



## COURSE DESCRIPTION & OBJECTIVES:

In the first chapter of his monumental work *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) W.E.B. Du Bois wrote:

*...the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.*

*The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. This, then, is the end of his striving: to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius.*

This course is a study of African American literature and culture through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and up to today, however, if it succeeds, it will go far deeper than this, becoming an insightful investigation of the “double consciousness” that Du Bois alluded to over 110 years ago. Themes for this course will include the Construction of Race, Slavery, Emancipation, Jim Crow, Lynching, Jazz, Urbanization, the Harlem Renaissance, Desegregation, Civil Rights, R&B & Rock n’ Roll, the Sports and Entertainment Industries, Victimization, White-guilt, Political Correctness, Affirmative Action, and Hip-Hop Culture.

Because of its combined literary and cultural foci, the methodology of this course will be somewhat unconventional, using not only literary texts and documents, but also many cultural creations (film, music, etc.) to examine the story of Black America. This is necessary because this subject is complex and culturally loaded—the construction, enforcement, reconstruction, and slow transformation of “Black” and “White” America is at the center of the dynamic tension that has driven much of American history, from the ravages of Slavery and the Civil War to the creation of the amazing and distinctive African American culture that heavily impacts the global culture of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Each week will include a lecture on the context & culture of Black America for the given era, and then a discussion of the assigned text. Learning to examine, explain, and understand the vibrant literary and cultural creations of Black America is the goal of this course.

## EVALUATION:

**Reading Responses:** During this class you will be responsible for seven Reading Responses — one for each of the 7 weeks we meet. These should be at least 1000 words and I will expect an insightful analysis of the work written in clean, crisp, concise prose. I will drop the lowest scoring response.

**Class Participation:** You will all be expected to attend each lecture, to read each assigned text well, and to actively participate in class discussions.

## ASSIGNMENTS & SCORING

Reading Responses (6 x 15%)	=	90%
Class Participation	=	10%

### Grades will be based on a ten-point scale:

5 = 100-90%	4 = 89-80%	3 = 79-70%	2 = 69-60%	1 = 59-0%
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Assignments turned in late will be penalized 10%

**TEXTS:** (the course will consider the following texts—students will address one selection from each section)

### **Week 1. Slavery & the American Civil War**

- Folktales & Spirituals (early 1800s)
- Martin Delany. *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration & Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (selections) (1852)
- Frederick Douglass. *My Bondage and My Freedom* (selections) (1855)
- Harriet Jacobs. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (selections) (1861)
- Sojourner Truth. “Ar’n’t I a Woman?” (1864)

### **Week 2. Reconstruction & the Rise & Fall of Black Rights**

- Charles Chesnutt. “The Wife of His Youth” (1898)
- Booker T. Washington. “The Atlanta Exposition Address” (1895)
- W.E.B. Du Bois. *The Souls of Black Folk* (selections) (1903)

### **Week 3. Segregated America**

- James Weldon Johnson. *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912)

### **Week 4. The Harlem Renaissance**

- Poetry of the Harlem Renaissance (1920s)
- Langston Hughes. *The Big Sea* (selections)
- King Vidor film. *Hallelujah!* (1929)

### **Week 5. The Civil Rights Era**

- Ralph Ellison. *Invisible Man* (selections) (1952)
- Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, & Stokely Carmichael (selections) (1960s)
- Poetry of the Black Arts Era (1960-70s)

### **Week 6. All Funked Up: Hip Hop America**

- Blaxploitation film. *Shaft* (1971)
- Early Hip Hop film. *Wild Style* (1983)
- Spike Lee film. *Do the Right Thing* (1989)
- John Singleton film. *Boyz n the Hood* (1991)
- Spike Lee film. *Bamboozled* (2000)

### **Week 7. Black Lives Matter?!: Race in America Today**

- Ta-Nehisi Coates. *Between the World & Me* (2015)