

Brian Baaki

Spring 2020 Course Description

English 3325

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 narratives by Briton Hammon (1760) and James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw (1772), along with the poetry of Phillis Wheatley (1773). We will then read the autobiographies of early African Americans John Marrant (1785) and Venture Smith (1798). Moving into the antebellum period, we will study some of the first works of African American fiction from the 1850s: Frederick Douglass's *The Heroic Slave* (1852) and Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859). We will continue with an examination of Frances Ellen Watkins' poetry of the Reconstruction period, *Sketches of Southern Life* (1872), before ending with three complex, modernist works that will take us through 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 Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). Through this study, we 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 complete regular reading response assignments, submit two mid-length critical research papers, write a short summary of an assigned secondary text, and complete a final exam.