale Hurston, Mules and Men (Harper Collins)
Zora Neale Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God (Harper Collins)
Richard Wright, Black Boy (Harper Collins)

All other materials—documents, songs, images, and films—are available either on the course website or through linked resources made available without charge through the UC Berkeley library.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

This course is subject to university policies governing academic integrity, nondiscrimination, disability accommodation, and sexual harassment. Links to these policies are available on the course website.

CONTENT WARNING

Reading in this course features offensive language, including racial epithets. Students will encounter this language on the page, but it will not be spoken aloud in class. Students will also experience other challenging content in this course, including the representation of lynching and domestic violence.

EVALUATION

20% Weekly Questions
20% Class Participation
25% Reception History
35% Conference Paper

WEEKLY QUESTIONS

By midnight on Wednesday nights, you will submit 3-4 questions about the week's reading. In total, each submission should contain at least 300 words. Questions are to be entered under "Discussions" on the website. Please be sure to explain your questions in detail, using examples as needed. Work to formulate real questions—questions, in other words, to which you do not already have answers.

RECEPTION HISTORY

Students will write and share short essays (8 pages) reviewing the critical reception of one author or work. These essays should summarize the most important and influential research on your topic while outlining the predominant patterns of critical attention and the stakes of academic debates. Reception histories are due on November 3. Everyone will read the essays, and we will discuss them in class.

CONFERENCE PAPER

At the end of the semester, we will hold an informal conference at which students will present papers. We will follow the typical format for academic panels, with each presentation allotted 20 minutes. Be sure to consult with me about your ideas for the paper well in advance of writing so I can help to guide your research and thinking. Students will also submit written versions of their papers for evaluation.

ENGLISH 203
HARLEM RENAISSANCE
FALL 2020 - SCHEDULE

AUG 27 INTRODUCTION

The movement known in its time as the "Negro Renaissance" was only named in retrospect after the Harlem neighborhood in New York. It was one of several important cultural nationalist movements to emerge after the First World War. The Harlem Renaissance included not only artists and writers but influential editors and patrons. It was fostered by cultural institutions such as magazines, publishing houses, civil rights organizations, philanthropic foundations, museums, salons, and nightclubs.

Related Works: W. E. B. Du Bois, "Returning Soldiers" (1919)
A. Philip Randolph, "The Negro in Politics" (1919)
Marcus Garvey, "Africa for the Africans" (1921)
Gwendolyn Bennett, "To Usward" (1924)

SEP 3 MIGRATION AND RETURN

Toomer announces the modern artist's salvage mission to preserve the folk tradition of slavery, but face-to-face encounters in the rural south prove challenging and confusing. Migration accelerates the experience of modernization. Pastoral and gothic modes are conjoined in surreal black comedy.

Assignment: Jean Toomer, Cane (1923)

Related Works: Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Lynch Law in Georgia (1899)
W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Negro as He Really Is" (1901)
Robert Park, "Conflict and Fusion of Cultures" (1919)
Jacob Lawrence, The Migration of the Negro (1941)

SEP 10 MASTERY OF FORM

McKay, Johnson, and Cullen express racial themes in conventional verse, announcing the emergence of a "New Negro" by breaking with the plantation tradition. Sonnets capture the feelings of exile and alienation. In Cullen's sensual and decorous poems, the conflict of Christian and pagan inclinations figures the divided identity of the black poet as well as an ambivalence about homosexual desire.

Assignment: Countee Cullen, Color (1925)
Claude McKay, Harlem Shadows (1922)
Georgia Douglas Johnson, Bronze (1922)

Related Works: James Weldon Johnson, Preface to Book of American Negro Poetry (1922)
Margaret Sperry, "Negro Boy Poet Tells His Story" (1924)
Paul Laurence Dunbar, "A Negro Love Song" (1895)
Gwendolyn Bennett, "Heritage" (1923)

SEP 17 **COLOR AND CULTURE**

Fauset depicts passing as a moral dilemma in which loyalty and self-interest are opposed. She argues for literature that counters prevailing stereotypes by emphasizing black elite respectability. Along with Charles S. Johnson and Alain Locke, she builds institutions that promote the New Negro movement.

Assignment: Jessie Fauset, There is Confusion (1924)

Related Works: W. E. B. Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art" (1926)
Meta Fuller, "Ethiopia Awakening" (1910)
Jessie Fauset, "The Sleeper Wakes" (1920)
Lydia Maria Child, "The Quadroons" (1842)

SEP 24 **ENTER THE NEW NEGRO**

Locke attempts to encompass the New Negro movement prospectively rather than retrospectively. The anthology format suggests a modernist understanding of culture that recalls museum display. Reclamation of African style in visual and plastic arts is intertwined with the history of colonialism.

