

English 7328 / 8328
Studies in Major Authors: African American Literature

Fall 2021
Thursdays, 5:30 – 8:30 pm
Patterson 221 and via Zoom

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And dishwater gives back no images.
—William Waring Cuney

Description:

This course provides a forum for in-depth study of African American authors, focusing on relationships among them and comparing their aesthetics. We will examine both established and emerging writers, as well as canonical and lesser-known works. Along with exploring traditional readings, I will invite you to promote new readings and emerging contexts—especially with reference to the American Left, queer theory, postcolonial studies, and contemporary feminist theory.

The word “image” in Waring Cuney’s prize-winning 1926 poem “No Images” suggests W. E. B. Du Bois’s concept of “double-consciousness.” Cuney and his artistic cohorts ably demonstrated Du Bois’s theory, as they negotiated racial and gendered conflicts in their pursuit of intellectual, artistic, and political achievement. The poem also manifests major themes in the literature examined in this course: the celebration of black women; defiance of race and gender limitations; protest against discrimination and economic inequality; and the Blues as voice and metaphor for the disenfranchised. The seminar will meet weekly on campus, although all classes will be available via Zoom for those who are unable or do not wish to attend class in-person.

Primary Texts:

Paul Laurence Dunbar, *The Sport of the Gods* (1902)
Paul Laurence Dunbar, *Selected Poems*
James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912)
James Weldon Johnson, *God’s Trombones* (1927)
Waring Cuney, *Selected Poems*
Toni Morrison, *God Help the Child* (2015)
Britt Bennett, *The Mothers* (2016)
Chanelle Benz, *The Gone Dead* (2019)
Britt Bennett, *The Vanishing Half* (2020)