

Fall 2020 Course Description

Instructor: Regina Mills

Course: ENGL/AFST 204

Title: Intro to African American Literature: Black Public Intellectuals

Description: “The history of Black Literature provides, in my opinion, a much more illuminating account of the nature of freedom, its extent and limited, than all the philosophical discourses on this theme in the history of Western society.” – Angela Y. Davis, *Lectures on Liberation*

The theme of this course is “Black Public Intellectuals” and it takes seriously Davis’s claim in the epigraph above that Black Literature provides more illuminating commentary on the nature of freedom, and I would argue, many other topics of grave concern to all people. This course provides an overview of several key public intellectuals of African descent and their literature, which continues to impact public thought, particularly in the US, on key issues to this day. We will examine the literary and cultural texts of varied Black intellectual voices across genres and from different periods of US history, such as post-Reconstruction, Puerto Rican colonization, and the Harlem Renaissance. The course texts will show how Black public intellectuals have been and continue to be in conversation over topics of import to Black Americans, citizens of the United States, and people of color throughout the world, such as: the purpose of education, the creation of history and archives, the multi-faceted nature of oppression, what economic system is best for people, and of course, the nature of freedom and unfreedom. Texts will cover a variety of genres: speeches, memoirs, poetry, essays, manifestos, short stories, and more. The course will examine debates spanning more than 150 years: from the abolition of slavery to the abolition of the prison system.

Proposed Readings: Readings may include:

- Fredrick Douglass, “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July” (4 Jul 1852)
- Booker T. Washington, 1895 Atlanta Exposition Speech (18 Sep 1895)
- WEB DuBois, Chapter III, “Of Booker T. Washington and Others” and Chapter XIII, “Of the Coming of John” in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)
- Arturo Alfonso Schomburg, “Racial Integrity: A Plea for the Establishment of a Chair of Negro History in Our Schools and Colleges, etc.” (July 1913)
- Langston Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (23 Jun 1926); selected poems: “Formula,” “Alabama Earth,” “Open Letter to the South,” “Call to Creation,” “The Bitter River,” “The Ballad of Booker T” from *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* (1995, ed. Arnold Rampersad); stories from *The Best of Simple*, “Banquet in Honor,” “Vicious Circle”.
- Jesus Colon, *A Puerto Rican in New York* (1961)
- Audre Lorde, “Poetry Is Not a Luxury” (1977) and “Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism” (1981) from *Sister Outsider* and selected poems from *Collected Poems*: “There Are No Honest Poems About Dead Women,” “Rites of Passage,” “The Day They Eulogized Mahalia,” “Who Said It Was Simple,” “The American Cancer Society Or There Is More Than One Way To

Skin A Coon," "Power," "A Woman Speaks," "Afterimages," "A Litany for Survival"
-Angela Y. Davis, Lectures on Liberation (1969); "Preface" and "Nets" from Angela Davis: An
Autobiography (1974).
-Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations" in The Atlantic (2014), Black Panther comics
-Vann R. Newkirk II, "This Land Was Our Land" in The Atlantic (2019)