



Kara Walker, *Gone: An Historical Romance of a Civil War as It Occurred b'tween the Dusky Thighs of One Young Negress and Her Heart* 1994

# ENGL 105: African American Literature\*\*\*

Dr. Robert LaRue  
Fall 2020  
Online

Email: [laruer@moravian.edu](mailto:laruer@moravian.edu)  
Office Location: online  
Office Hours: online by  
appointment

Syllabus version: 9/28/20

African American Literature is a branch of African American Studies (or its more Diasporic counterpart Africana Studies), which itself is the intellectual and political confluence of various disciplines aimed at investigating and cultivating the collective experiences of Black folk in the United States in particular, but not exclusively. The objective of this course is to introduce students to African American Literature, and by extension, African American Studies, through various depictions of the lived experiences of African Americans, paying close attention to those that emerge in historical discourses, art, language, literature, cultural studies, film, music, poetry, and drama. To this end, this course outlines the various subjects of African American Literature through the historical, literary, aural, and oral texts that reflect the culture of Black folk in the United States.

**Course Objectives:** By the end of this 100-level, M2 course, students should be able to:

- Closely read, analyze, and interpret texts
- Critically reflect on the complex relationship between texts and one's own lived experiences
- Identify and articulate major periods, movements, and genres within the field of African American Literature, and the relationships of these to historical and cultural developments
- Engage with difficult ethical questions regarding African American experiences

**Course Texts.** (Check Course Schedule below for actual reading order)

**Short Stories, Poetry & More (\*\* = provided on Canvas):**

Anonymous, "All God's Children Had Wings" and "Brer Rabbit"  
 Baldwin, James. "Sonny's Blues"  
 Butler, Octavia E. \*\* "Bloodchild"  
 Douglass, Frederick. *Narratives of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*  
 Dunbar, Paul Laurence. "We Wear the Mask" and "Frederick Douglass"  
 Hemphill, Essex. \*\* "When My Brother Fell," "Fixin' Things," "Commitments," "Family Jewels," "If I Simply Wanted Status, I'd Wear Calvin Klein"; "XXI," "XXII," "XXIV" (in your anthology)  
 Hopkins, Pauline. "Talma Gordon"  
 Hughes, Langston. "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "Mother to Son," "Danse Africaine," "Dream Variations," "I, Too," "Mulatto," "Afro-American Fragment," "Harlem," "Motto," "Theme for English B"  
 Hurston, Zora N. "Characteristics of Negro Expression"  
 Lorde, Audre. "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action"  
 Nugent, Richard Bruce. \*\* "Sahdji"  
 Obama, Barak. "A More Perfect Union"  
 Rankine, Claudia. \*\* *Citizen: An American Lyric*  
 Washington, Bryan. \*\* "Visitor"  
 Wheatley, Phyllis. "Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral," "On Being Brought from Africa to America," "On Imagination"  
 Wright, Richard. "Blueprint for Negro Writing"

**\*\*\*Disclaimer:** Due to its subject matter, some of the material will contain mature content—some of which will be violent, some of which will be explicitly sexual.

**\*Note:** I encourage you to submit your best work. Nevertheless, please understand that the quality of your submission serves as the basis of your grade, not simply the quantity submitted, or the effort put into the submission. Consequently, your grades might not always reflect your efforts.

To earn an "A" on assignments, you first need to successfully meet the expectations explicitly stated in the prompts. Then you must exceed these stated expectations. This often means looking between the lines of what is explicitly stated and offering more nuanced responses to the prompts.

Finally, the rounding of final grades is a courtesy extended to those whose engagement with the course warrants it.

**Grades.\*** This course uses a point system. You begin with zero (0) points and build your grade as assignments are completed. The number of points you have at the end of the semester will be your final grade.

