

Our Head in the Lion's Mouth : Untold Stories and The Making of Modern African American Literature

English 7/8337: African American Literature 1930-1988

2:20pm-3:45pm Monday/Wednesday

Course Description:

Using texts from various time periods, we will examine how African-American authors wrestle with the question of blackness, particularly as it relates to its construction, by whites and African Americans, by individual and communities, and by the society and country at large. This class will trace the negotiation of the authors with the definition of blackness across political, literary, and historical cycles such as the emergence and presence of Jim Crow, through the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, and the emergence of black women writers. In particular, this course will trace the expansion and maturation of African American literature (and literary criticism) after the end of the Harlem Renaissance. This class covers how the multiple movements of the period (e.g. Black Arts) differed from movements like the Harlem Renaissance or how the emergence of black women's voices reversed the narrower focus of the Wright school. Emerging alongside the rapidly changing social, political, and economic landscapes within America and African America, we witness an impressive array of voices that not only reflect the lives of African Americans in the post-World War II moment, but that also interrogate the forces and structures that impact the lives the authors depict. So while we will certainly be interested in impact of the black nationalism and black middle class on the politics of the literature and criticism of the 1960s and 1980s respectively, we will also consider the exploration of black masculinity and femininity that those movements reinforced or challenged. Finally this class culminates with an examination of artists and critics who combined elements of distinct African American culture with the politics and aesthetics of multiple movements to become mainstream popular and critical successes. These works expand African American literature beyond the reflections of slavery and segregation to the varied concerns of African America in the post-Civil Rights America and setting the standard and agenda for African American literature in the twenty-first century.

Required Texts:

Primary Texts

Baldwin, James	<i>Another Country</i>
Bambara, Toni Cade, ed.	<i>The Black Woman</i>
Ellison, Ralph	<i>Invisible Man</i>
Hurston, Zora Neale	<i>Jonah's Gourd Vine</i>
Morrison, Toni	<i>The Bluest Eye</i>
Reed, Ishmael	<i>Flight to Canada</i>
Walker, Alice	<i>The Third Life of Grange Copeland</i>
Gaines, Ernest	<i>A Gathering of Old Men</i>
Wilson, August	<i>Joe Turner's Come and Gone</i>
Wright, Richard	<i>Native Son</i>
Wolfe, George C.	<i>The Colored Museum</i>