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AAS 267 African American Literature

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Syllabus

AAS 267 01W: African American Literature

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Course Description and Objectives:

This experience of a whole race beginning to go to school for the first time, presents one of the most interesting studies that has ever occurred in connection with the development of any race. Few people who were not right in the midst of the scenes can form any exact idea of the intense desire which the people of my race showed for an education. As I have stated, it was a whole race trying to go to school. Few were too young, and none too old, to make the attempt to learn. As fast as any kind of teachers could be secured, not only were day-schools filled, but night-schools as well. The great ambition of the older people was to try to learn to read the Bible before they died. With this end in view, men and women who were fifty or seventy-five years old would often be found in the night-school. Sunday-schools were formed soon after freedom, but the principal book studied in the Sunday-school was the spelling-book. Day-school, night-school, Sunday-school, were always crowded, and often many had to be turned away for want of room.

— Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* (1901)

AAS 267, African American Literature, is a survey course that will take us from the early days of enslavement to the present. We will read, analyze, and discuss literary texts written by African Americans, paying particular attention to the political, historical and social context that informs these texts. As the above quotation from Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery* illustrates, reading and writing have always been central to the struggle for self-definition in a nation that used words and ideas as weapons to exclude African Americans from national life. Through our aesthetic and contextual approaches, we will consider how writers used literary self-representations to challenge and to interact with, to reappropriate and to revise the "majority" culture's definitions. African American literature and culture thereby define and constitute the nation in ways both significant and profound. The themes we will explore this semester, therefore, will include identity, citizenship, and belonging, evolving representations of gender and sexuality, and activist and aesthetic responses to institutional and extra-legal violence. I have uploaded numerous resources on Blackboard that include visual and musical contexts for the literature we are studying. While our Blackboard site will present you with a number of resources to begin your research, the use of Discussion Board will allow you to contribute your own thoughts and voices to our exploration this semester.

PLEASE NOTE: THIS IS A LITERATURE COURSE WITH A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF REQUIRED READING. IF YOU DO NOT LIKE TO READ, THIS IS NOT THE COURSE FOR YOU.

As a 200 level literature course, African American Literature will ask you to draw on the critical reading and writing skills you have learned in earlier classes, but it also is intended to build on these skills, in preparation for life beyond the undergraduate degree. Specifically, we will focus on increasing your research, argumentation, and documentation skills, as well as your ability to incorporate critical sources into your writing.

By the end of the course, students will:

- develop an understanding of African American Literature encompassing various genres, forms, and historical periods.
- Develop critical thinking skills while examining major themes in African American literature.
- write analytically about African American Literature, making direct connections between past and present.
- learn to use theoretical language and ideas in their academic essays.
- locate and critically evaluate print and electronic sources.
- integrate primary and secondary sources into their writing, following the formatting and documenting conventions of the MLA style.

Required Texts: All available online as indicated in your syllabus.

Supplemental Texts:

The supplemental texts for this course can be located in the Content button on your course menus in Blackboard.

Course Requirements

- **Postings to Discussion Board:** Each week you will be required to post one or two responses to the week's readings on the Discussion Board on Blackboard site. Your responses will focus on questions or activities that I (or a selected classmate) have posted about the class text. These postings are informal but they should be substantial (NOT a sentence or two) and follow the rules of academic writing (not too casual, no online abbreviations, etc.) ***You will be responsible for responding to postings by TWO of your classmates each week in addition to your own posting.*** These assignments are listed on the course reading schedule as DB . *These assignments are due unless otherwise specified every Wednesday by 12am; responses to your classmates' postings are due by Friday at 12pm.*

- **Presentation:** During week two, each of you will sign up for a presentation date (please see guidelines on Blackboard).
- **Midterm Essay.** This essay will focus on an original analysis and critique of two representations from the course. Rather than trying to talk about all the issues in a particular narrative, it is best that your essay focuses on a single idea, theme, question or connection between the **two texts**. These essays should be well organized, proofread, and typed. In elaborating on your argument, your essay should discuss *one or two outside sources* using MLA citation. (typed, 5 pages) Please note: Wikipedia is not a scholarly source. You should also evaluate online sources carefully to see where the information comes from. In other words, a blog post that makes claims without credible support and citations is not a source.
- **Final Essay:** This essay will make an original argument about three texts from the course, focusing a shared theme and discussing the similar and different ways the texts (remember that I am using text to include ALL media) treat this theme, particularly in terms of the historical moment in which they are produced. While you may mention texts discussed in your midterm, this essay should primarily focus on texts considered during the second half of the semester. Your analysis and critique should incorporate *two to three outside sources* using MLA citation. (typed 7 pages)
- **Final Exam:** In this exam you will consist of two sections: part one: in which you will be asked to identify significant quotations from our readings this semester, and part two, in which you will be asked to write two essays on major themes from the semesters readings.

Grading:

Late assignments will be graded down unless (with a good reason) you arrange in advance for an extension. Extensions are generally limited to one week after the due date, after which your paper will not be accepted. Point value for each assignment listed below:

Discussion Board Postings and Presentation	(25%)
Midterm Essay	(25%)
Final Essay	(25%)
Final Exam	(25%)

Grading Criteria for each assignment will be posted on Blackboard under Assignments.

A Note on Attendance:

As with any college class, in order to be successful it is essential to be in class, to participate in our discussion of class texts and weekly topics, and to offer thoughtful feedback on your classmates' postings and formal writing assignments. You are expected to complete all assigned online work on time in order to succeed in this course. Absences, failure to participate in weekly

online work, and tardiness will affect your grade. Any material missed due to an absence is your responsibility.

Services for Students with Disabilities: Lehman College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students can request services by contacting the Office of Student Disability Services located in Shuster Hall, Room 238. Students should be prepared to discuss the nature of the disability, the impact on learning, and the accommodations needed to help you meet your academic goals. Please contact (718) 960-8441 to schedule an appointment.

The Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) and the Science Learning Center (SLC)

The Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) and the Science Learning Center (SLC) are two of the tutoring centers on campus. The ACE provides appointment based and drop-in tutoring in the humanities, social sciences, and writing, as well as general writing and academic skills workshops. The SLC provides drop-in tutoring for natural and computer science courses. To obtain more information about the ACE and the SLC, please visit their website at <http://www.lehman.edu/issp>, or please call the ACE at 718-960-8175, and the SLC at 718-960-7707.

Additional Policies:

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of someone else's work as one's own in all forms of academic endeavor (such as essays, theses, examinations, research data, creative projects, etc), intentional or unintentional. Plagiarized material may be derived from a variety of sources, such as books, journals, internet postings, student or faculty papers, etc. This includes the purchase or "outsourcing" of written assignments for a course. A detailed definition of plagiarism in research and writing can be found in the fourth edition of the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, pages 26-29. Be sure to properly cite the source for any outside information/quotes used in your papers. You will receive **no credit** on any essay with plagiarized material and risk the chance of receiving no credit for the entire course. Students are expected to be familiar with the accepted academic principles regarding plagiarism; procedures concerning allegations of plagiarism and penalties are set forth in the student handbook.

<http://www.lehman.edu/student-affairs/student-handbook.php>



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