Weekly Quizzes (10 @ 10 pts. each)	100 pts.
Discussion Posts (6 @ 50 pts. ea.)	300 pts.
Exams (2 exams, the lowest exam will be dropped)	200 pts.
Analysis Presentation	160 pts.
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b>	<b>760 pts.</b>
A=760-707; A-=706-684; B+=683-661; B=660-631; B-=630-608; C+=607-585; C=584-555; C-=554-532; D+=531-509; D=508-479; D-=478-456, F=455 and below	

**Major Assignments.\*\*** (See each prompt for specific instructions)

**Quizzes (10 total):** Each week, you will be asked to complete a short (approximately 10 questions) quiz over the materials assigned for the week. These quizzes are meant to not only test your knowledge of the material but also your ability to apply that knowledge. The questions will be a mix of multiple choice, multiple answer, and true/false. Each question will be labeled accordingly.

**Discussion posts (6):** Each week, you will be asked to interact with your classmates by responding to a set of questions on the discussion board. Treat these posts as a conversation, rather than as a chore or even checklist. While there are accurate responses, there are no “right” answers to the questions you’ll be asked. Instead, aim to clearly support the responses you provide—don’t just assume that what you say will make sense. Your posts must be submitted no later than 11:59 p.m., each Saturday. Additionally, you will need to provide substantive responses and feedback to at least one peer no later than 11:59 p.m., each Sunday. You must complete discussion posts and responses in six different weeks. Since there are 10 discussion posts scheduled during the semester, this means that the lowest four discussion post grades will be dropped—you may either submit posts and responses for these four weeks or not; the choice is yours.

**Exams (2):** The exams will test your comprehension of the discussions and materials covered up to the exam. It will consist of a mix of multiple choice, true/false, and multiple answers questions that will ask you to both recall information *and* apply your knowledge. There will be two exams, with each exam worth 200 points. The lowest exam score will be dropped. (This means that only one exam worth 200 points will be counted towards your grade.)

**Analysis Presentation (<5-minute video presentation + <4-page written narrative):** This presentation will ask you to demonstrate your understanding of the theories, concepts, and materials we read through an analysis of a text that was not read during the course. These will be recorded video presentations and will require visual aids and considerable preparation. The presentation will consist of a video component and a written component—both of which must be submitted to receive credit for the assignment.

**Submitting work:** *Unless requested otherwise, all work must be submitted via Canvas, and by the specified deadline, in order to receive a grade. Work submitted via email will not be accepted or graded. Furthermore, work submitted without the proper MLA heading (your name, course, instructor, date, etc.) will receive an automatic deduction of 10% of the assignment’s possible value. To ensure that your work is accessible, please submit your work only as either .doc, .docx, or .pdf files—do not share work with me as a Google file, unless specifically requested to do so. It is your responsibility to ensure that your work is submitted and accessible.*

**Feedback:** *The feedback that I provide you on your assignments is not, nor will it ever be either comprehensive or meant to justify the grade you have earned. Rather, my feedback is meant to provide you with advice for you to use in (1) thinking over the assignment at hand, and (2) looking forwarding to your future submissions. Please come see me if you have questions or would like additional feedback on your work.*

### Course Expectations.

**Engagement:** *You are expected to actively and meaningfully participate. This means, your comments, questions, and responses should work to advance the class discussions in significant and insightful ways. Your online interactions are expected to follow the same standards as face-to-face participation—i.e., demonstrate a serious and critical attempt to engage the class, its materials, and its discussions. Posts failing to do this will not be counted, no matter how long the post.*

### Classroom Behavior:

1. *Read the appropriate materials each lesson.*
2. *Be respectful, attentive, and conscientious.*
3. *Arrive punctually to all group activities. If you arrive late, please join as discretely as possible. Keep in mind, though, habitual tardiness (more than 5 minutes late) negatively impacts your ethos and will impact your requests for things like deadline extensions.*

### Course Policies.

**Late Assignments.** NO LATE, MISSED, or UNSUBMITTED ASSIGNMENTS, AND/OR QUIZZES WILL BE ACCEPTED past the extension breakdown provided below. Since all work is to be submitted electronically, via Canvas, absences—either excused or unexcused—do not excuse you from work. If special arrangements are needed, please discuss options with me at least 24-hours before an assignment is due.

