ENGL 485 Claiming the Narrative: African American Novels from Reconstruction to the Harlem Renaissance
Mondays & Wednesdays, 1:00-2:20, ML 246
Instructor: Dr. Jennifer Harris
Email: jennifer.harris@uwaterloo.ca
Office & hours: Mondays & Wednesdays, 2:30-3:30, or by appointment

A satire featuring a machine that turns black people white; a murder mystery where the corpse isn’t dead; a utopian tale of a secret black nationalist state in Texas; an expressionist jazz novel. Following the abolition of slavery African American readers swelled in numbers; so too, did their desire for diverse novels with protagonists who looked like them or shared their sensibilities and concerns. This course opens in the 1890s when, for the first time, African American authors could reasonably assume that the majority of their black readers hadn’t been denied access to literacy and had exposure to a variety of literary forms. Yet, access to publishing remained vexed; white newspapers did not equally review black novels, mainstream literary journals expressed a preference for particular iterations of black life, and white publishers proclaimed there was no audience for a “black book.” Drawing on literary studies and print culture studies, we will consider eight novels, the context in which they were produced, and the ways in which they circulated. Select academic essays on African American print culture and literary history will complement our study. As there is no exam, additional emphasis will be placed on engagement in the classroom.

Course readings
Fauset, Jessie Redmon. *Plum Bun* (1928)
Griggs, Sutton. *Imperium in Imperio* (1899)
Harper, Frances E. W. *Iola Leroy* (1892)
Larsen, Nella. *Passing* (1929)
McKay, Claude. *Home to Harlem* (1927)
Thurman, Wallace. *Black No More* (1931)
*select academic articles will be posted on learn*

Course components
Two written reports (500 words each) on reception of a novel (2 x 10%=20%)
Presentation (25 minutes) (25%)
Essay proposal (10%)
Essay peer review component (5%)
Final essay (8-10 pages) (25%)
Class participation (15%)
*no exam*

Two written reports on reception of a novel (2 x 10%=20%)
Students will produce two reports in formal academic language, 500 words per report. Each report will cover one aspect of a different novel’s reception, referencing book reviews and newspaper articles, where available. On the day we cover each novel, students who have
composed reception reports will be responsible for utilizing their research to advance the classroom discussion. The due date depends upon the novels the student signs up for.

**Presentation (25%)**
Students are required to present on one day’s readings. The presentation should be twenty-five minutes, followed by questions. The questions should be posted at least 24 hours in advance on Learn. Students are required to meet with me at least one week in advance.

**Essay proposal & presentation (10%)**
The essay proposal includes three components: a meeting with me to discuss your topic; a one-page proposal with an additional bibliography of 3-5 relevant academic sources; and the informal presentation of that proposal in class.

**Essay peer review component (5%)**
Students are required to bring a printed hard copy of their final essay to class and engage in thoughtful and productive peer review. A paper copy is crucial, as this enables written feedback.

**Final essay (25%)**
An academic essay, 8-10 pages in length, properly presented in MLA format.

**Class participation (15%)**
(rubric which includes online participation; which accounts for the bringing of the reception report into the classroom, for daily participation; acknowledging you’ve read the seminar questions at least 2 hours before the class). Students who miss more than 50% of classes will not pass the course; students who miss one-third of classes will receive an automatic zero in participation.

*Late Policy: there will be a deduction of 5% if work is not submitted on time, with a 2% penalty every 24 hours after that.*

**SCHEDULE OF READINGS**

**WEEK 1**
Sept 10: Intro, history

**WEEK 2**
Sept 17: Charles W. Chesnutt, “The Wife of His Youth” (linked to on Learn)
Sept 19: *Iola Leroy*

**WEEK 3**
Sept 24: *Iola Leroy*
Sept 26: *Imperium in Imperio*
WEEK 4
Oct 1: *Imperium in Imperio*
Oct 3: *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*

WEEK 5
Oct 8: no class (fall break)
Oct 10: no class (fall break)
Oct 12: Individual meetings (*The loss of a Wednesday class on October 10 (Fall Break study day) will be made up by following a Wednesday schedule on October 12.*)

WEEK 6
Oct 15: *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*
Oct 17: Zora Neale Hurston: “*What White Publishers Won’t Print*”; “*Drenched in Light*”; “*Sweat*”

WEEK 7
Oct 25: *Home to Harlem*

WEEK 8
Oct 29: *Home to Harlem*
Oct 31: *Plum Bun*

WEEK 9
Nov 5: *Plum Bun*
Nov 7: *Passing*

WEEK 10
Nov 12: *Passing*
Nov 14: Essay proposal

WEEK 11
Nov 19: *Black No More*
Nov 21: *Black No More*

WEEK 12
Nov 26: *The Conjure Man Dies*
Nov 29: *The Conjure Man Dies*

WEEK 13
Dec 3: Peer review
UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. See the UWaterloo Academic Integrity webpage and the Arts Academic Integrity webpage for more information.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline. For typical penalties check Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties.

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4. When in doubt, please be certain to contact the department’s administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to Policy 72 - Student Appeals.

Note for students with disabilities: The AccessAbility Services office, located on the first floor of the Needles Hall extension (1401), collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS office at the beginning of each academic term.

Counselling Services: Counselling Services are provided, at no charge, in a private and confidential setting to University of Waterloo students who are currently registered or on a co-op term. They write: “Feel free to drop by our office in Needles Hall North, 2nd Floor or phone 519-888-4567 ext. 32655 to learn more about our services and register for them. Check out the Hours page for our hours of operation.” They also provide links for urgent health.