Assignment: Alain Locke, Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro (1925)

Related Works: Alain Locke, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts" (1925)
Miguel Covarrubias, "Cake Walk" (1927) and "Rhapsody in Blue" (1927)
Aaron Douglas, "Prodigal Son" (1927) and "Aspects of Negro Life" (1934)
Paul Whiteman Orchestra with George Gershwin, "Rhapsody in Blue" (1927)
Duke Ellington's Cotton Club Orchestra, "East St. Louis Toodle-oo" (1928)
Louis Armstrong and His Hot Seven, "Potato Head Blues" (1927)
Dudley Murphy, Black and Tan (1929) and St. Louis Blues (1929)

OCT 1 **BROTHER ESAU**

Johnson disguises his novel as an autobiography, prompting questions about identity and authorship. Passing is a psychological problem whose complexity is implied by picaresque plotting and unreliable narration. The mission to transform folk heritage into fine art is derailed by the trauma of lynching.

Assignment: James Weldon Johnson, The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man (1912/1927)

Related Works: W. E. B. Du Bois, "Strivings of the Negro People" (1897)
James Weldon Johnson, "O Black and Unknown Bards" (1917)
Fisk University Jubilee Singers, "Steal Away to Jesus" (1926)
Scott Joplin, "Maple Leaf Rag" (1899) and Treemonisha (1911)

OCT 8 **SHAME AND ITS SISTERS**

Larsen associates the mentality of the black bourgeoisie with psychological states of paranoia and psychosis depicted through unstable irony and strong focalization. Critics have asked whether the work is a novel about racial passing or instead a novel about sexuality passing as a novel about race.

Assignment: Nella Larsen, Passing (1929)

Related Works: Richard Bruce Nugent, "Shadow" (1925)
Mae Cowdery, "Insatiate" (1936) and "Heritage" (1936)
Gladys Bentley, "Worried Blues" (1928) and "I Am a Woman Again" (1952)
Langston Hughes, "Blessed Assurance" (1963)

OCT 15 **COMMON ELEMENTS**

A younger generation announces its break with the highbrow aesthetics and politics of respectability advocated by thinkers like W. E. B. Du Bois and Alain Locke, finding truth and beauty in bohemian life and sexual experimentation. Primitivism promises escape from entrapment by western civilization.

Assignment: Fire!! A Quarterly Devoted to Younger Negro Artists (1926)

Related Works: Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1926)
George Schuyler, "The Negro Art-Hokum" (1926)
Claude McKay, "Zeddy" and "Congo Rose" (1928)
Carl Van Vechten, "Prologue" (1926)

OCT 22 **HISTORY IN LIGHTNING**

Working apart from the Harlem Renaissance, a circle of independent filmmakers in the 1910s and 1920s produced black-cast films for black audiences (so-called "race films") as an alternative to the better financed but characteristically negrophobic cinema distributed by Hollywood studios.

Assignment: Oscar Micheaux, Within Our Gates (1920)

Related Works: Oscar Micheaux, Body and Soul (1925)
Frank Perugini, The Scar of Shame (1929)
D. W. Griffith, The Birth of a Nation (1915)

OCT 29 **MIDNIGHT ON LENOX AVENUE**

Hughes stages the poet's encounter with vernacular tradition, but does not aspire to elevate folkways into fine art. He values folkways on their own terms, especially their capacity for melancholy, aspiring to represent folk expression without apparent mediation. This commitment to cultural authenticity is challenged unexpectedly in slice-of-life poems that pose unresolved dilemmas for detached observers.

Assignment: Langston Hughes, The Weary Blues (1926)
Langston Hughes, Fine Clothes to the Jew (1927)
Langston Hughes, "Christ in Alabama" (1931 and 1967)

Related Works: Bessie Smith, "St. Louis Blues" (1925) and "Backwater Blues" (1927)
Geeshie Wiley, "Skinny Leg Blues" (1930) and "Last Kind Word Blues" (1930)
William Kelley, "Langston Hughes: The Sewer Dweller" (1927)
Thomas W. Talley, "A Study in Negro Folk Rhymes" (1922)
Sterling Brown, "Odyssey of Big Boy" (1927)

NOV 5 **RECEPTION HISTORY**

Students will write and share short essays (8 pages) reviewing the critical reception of one author or work. These essays should summarize the most important and influential research on your topic while outlining the predominant patterns of critical attention and the stakes of academic debates. Reception histories are due on November 3. Everyone will read the essays, and we will discuss them in class.

NOV 12 **THE SPYGLASS OF ANTHROPOLOGY**

Committed to the concepts of cultural relativism and participant observation in current anthropology, Hurston returns to her all-black hometown of Eatonville, Florida. In her fieldwork, Hurston reflects on her relationship to her own culture as well as the tensions she experiences as an organic intellectual.