However, I will accept essays and projects up to 24 hours after their due date—due date extensions nullify this option. Late submissions will receive an automatic deduction according to the following timetable:

12:00am – 4am = -2.5% (deducted from grade earned)  
 4:01am – 8am = -5%  
 8:01am – 12pm = -7.5%  
 12:01pm – 4pm = -12.5%  
 4:01pm – 8pm = -20%  
 8:01pm – 11:59pm = -32.5%

Late work must be submitted through Canvas. The assignment slot for each eligible assignment will remain open for 24 hours after its stated deadlines for this purpose. After 24 hours, submissions will no longer be accepted.

**Attendance Policy.** Submitting your work on time will count as your attendance. A missed assignment equates to a missed class session.

## **College Policies.**

### **Academic Code of Conduct.**

*You are responsible for adhering to the College's policy on academic honesty. Moravian College expects its students to perform their academic work honestly and fairly. You should neither hinder nor unfairly assist the efforts of other students to complete their work successfully. This policy of academic integrity is the foundation on which learning at Moravian is built. Assignments found guilty of academic dishonesty will receive a zero with no chance for resubmission.*

*The College's expectations and the consequences of failing to meet these expectations are outlined in more detail here:*  
<http://www.moravian.edu/studentlife/handbook/academic/academic2.html>

**Title IX.** Moravian College faculty are committed to providing a learning environment free from gender discrimination and sexual violence and are obligated to report student concerns to the Title IX Coordinator, who will assist the student in determining resources for support and resolution. Fully confidential reporting options include the [Counseling Center](#), [Health Center](#), and [Religious Life](#) (chaplain). Survivors are encouraged to seek immediate assistance by contacting the [Advocates](#) at (484) 764-9242. For more information, please visit [www.moravian.edu/titleix](http://www.moravian.edu/titleix).

## **Communication.**

**Canvas.** Information will be disseminated via Canvas and/or email. You are responsible for checking your student email and Canvas announcements regularly. Enable Canvas notifications to ensure that you are alerted to any messages sent. However, do not use Canvas to contact me.

**Email.** I am accessible by email at the email address listed above. Please be aware, however, I do not monitor my email 24 hours a day. I check it regularly between 9am and 6pm during the school week, and sporadically on the weekend. Typically, expect at least 24 hours for me to reply to your email. (I do this in order to increase the accuracy of my reply.) If, after this period, you do not receive a response, email me again. Also, keep in mind, extended conversations cannot and will not be had via email. If, after one exchange, you have more questions, you will need to schedule a face-to-face meeting with me. Finally, please note that grade concerns will only be addressed in person.

**Face-to-Face:** No face-to-face meetings will be held this term.

**Syllabus and Schedule Changes.** As the semester progresses, it may become necessary to make alterations to policies and/or assignments; I, therefore, reserve the right to alter the syllabus at any point. I will alert you to any such changes.

**Course Schedule.** Unless directed otherwise, follow the schedule outlined below. You are responsible for adhering to the stated deadlines. Also, please keep in mind that, much like the syllabus itself, this calendar is a living document—i.e., it is subject to change. I will notify you of changes via Canvas.

**Lesson 1/Week 1: Aug 24-Aug 30**

**Introductions: What Is African American Literature?**

1. Introductions
2. Assignments:
  - a. Quiz
  - b. Discussion Post
3. Texts:
  - a. Wright, "Blueprint for Negro Writing"
  - b. Hurston, "Characteristics of Negro Expression"

**Lesson 2/Week 2: Aug 31-Sept 6**

**Slavery through Reconstruction Eras**

1. Overview
2. Assignments:
  - a. Quiz
  - b. Discussion Post
3. Texts:
  - a. Anonymous, "All God's Children"
  - b. Anonymous, "Brer Rabbit"

**Lesson 3/Week 3: Sept 7-Sept 13**

1. Overview
2. Assignments:
  - a. Quiz
  - b. Discussion Post
3. Texts:
  - a. Wheatley, Phillis. "Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral," "On Being Brought from Africa to America," "On Imagination"

**Lesson 4/Week 4: Sept 14-Sept 20**

1. Overview
2. Assignments:
  - a. Quiz
  - b. Discussion Post
3. Texts:
  - a. Douglass, Frederick. From *Narratives of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*

