

Instructor: Brian Baaki

Course: English 3325.001

Course Description

In this class, we will study a range of works in early African American literature from its inception in the Colonial Period through the Harlem Renaissance. We will begin with the first slave narrative by Briton Hammon (1760) and then read the spiritual autobiographies of John Marrant (1785), John Jea (1815), and Jarena Lee (1836). Before break, we will study some of the first works of African American fiction from the 1850s: Frederick Douglass's *The Heroic Slave* (1852), William Wells Brown's *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter* (1853), and Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859). We will resume after break with an examination of two slave narratives written after slavery, William Wells Brown's *My Southern Home* (1880) and Lucy Delaney's *From the Darkness Cometh the Light* (1890), before ending with three complex, modernist novels that will take us to the Harlem Renaissance: Paul Laurence Dunbar's *The Sport of the Gods* (1902), James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), and Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928). Alongside these prose works, we will survey the poetry of Phillis Wheatley, Frances Harper, and Paul Laurence Dunbar throughout the term. Through this study, will gain a sense of the transatlantic and transcultural currents guiding African American literature from its beginning and across three centuries. We will also work as a class to develop a working definition of early African American literature, to articulate what links modern texts to works from earlier periods. Students will be required to submit short summary essays on secondary readings, two mid-length critical research papers, and complete mid-term and final exams.