**African American Literature in the Archives**

**ENGL 221 / AFAM 212**

**Melissa Barton Office Hours: W 11:15a-12:15p and by appt**

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**W 9:25-11:15a**

**Course Description**

This course places African American literary texts within their archival context, examining how texts were planned, composed, revised, and received in their time.  Each class meeting will pair a text or texts with archival materials from Beinecke Library, including manuscripts, correspondence, photographs, and ephemera. Students will gain an understanding of archival organization and how archival materials can be placed in conversation with published work by examining published and unpublished texts as well as scholarly uses of archival materials.

**Goals**

By the end of this course, students will:

* understand how archival materials tell the history of a literary text
* understand the types of materials found in literary archives
* learn how to use library resources to learn about the historical presentation and reception of a work of art
* improve their skills at writing literary analysis

Course Requirements

**Class Participation, 20%**

The most important requirement for this course is regular attendance and active participation in class discussion. In order to participate fully in each class discussion, you will need to have the week’s readings with you.

**Canvas discussion postings, 10%**

Each week, please post a one- to three-paragraph informal response on the Canvas discussion board. Posts should ask questions about the readings, analyze the arguments of essays where applicable, and respond to other posts. One way to write a strong response is to select a brief passage (or several related passages) from a text or an essay that strikes you in some way and explain what that way is. You may also juxtapose two or more of the week’s readings, or compare the week’s readings to previous readings or discussions. A lively dialogue with your classmates will be the most productive use of this assignment. I will read your posts, but I will not grade them, except to make sure you have fulfilled the requirement.

**Short paper: textual analysis 15%**

You will write a close reading of 4-6 pages in response to a prompt.

**Exhibition Presentation 15%**

You will research the production or reception of a text using online resources available through Yale library and archival resources at Beinecke and elsewhere. You will present brief findings to the class in the form of a 2-3 item exhibition of material with written labels of 150-200 words. Exhibited materials may be facsimiles (i.e. printouts) or items drawn from Beinecke’s collection. This research will also inform your final paper.

**Final Paper, 40%**

The final paper of 10-12 pages will invite you to combine a formal analysis of a text with consideration of that text’s production and reception history.

**Texts**

James Baldwin, *Go Tell it on the Mountain* (Vintage)

Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun and The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window* (Vintage)

Langston Hughes, *The Weary Blues*, ed. Young (Knopf)

James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, ed. Goldsby (Norton)

Yusef Komunyakaa, *Neon Vernacular* (Wesleyan Poetry Series)

August Wilson, *The Ground on Which I Stand* (TCG)

---, *Fences* (Plume)

Richard Wright, *Native Son* (Perennial Classics)

*All other readings (marked \*) will be provided in electronic form*

**Schedule**

**Week 1, Aug 30: Introduction**

Reading (in class):

Langston Hughes, “Harlem” in *Montage of a Dream Deferred\**

Materials from Beinecke collection: manuscripts of *Montage of a Dream Deferred*

**Week 2, Sep 6: Working Backwards from a Critical Edition**

Readings:

James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, ed. Jacqueline Goldsby (Norton)

Materials from Beinecke collection: Materials from James Weldon Johnson and Grace Nail Johnson Papers; editions of *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*

**Week 3, Sep 13: The Making of *The Weary Blues***

Readings:

Langston Hughes, *The Weary Blues* facsimile edition (ed. Kevin Young)

Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes* (excerpt)\*

Materials from Beinecke collection: Hughes correspondence with Jessie Fauset, Carl Van Vechten, Blanche Knopf, Alfred Knopf; Van Vechten correspondence with Hughes, Blanche Knopf, Alfred Knopf

**Week 4, Sep 20: Production and Reception History: *Porgy and Bess***

Readings:

DuBose and Dorothy Heyward, *Porgy\**

DuBose Heyward, Preface to *Porgy\**

Materials from Beinecke collection: Scripts, correspondence, photographs, advertisements for *Porgy* and *Porgy and Bess* from the Theatre Guild Archive

\*In-class session on online resources for primary source research

**Week 5, Sep 27: Production and Reception History: The Harlem Suitcase Theater and the Negro People’s Theaters**

Readings:

Langston Hughes, *Don’t You Want to Be Free?\**

Theodore Ward, *Big White Fog\**

Materials from Beinecke collection:

Drafts of *Don’t You Want to Be Free?*

Harlem Suitcase Theater materials

Hughes’s correspondence with Ted Ward, Fanny McConnell and Frank Greenwood

**Week 6, Oct 4: The Clippings File: Race in Casting**

Alain Locke, “The Drama of Negro Life”\*

August Wilson, *The Ground on Which I Stand*

Materials from Beinecke collection: Clippings File of the James Weldon Johnson Collection, files on African American actors (James Earl Jones, Paul Robeson, Diana Sands)

**\*Short papers due**

**Week 7, Oct 11: FIELD TRIP: Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, details TBD**

**FALL BREAK**

**Week 8, Oct 25: *Native Son***

Readings:

Richard Wright, *Native Son*, Parts I and II

Materials from Beinecke collection: drafts, correspondence, and clippings regarding *Native Son* from the Richard Wright Papers

**Week 9, Nov 1: *Native Son***

Readings:

Richard Wright, *Native Son*, Part III and “How Bigger Was Born”

Richard Wright, “The Problem of the Hero”

Materials from Beinecke collection: drafts, correspondence, and clippings regarding *Native Son* from the Richard Wright Papers

**Week 10, Nov 8: Finding Collaborators**

Readings:

Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*

Materials from Beinecke Collection: materials from the Lloyd Richards Papers and Philip Rose Papers; Clippings File of the James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection

**Week 11, Nov 15: Exhibition Presentations**

**[THANKSGIVING BREAK]**

**Week 12, Nov 29: August Wilson’s Century Cycle and History**

Readings:

August Wilson, *Fences*

Materials from Beinecke collection: Correspondence, drafts, notes, and photographs from the Lloyd Richards Papers; Clippings File of the James Weldon Johnson Collection (files on Jackie Robinson, African American Athletes--Baseball)

**Week 13, Dec 6: Archives of Contemporary Authors**

Readings:

Yusef Komunyakaa, *Neon Vernacular*

Materials from Beinecke collection: Yusef Komunyakaa Papers

**December 14: Reading Period ends, final papers due by 5pm**

**A Selection of Archival Collections**

**Selected Beinecke Collections Related to African American Literature and Drama**

Clippings File of the James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection, JWJ MSS 89

Langston Hughes Papers, JWJ MSS 26

Zora Neale Hurston Collection, JWJ MSS 9

James Weldon and Grace Nail Johnson Papers, JWJ MSS 49

Georgia Douglas Johnson Collection, [uncatalogued]

Eugene O’Neill Papers, YCAL MSS 123

Gene Persson Papers Relating to Dutchman, YCAL MSS 480

Photographs of Prominent African Americans, JWJ MSS 76

Lloyd Richards Papers, YCAL MSS 366

Philip Rose Papers, YCAL MSS 438

Gertrude Stein Papers, YCAL MSS 76

Florine and Ettie Stettheimer Papers, YCAL MSS 20

Theatre Guild Archive, YCAL MSS 436

Richard Wright Papers, JWJ MSS 3

Carl Van Vechten Papers

Yusef Komunyakaa Papers, JWJ MSS 152

**Other Collections to Consider (just for starters!)**

Yale Manuscripts and Archives

Crawford Theater Collection, MS 1387

Records of Yale Repertory Theatre, RU 148

Records of the Yale University Dramatic Association, RU 300

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Billy Rose Theatre Division

Theater on Film and Tape (TOFT) Collection