

**Course Calendar**  
**Luminous Things: African American Poetry, Spring 2022**  
**Text: *The Oxford anthology of African-American Poetry***

**Class structure:** Session #1 – Approx. 10-15 minutes  
Sessions #2 & #3: Approx. 45 – 50 minutes each

<b>Day #1</b> <b>March 15</b>	<b>Introductions and Previews</b> <b>Session #1:</b> Intro to the course, the coordinators, the website <b>Session #2:</b> Brief historical and cultural context <b>Session #3:</b> Discussion of poet and poem: TBA	<b>Chapter Questions</b>
<b>Day #2</b> <b>March 22</b>	<b>Portraits: Black Woman: Mother, Sister, Girl, Lover, Maid</b> <b>Chapt. #8: “Is She Our Sister?” pgs. 163 - 200</b>  <b>Session #1:</b> Themes: The Many Representations of the Black Woman Over Time? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenter:</li> </ul> <b>Session #2:</b> Poetry discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion leader: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Poems:</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <b>Session #3:</b> Poetry discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion leader: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Poems:</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Our text’s editor Arnold Rampersad explains that stereotypes of the Black woman are based on “Damning assumptions . . . Debasing ideas about her sexuality and psychology.” What assumptions and ideas? Where do you see or hear these stereotypes? Do any of the poems in this chapter confront these debasing ideas?</p> <p>Rampersad writes, “Prevailing ideas about feminine beauty have worked to demoralize [the Black woman]” What are these ideas of beauty, and how do they demoralize Black women? Do any of the poems in this chapter confront these debasing ideas?</p> <p>In this chapter we meet Black mothers, grandmothers, teenaged girls, blues singers, women who work the night shift or in other people’s homes. What themes, images and/or emotions run through many of these portraits? Are there any specific portraits that are particularly powerful to you? Or particularly puzzling or surprising? Are there any portraits that extend to women of any race?</p> <p>The chapter title is “Is She Our Sister?” After reading the poems in this chapter, what do you make of this title? Would you give the chapter a different title – such as? (Linda S.: “we were never meant to survive”)</p>
<b>Day #3</b> <b>March 29</b>	<b>Portraits: Black man: Boy, Brother, Father, Lover</b> <b>Chapt. #9: “Don’t It Make You Want to Cry?” pgs. 201 – 228</b>	<p>Rampersad reminds us that historically, Black men have been portrayed as sexual predators, as fearsome criminals, as simpletons, or as Uncle Toms. Do the poems in this chapter confront these stereotypes?</p> <p>Rampersad writes that African American poets have explored the idea of black manhood in America . . . “with searing candor but also with compassion.” What</p>

	<p><b>Session #1:</b> Theme: The Stresses of Black Manhood in America?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenter:</li> </ul> <p><b>Session #2:</b> Poetry discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion leader: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Poems:</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Session #3:</b> Poetry discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion leader: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Poems:</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>are the challenges of Black manhood that are portrayed in some of these poems? In which poems do you hear that candor? Compassion? Or both?</p> <p>The title of this chapter is, “Don’t It Make You Want to Cry?” Was that your reaction to some of these poems? Which ones? Why? Are there poems that do not fit within that title?</p> <p>In this chapter, we meet Black fathers, Black sons, older Black men, Black men who keep on working and working, baseball players, boxers, ex-soldiers, and more. What themes, images and/or emotions run through many of these portraits? Are there any specific portraits that are particularly powerful to you? Or particularly puzzling or surprising?</p>
<p><b>Day #4</b> <b>April 5</b></p>	<p><b>Portraits: Children, Childhood, and the Black Child</b> <b>Chapt. #10: “Whose Children Are These?” pgs. 229 - 244</b></p> <p><b>Session #1:</b> