

Department of English & Writing Studies

English 4470F (001)
Seminar in American Literature: The Harlem Renaissance
Fall 2024

Instructor: Prof. Alyssa MacLean

Course format: in-person, synchronous

Prerequisites: 1.0 from English 3000-3999 or permission of the Department.

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Course Description

This course will explore the extraordinary creativity, improvisation, and innovation of the period known as the Harlem Renaissance. Read in its most static sense, the term “Harlem Renaissance” invokes a Black cultural movement emerging in a fixed time and place when Black artistic culture was “reborn” in a single district of New York City. However, we will be using the term to refer more broadly to a period of Black cultural production, improvisation, and conversation, one which developed from the late 1910s to the 1940s and which involved not only Black authors in Harlem but also Black authors across the US and worldwide. We will study how their texts speak to the dynamic energy of their era and affirm a sense of dignity in the face of repressive anti-Black policies in the United States. We will study how these texts respond to, or “signify” upon, white supremacist culture in the U.S., modernist aesthetics, and forms of Black expression. While we will be concentrating primarily on literary texts (notably poetry and novels), we will also think beyond the boundaries of literature to consider other forms of creativity such as jazz and visual art. Over the course of the term, we will study fiction including Nella Larsen’s *Passing*, Jean Toomer’s *Cane*, James Weldon Johnson’s *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, and Claude McKay’s *Home to Harlem*. We will read short essays crucial to the development of artistic thought in the period by Alain Locke, George Schuyler, and Richard Wright. We will study poetic works by Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, and Sterling Brown. Theorists such as Judith Butler and Frantz Fanon will inform our readings of certain works. Finally, we will pay special attention to the importance of vernacular traditions including spirituals, blues, and jazz. Students will be required to write 2 position papers, co-present a seminar, and write a 14-page research paper.

Use of recordings: Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation, or the participant has the prior permission of the instructor.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the course, successful students will be able to:

- Analyze key texts in Harlem Renaissance literature, explain their significance, and appreciate their characteristics and qualities
- Generate original, incisive readings of assigned works in oral and written assignments
- Read and understand theoretical and critical works about Harlem Renaissance literature and culture; summarize and cite literary scholarship responsibly; use discussions of secondary sources to generate new interpretations of texts
- Express ideas clearly using appropriate textual evidence, literary terms, scholarly criticism, theoretical concepts, historical contexts, and insights from class discussions
- Design and execute a research project: formulate a research question, identify research gaps, analyze and summarize scholarship, and offer original readings of texts
- Use specialized research methods such as library databases to conduct research
- Communicate effectively and respond constructively to peers in multiple contexts, including discussions, papers, and seminars.

Course Materials

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr., and Valerie Smith. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, 3rd ed, vol 1, Norton, 2014.

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. HarperCollins, 2006.

Other texts will be made available via OWL.

Methods of Evaluation

The final mark for the course will be arrived at as follows:

Position paper 1 (2-3 pages, on a literary work)	15%
Position paper 2 (2-3 pages, on literature, music, art, or theory)	15%
20-minute joint seminar	20%
Research paper proposal	5%
Research paper (12-14 pages)	30%
Participation and engagement	15%

Students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/Student%20Information.html>.