LLT 3463: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity in American Literature
"Bondage and Liberation"
Fall 2021
Dr. Paul Jaussen (he/his/him)
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Office Hours (S228): TTH 3-4, and by appointment (Zoom or phone appointments also available)

"Look at all these slave masters posin' on yo dollar."—Run the Jewels

"*For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*."—Audre Lorde

"Do you hear me, do you feel me? We gon' be alright"—Kendrick Lamar

Course Description
This course hypothesizes that the most authentic expressions of the American political experiment is not to be discovered in the writings of the Anglo-American founding fathers (those "slave masters posing on your dollar" [1]) but in the songs, poems, and stories of their African slaves. These expressions arise not from the abstract principles of European enlightenment philosophy—"life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"—but out of the active experience of the *struggle* for liberation from bondage—"Alls my life I has to fight," as Kendrick Lamar puts it. This struggle takes many names and forms, embedded in the key words that we will explore in this course: the wake of the slave ship, the flight of fugitivity, the creative freedom of marroonage, the renaissance that arose from the "great migration," the nonviolent struggle for civil rights, the claims of kindred, and the public mobilization in the name of Black life.

In an added twist of history's paradoxes, we will also see that the "stolen life" of slavery not only economically funded and fundamentally shaped the American experiment; it also made possible the development of modern freedom as a political value. The story of "race, ethnicity, and identity" is thus not simply a version of modernity, but is *the* story of modernity. Ultimately, the struggle for bondage and liberation is a struggle for the collective imagination, the desire to find a possible world, which is one reason that imaginative literature has been a fundamental medium and instrument for that struggle.

In this course, we cannot neatly separate ourselves from the struggle; we will bear witness to it through our reading, writing, and conversation. Because the story is not yet finished, and it is your story, too.

ASSIGNMENTS
Participation: 20%
Three papers (3 pages each): 20% each (total of 60%)
Historical Research Presentation: 20%

[1] Documentary evidence shows that twelve US presidents owned slaves, a number that does not reflect the slave-holdings of other founders. For a brief summary, see https://www.history.com/news/how-many-u-s-presidents-owned-slaves

The following grading scale will be used for computation:

A 100-95%	B+ 89-86%	C+ 79-76%	D+ 69-66%
A- 94-90%	B 85-83%	C 75-73%	D 65-63%
	B- 82-80%	C- 72-70%	D- 62-60%

REQUIRED TEXTS
Available in the bookstore (you MUST purchase these editions); remember that the bookstore will match Amazon prices.

Kevin Young, editor, *African American Poetry: 250 Years of Struggle & Song* (Library of America) ISBN 978-1598536669
Jean Toomer, *Cane* (Liverright) ISBN 978-0871402103
Octavia Butler, *Kindred* (Beacon) ISBN 978-0807083697

COVID-19 SAFETY
Face Masks
Due to the global pandemic, our first concern this semester needs to be our safety. Protecting our health is an *educational goal*, since fear, anxiety, and uncertainty place a distracting cognitive load upon us: if we are spending our brain power worried about our safety, we will not be able to focus on our collaborative inquiry. As members of this learning community, we must act in such a way that we keep ourselves and those around us safe.

To that end, and as a reminder of the official policy, LTU requires every individual to wear a face covering (mask) over their nose and mouth when in any indoor public space. Public space is any shared or communal space such as a classroom, hallways, conference rooms, atriums, and laboratories. In this course, masks are a requirement for both attendance and participation. **If you are not properly wearing your mask in our class, I will *at first* gently remind you to make appropriate adjustments.**
Furthermore, students who choose not to wear a face covering (mask) are in violation of the LTU Student Code of Conduct, Section C, Rules and Regulations 9. Violators will be sanctioned. Multiple violations will result in loss of privileges and suspension.

Quarantining/Isolating
In the event of COVID-19 exposure or possible infection, I expect all students to follow CDC guidelines on quarantining, isolating, and testing (available at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.html). *If you are exposed or are concerned that you may have contracted COVID-19, do not come to class.* Instead, email me as soon as possible so that we can devise an appropriate plan for your continued engagement and success in the course.