Assignment: Zora Neale Hurston, Mules and Men (1935)

Related Works: Zora Neale Hurston, "Hoodoo in America" (1931)
Zora Neale Hurston, "Characteristics of Negro Expression" (1934)
Zora Neale Hurston, "Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals" (1934)
Franz Boas, "The Problem of Race" (1929)

NOV 19 **HOMECOMING**

Hurston narrates the struggle for personal autonomy by leavening dialect with figurative language and elaborating characterization through free indirect discourse. An anthropologist, Hurston addresses the problem of participant observation in a romance plot in which the suitor is also a native informant.

Assignment: Zora Neale Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937)

Related Works: Zora Neale Hurston, "How it Feels to Be Colored Me" (1928)
Sterling Brown, "Negro Character as Seen by White Authors" (1933)
Gabrielle Brown and Rochelle French, "John Henry" (1935)
Alice Walker, "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston" (1975)

DEC 3 **BROODING**

Wright poses an alternative to Hurston, rejecting assumptions about the positive value of folk culture associated with the Harlem Renaissance, assumptions that underestimate racism's power to destroy the consciousness of its victims. Wright overcomes these circumstances by engaging the imagination.

Reading: Richard Wright, Black Boy (1945)

Related Works: Zora Neale Hurston, "Stories of Conflict" (1938)
Richard Wright, "Between Laughter and Tears" (1937)
Richard Wright, "Blueprint for Negro Writing" (1937)
E. Franklin Frazier, "In the City of Destruction" (1939)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Louis Armstrong and His Hot Seven, “Potato Head Blues,” OKeh W80855, 1927.

Gwendolyn Bennett, “Heritage,” Opportunity 1 (1923): 371.

Gwendolyn Bennett, “To Usward,” Crisis 28 (1924): 19.

Gladys Bentley, “Worried Blues,” OKeh 401059, 1928.

Gladys Bentley, “I Am a Woman Again,” Ebony 7 (August 1952): 92-98.

Franz Boas, “The Problem of Race” in Anthropology and Modern Life (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1929), 18-61.

Gabrielle Brown, “John Henry,” AFC 2935-001, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress. Recorded by Zora Neale Hurston, Alan Lomax, and Mary Barnicle, Eatonville, Florida, 1935.

Sterling Brown, “Negro Character as Seen by White Authors,” Journal of Negro Education 2 (1933), 179-203.

Sterling Brown, “Odyssey of Big Boy,” in Countee Cullen, ed., Caroling Dusk (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1927), 130-132.

Lydia Maria Child, “The Quadroons” in The Liberty Bell, by Friends of Freedom (Boston: Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society,1842), 115–41.

Miguel Covarrubias, Negro Drawings (New York: Knopf, 1927).

Mae Virginia Cowdery, “Insatiate”and “Heritage,” in Lift Our Voices: And Other Poems (Philadelphia: Alpress, 1936), 58, 64.

Countee Cullen, Color (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1925).

Aaron Douglas, The Prodigal Son, 1927, oil on canvas, Richmond, Virginia Museum of Fine Art.

Aaron Douglas, Aspects of Negro Life,1934, oil on canvas, New York, Art and Artifacts Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

W. E. B. Du Bois, “Criteria of Negro Art,” Crisis 32 (1926), 290-297.

W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Negro As He Really Is,” World’s Work (June 1901), 848-866.

W. E. B. Du Bois, “Returning Soldiers,” Crisis 18 (1919): 13.

W. E. B. Du Bois, “Strivings of the Negro People,” Atlantic Monthly 80 (1897), 194-198.

Paul Laurence Dunbar, “A Negro Love Song” in Lyrics of Lowly Life (New York: Dodd Mead, 1895), 110-111.

Duke Ellington and His Orchestra, “East St. Louis Toodle-oo,” Victor BVE41245, 1928.

Jessie Fauset, “The Sleeper Wakes,” Crisis 20 (1920): 168-173, 226-229, 267-274.

Jessie Fauset, There is Confusion (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924).

Fire!! A Quarterly Devoted to Younger Negro Artists (1926; reprint, Metuchen, NJ: Fire Press, 1982).

Fisk University Jubilee Singers, “Steal Away to Jesus,” Columbia W141524, 1926.

E. Franklin Frazier, “In the City of Destruction” in The Negro Family in the United States (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), 269-390.

Meta Warrick Fuller, “Ethiopia Awakening,” 1910, Bronze, New York, Art and Artifacts Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

Marcus Garvey, “Africa for the Africans,” in Amy Jacques Garvey, ed., Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey (New York: Universal Publishing, 1923), 1:68-72.

D. W. Griffith, The Birth of a Nation (Los Angeles: Epoch Producing Corporation, 1915).

Langston Hughes, “Blessed Assurance,” in Something in Common (New York: Hill, 1963), 227-232.

Langston Hughes, “Christ in Alabama” Contempo 1 (1931): 1.

