

ENG 257

African American Literature

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Office Hours: Mon & Wed 1:30 - 2:30, & Tues 12:00 - 1:00
Moodle: <http://elearning.linnbenton.edu>
CRN: 32276 NSH109; Tuesdays and Thursdays @ 1:00 - 2:30
Text: *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*
Edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr and Nellie McKay

“Say it plain, that many have died for this day.
Sing the names of the dead who brought us here . . .
In today’s sharp sparkle . . . anything can be made, any sentence begun . . .
Praise song for walking forward in that light.”

Elizabeth Alexander from her Inaugural Poem for Barack Obama, Jan 20, 2009

Course Description:

We’ll celebrate Black culture and tradition (social, political, historical) and lay plain the claim that Voice, the chance to tell one’s story, is power. We’ll link Voices, from the sorrow songs of the Middle Passage to contemporary Hip Hop by creating “linkages in the chain”; in this way, together we’ll “build” the tradition. And even as we look back several centuries, we’ll keep our perspectives firmly rooted in the present moment, in a generation identified by the Blues and Hip Hop culture, by spoken word slams and the “literature” of a Black presidency, by the rise of the Black Lives Movement. Our scholarship of these powerful *voices*, on their own terms, will enrich our understanding not only of America now, but also of the powerful cultural diversity of American literature.

Literature Outcomes: All literature courses at LBCC strive to achieve common goals. When you successfully complete ENG257, you should be able to:

- Describe how African American culture and literature has contributed to American literature in exploring the human condition.
- Demonstrate an understanding of how African Americans experience difference, power, and discrimination.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and culture of African Americans.
- Interpret African American literature through critical reading.
- Participate in activities that encourage personal awareness, growth, and/or creativity through the experience of African American literature.
- Write and speak confidently about your own and others’ ideas.

Note: Succeeding in this class will require that you have college-level writing and reading skills (write at the WR121 level). If you have not yet taken WR121 (or aren’t taking it this term), please see me.

The Work We'll Do (200 points total)

Discussion/Class Writings/Participation (40)

Class discussions - in which we all participate - go a long way toward extending and deepening meaning, understanding, and pleasure. I'll provide the focus, concepts, and context as together we will explore and construct this tradition. Plan to prepare well before class and to participate in readings, activities, and discussions during class. Question and examine what these readings mean to you. Present and participating earns full credit. Please always be present for class! **You** - your consistent presence and participation - contribute to the integrity of our classroom community. More than three absences will negatively affect your final grade.

The LBCC community is enriched by diversity of all kinds. We all share the privilege of thinking, learning, and working together in an encouraging environment. In our classroom community, we will work toward creating and enjoying a community of mutual respect, appreciation, and goodwill.

Weekly Writings (60: six at 10 points each)

You'll be gathering your responses to weekly readings and discussions as well as practicing and refining your analytic and interpretive writing skills in focused (informal) writings. I'll provide an assignment each week; you pick six from the ten possibilities. And I will always try to provide a creative option. These response writings, which are designed for you to reflect on and synthesize what you are learning, will lead you toward your Formal Essay and provide you with your own writing as foundation. (**Full Credit:** turned in on time, represents clear understanding and critical thinking, well developed. **Partial Credit:** not turned in on time, or does not represent a clear understanding, or is not well developed. Format: 500 words, word-processed, single-spaced.)

Formal Essay (70)

A formal essay focused on the African American tradition that grows out of your own writings.

Presentation or Enrichment Events (30 points)

- **Presentation:** Here's your opportunity to focus on and share with us (in any creative ways that you choose) what brought you to this class or what became most interesting to you as we explored the tradition (e.g. the blues or Hip Hop, the history of the Middle Passage or the vibrancy of the Harlem Renaissance, the advances of the Civil Rights Movement or the historical precedence and the implications of Obama's Presidency). Collaborative projects give you the opportunity to step outside of the standard academic assignments (individual written/academic performance). You're invited to get together with some of your colleagues, bring your own interests and talents, and create a presentation that (in any creative way) enhances our understanding of your subject. Plan to have as much fun in the preparation as you will in the presentation.
- **Enrichment Events (3 @ 10 points each):** Choose your own events, on or off campus, related to class concepts or artists (e.g. speakers, celebrations, exhibitions, club meetings) and write a summary and response. Format: one full page (500 words), include word count in header, word-processed, single-spaced.