EXPECTATIONS, POLICIES, ADVICE
On Reading
Henry David Thoreau said that the best books require the best of us, and that "reading in the high sense" is "not that which lulls us as a luxury and suffers the nobler faculties to sleep […], but what we have to stand on tip-toe to read and devote our most alert and wakeful hours to." The more actively and intelligently you engage with these texts, the more you will get out of this course. Prepare to spend the bulk of your studying time for this class carefully reading (and rereading) the

texts. We will spend some time discussing what this means but, at minimum, it requires you to read **with a pen in hand** (underlining, making comments in the margins, taking notes).

ADDITIONALLY: you must bring all REQUIRED material to class in *HARD COPY*. Printer malfunctioning will not be an acceptable excuse for not having the hard copy in hand.

Participation/Attendance
I believe that you are ultimately responsible for your own learning. Whether or not you attend class is entirely up to you; apart from the regulations imposed by the university, I will not reward you simply for being here or penalize you for not being here.

However, a seminar is not a lecture, but an exercise in shared learning. We teach one another in this course, and thus, if you ARE in class, I expect your fully engaged presence. As your instructor, I am responsible for guaranteeing the best classroom environment, which informs my participation guidelines. Additionally, if your classroom behaviors indicate that you are not here to learn, I will call you out as an ***agent saboteur*: that is, someone who has infiltrated our seminar for the purposes of disrupting its progress. *Agent Saboteur* behaviors include but are not limited to the following:**

> …no hard copies of the assigned readings.
> …use of cell phone, including texting or web browsing (if you need to take a call or text, simply step outside).
> …use of laptop without prior permission.
> …engaging in other behaviors (sleeping, etc.) that distract from or diminish the quality of our conversation.

Obviously, if you are not here, you will not be able to earn participation points. Your participation score will fall into one of four categories. Here are the characteristics of each category.

> **Excellent participation** (**A)**: Demonstrates leadership in our class discussion by initiating conversation on a daily basis. Listens to fellow classmates and responds to them directly. Attends each class prepared to offer relevant, insightful, and thoughtful comments and discussion questions. Demonstrates a thoughtful reading of the material, and is prepared to respond to questions about the text. Takes regular notes and actively annotates the readings.
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> **Good participation (B)** Speaks up in class on a daily basis. Demonstrates that he/she has read and engaged the material to some degree, but offers little insight or poor discussion questions. Contributes to small group discussion, but fails to show leadership. Takes minimal notes.
>
> **Passing participation (C):** Speaks up in class occasionally, but does not make a significant contribution to the class discussion. Participates in small group discussions, but minimally. Does not demonstrate basic knowledge of the material. Takes few or no notes.
>
> **Failing participation** (**D/F):** Attends class, but does not speak. Does not demonstrate that he/she has read the material. Does not contribute actively to small group activities, and sits passively during large group discussion.

I will be giving you feedback throughout the term so you know where you stand on your participation grade.

Historical Presentation and Essay Assignments
As a literature course, the bulk of our class periods will be spent closely analyzing poetry and fiction by African-American writers. We will also be engaging philosophical and theoretical texts that come from this tradition. Your first two essays will primarily offer commentaries and close readings of that literature, with essay one dedicated to poetry, essay two to fiction. In essay three, we will be working with the special collections from the University of Detroit, Mercy; students will write a paper that analyzes a poem both for its language and its visual design.

The tradition of literature that we will be studying emerges from historical realities, including key legal, political, and social events that gave shape to the processes of bondage and liberation. To that end, students will be asked to give a 15 minute presentation on a key event in our nation's history.

Due Dates and Optional Revision
Late essays will be penalized one third of a letter grade for each 12-hour period. Thus, an "A" essay due at 11:59 pm turned in at 5 am the next day will score at B+; at 5 pm, it will score a B, etc. For essays 1 **OR** 2 **(but not both)**, you will have the option of turning in a revision, due 1 week after I return the essay with comments. **I will only accept a revision that includes a 1 paragraph statement explaining how it was revised. Additionally, I will grade the revision as rigorously as I grade the first draft—if you want to improve the grade, you must improve the paper substantially.**

Plagiarism
Plagiarism, or academic dishonesty, is presenting someone else's ideas or writing as your own. In your writing for this class, you are encouraged to refer to other people's thoughts and writing—as long as you cite them. As a matter of policy, any plagiarized piece of writing will receive an F with no possibility of revision, ***even if the plagiarism is unintentional*.** Additionally, students who commit flagrant or persistent plagiarism will be reported to the Academic Honor Board for review and risk failing the course. Note that plagiarism is an insult to me as your instructor and to your peers. There is no reason for you to stoop to this in this course. If at any point you have further questions about this, or aren't sure whether or not something is plagiarism, come and see me.