**Snapshot of Important Dates:**

**Weekly:**

1. Quizzes  
(Due Fridays by 11:59 pm)
2. Discussion Posts  
(Due Saturdays by 11:59 pm)
3. Discussion Post Responses  
(Due Sundays by 11:59 pm)

**Lesson 5/Week 5.** Exam 1 (due by 11:59 pm on Saturday, Sept. 26)

**Lesson 9/Week 9.** Exam 2 (due by 11:59 pm on Saturday, Oct 24)

**Nov 6.** Last Day to Withdraw

**Lesson 14/Week 14.** Thanksgiving Break

**Lesson 15/Week 15.** Analysis Presentations (all materials due on Canvas by 11:59 pm on Saturday, Dec. 5)

**Lesson 5/Week 5: Sept 21-Sept 27**

1. Exam 1

**Lesson 6/Week 6: Sept 28-Oct 4****The Long Harlem Renaissance through Civil Rights Eras**

1. Overview
2. Assignments:
  - a. Quiz
  - b. Discussion Post
3. Texts:
  - a. Hopkins, "Talma Gordon"
  - b. Dunbar, "We Wear the Masks" and "Frederick Douglass"

**Lesson 7/Week 7: Oct 5-Oct 11**

1. Overview
2. Assignments:
  - a. Quiz
  - b. Discussion Post
3. Texts:
  - a. Nugent, "Sahdji"
  - b. Hughes, Langston. "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "Mother to Son," "Danse Africaine," "Dream Variations," "I, Too," "Mulatto," "Afro-American Fragment," "Harlem," "Motto," "Theme for English B"

**Lesson 8/Week 8: Oct 12-Oct 18**

1. Overview
2. Assignments:
  - a. Quiz
  - b. Discussion Post
3. Texts:
  - a. Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues"

**Lesson 9/Week 9: Oct 19-Oct 25**

1. Exam 2

**Lesson 10/Week 10: Oct 26-Nov 1****Black Arts Movement into the New Millennium**

1. Overview
2. Assignments:
  - a. Quiz
  - b. Discussion Post
3. Texts:
  - a. Butler, "Bloodchild"

**Resources.** If you are not able to come to me, but need assistance, please use the following to find the appropriate help.

**Writing Support and Academic**

**Support:** The Writing Center is a resource for Moravian students. At the Writing Center, a trained peer tutor will work individually with you on your writing, at any point in the process from brainstorming to editing. The Writing Center is located on the second floor of Zinzendorf Hall, a building that is not accessible to persons with mobility impairments. If you need the services of the Writing Center, visit <https://moravian.mywconline.com/>

If you need other academic support, such as assistance with time management, learning strategies, or a tutor for a content area other than writing, please contact the Student Success Program Coordinator at 610-625-7625.

**Reeves Library:** In addition to the physical resources available—books, magazines, journals, newspapers, and digital resources—Reeves Library has the invaluable resource of reference librarians.

**Counseling:** Counselors at the Counseling Center help students deal with the stresses of college life. They are a great resource for all students. You can give them a call at 610-861-1510 or stop by at 1301 Main Street.

Continued on the following page...

**Lesson 11/Week 11: Nov 2-Nov 8**

1. Overview
2. Assignments:
  - a. Quiz
  - b. Discussion Post
3. Texts:
  - a. Hemphill, "When My Brother Fell," "Fixin' Things," "Commitments," "Family Jewels," and "If I Simply Wanted Status, I'd Wear Calvin Klein"

**Lesson 12/Week 12: Nov 9-Nov 15**

1. Overview
2. Assignments:
  - a. Quiz
  - b. Discussion Post
3. Texts:
  - a. Obama, "A More Perfect Union"
  - b. Rankine, Selections from *Citizen*

**Lesson 13/Week 13: Nov 16-Nov 22**

1. Assignments: Work on Analysis Presentation

**Lesson 14/Week 14: Nov 23-Nov 29**

1. Thanksgiving Break

**Lesson 15/Week 15: Nov 30-Dec 5**

1. Assignment: Analysis Presentation

**Disability Services:** Students who wish to request accommodation for a disability should contact the Office of Academic and Disability Support, located in Monocacy Hall, or by calling: **610-861-1401**.

Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic Support Center, nor can they be applied retroactively.