Langston Hughes, “Christ in Alabama,” The Panther and the Lash (New York: Knopf, 1967), 37.

Langston Hughes, Fine Clothes to the Jew (New York: Knopf, 1927).

Langston Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” Nation 122 (1926): 692-694.

Langston Hughes, The Weary Blues (New York: Knopf, 1926).

Zora Neale Hurston, “Characteristics of Negro Expression,” in Nancy Cunard, ed., Negro: An Anthology (London: Wishart, 1934), 39–46.

Zora Neale Hurston, “Hoodoo in America,” Journal of American Folklore 44 (1931): 317–417.

Zora Neale Hurston, “How it Feels to be Colored Me,” World Tomorrow 11 (1928): 215-216.

Zora Neale Hurston, Mules and Men (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1935).

Zora Neale Hurston "Spirituals and Neo–Spirituals," in Nancy Cunard, ed., Negro: An Anthology (London: Wishart, 1934), 359–61.

Zora Neale Hurston, “Stories of Conflict,” Saturday Review of Literature (2 April 1938): 32.

Zora Neale Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1937).

Georgia Douglas Johnson, Bronze: A Book of Verse (Boston: B. J. Brimmer, 1922).

James Weldon Johnson, The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man (New York: Knopf, 1927).

James Weldon Johnson, ”Preface” in The Book of American Negro Poetry (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1922), vii-xiviii.

James Weldon Johnson, “O Black and Unknown Bards” in Fifty Years and Other Poems (Boston: Cornhill, 1917), 6-8.

Scott Joplin, Maple Leaf Rag (St. Louis: John Stark and Son, 1899).

Scott Joplin, Treemonisha: Opera in Three Acts (New York: Scott Joplin, 1911).

[William Melvin Kelley], “Langston Hughes: The Sewer Dweller,” New York Amsterdam News (9 February 1927), 22.

Nella Larsen, Passing (New York: Knopf, 1929).

Jacob Lawrence, The Migration of the Negro, 1940-1941, Acrylic on Canvas, New York and Washington DC, Museum of Modern Art and Phillips Collection.

Alain Locke, “The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts” in Alain Locke, ed., The New Negro: An Interpretation (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925), 254-267.

Alain Locke, ed., “Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro,” Survey Graphic 6 (1925): 622-724.

Claude McKay, Harlem Shadows (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1922).

Claude McKay, Home to Harlem (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1928), 17-40.

Oscar Micheaux, dir., Within Our Gates (Chicago: Micheaux Book and Film Company, 1920).

Oscar Micheaux, dir., Body and Soul (Chicago: Micheaux Film Corporation, 1925).

Dudley Murphy, dir., Black and Tan (Los Angeles: RKO Radio Pictures, 1929).

Dudley Murphy, dir., St. Louis Blues (Los Angeles: RKO Radio Pictures, 1929).

Richard Bruce Nugent, “Shadow,” Opportunity 3 (1925): 296.

Robert E. Park, “The Conflict and Fusion of Cultures with Special Reference to the Negro,” Journal of Negro History 4 (1919): 111-133.

Frank Perugini, dir., The Scar of Shame (Philadelphia: Colored Players Film Corporation, 1929).

A. Philip Randolph, “The Negro in Politics,” Messenger 2 (1919): 16-17, 20-21.

George S. Schuyler, “The Negro Art-Hokum,” Nation 122 (1926): 662-663.

Bessie Smith, “St. Louis Blues,” Columbia 14064-D, 1925.

Bessie Smith, “Backwater Blues,” Columbia 14195-D, 1927.

Margaret Sperry, “Countee P. Cullen, Negro Boy Poet,” Brooklyn Daily Eagle (10 February 1924), 9.

Thomas W. Talley, “A Study in Negro Folk Rhymes” in Negro Folk Rhymes: Wise and Otherwise (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 228-326.

Jean Toomer, Cane (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1923).

Carl Van Vechten, Nigger Heaven (New York: Knopf, 1926), 3-16.

Alice Walker, “In Search of Zora Neale Hurston” Ms. Magazine (March 1975): 74-79, 85-89.

Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Lynch Law in Georgia (Chicago: Chicago Colored Citizens, 1899).

Paul Whiteman and His Concert Orchestra, “Rhapsody in Blue, Part 1” and “Rhapsody in Blue, Part 2,” Victor 35822, 1927.

Geeshie Wiley, “Last Kind Words Blues,” Paramount 12951A, 1930.

Geeshie Wiley, “Skinny Leg Blues,” Paramount 12951B, 1930.

Richard Wright, Black Boy (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945).

Richard Wright, "Between Laughter and Tears," New Masses 25 (1937): 22-23

Richard Wright, “Blueprint for Negro Writing.” New Challenge 1 (1937): 53–65.