You will be required to type the undergraduate Honor Code Pledge on all papers and other work completed outside of class. Failure to do so will result in a lowered grade for that particular assignment. The Honor Code Pledge is as follows: "I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in completing this work, nor have I presented someone else's work as my own."

Finally, the Department of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Communications requires students to submit all final copies of expository essays to Turnitin, an anti-plagiarism software. Instructions on submitting work to Turnitin will be provided at a later date.

Accommodations
Please let me know if you need accommodation of any sort. I will work with Disability Services to provide what you require. I am very willing to take suggestions specific to this class to meet your needs. This syllabus is available in large print, as are other class materials.

Important Dates
August 29: Last day to add/register on Banner
September 6: Last day to drop with refund
November 19: Last Day to withdraw from traditional semester courses

Reading schedule (subject to revision)

8/24 **Introductions, syllabus;** Gwendolyn Brooks, "The Boy Died in My Alley"

I. Preliminaries: Poetry, Philosophy, Modernity
8/26 Audre Lorde, "Poetry is Not a Luxury" (Canvas, hereafter C); Kevin Young "Introduction" to *African American Poetry* (hereafter AAP) **Historical Presentations Assigned**

8/31 Susan Buck-Morss, "Hegel and Haiti" (C) **Essay 1 Assigned**
9/2 David Brion Davis, "Toussant L'Ouverture and the Phenomenology of Mind" (C)

II. The Wake
9/7 Lauri Scheyer, "The Legacy of African American Spirituals" (C)
9/9 **Presentation 1: 1619**; Christina Sharpe, "The Wake" (C)

9/14 **Presentation 2: Three-fifths compromise**; AAP, Part 1: "Bury Me in a Free Land"
9/16 **Class Cancelled for Sept 14 Humanity+Technology Event**

9/21 **ASSESSMENT DAY-no class**

III. Maroonage and Fugitivity
9/23 **Presentation 3: Missouri Compromise**; Roberts, "Freedom as Maroonage" (C)

9/28 **Presentation 4: Dred Scott**; Frederick Douglass, "Narrative" (C)
9/30 Douglass, "Narrative" (C)

10/5 Damien Sojoyner, "Another Life is Possible: Black Fugitivity and Enclosed Places" (C); **Essay 2 Assigned**
10/7 **Class Cancelled for October Humanity+Technology event**; **Essay 1 due**

IV. Future Anterior Kinship
10/12 **Presentation 5: Underground Railroad**; Kodwu Eshon, "Further Considerations of Afrofuturism" (C)
10/14 Octavia Butler, *Kindred*

10/19 Octavia Butler, *Kindred*
10/21 **Presentation 6: Harpers Ferry Raid**; Octavia Butler, *Kindred*

10/26 **Presentation 7: Articles of Confederation**; Octavia Butler, *Kindred*
10/28 Panel on *Kindred*

V. Black Reconstruction
11/2 W.E.B. Du Bois, "Black Reconstruction" (C)
11/4 AAP, part 2, "Lift Every Voice"

11/9 **Presentation 8: Jim Crow**; Jean Toomer, *Cane*
11/11 **Presentation 9: Tulsa Race Massacre**; Jean Toomer, *Cane*

11/16 **Presentation 10: Great Migration**; Jean Toomer, *Cane*
11/18 **Presentation 11: Harlem Renaissance**; AAP part 3, "The Dark Tower"; **Essay 2 due**

VI. Black Art in Detroit
11/23 **Presentation 12: Detroit Uprising**; AAP part 5, "Ideas of Ancestry"
11/25 THANKSGIVING DAY

11/30 Broadside Press Project; **Essay 3 Assigned**
12/2 Broadside Press Project

12/7 Broadside Press Project
12/9 Broadside Press Project

Final Exam: Final project presentations, Paper 3 due TBD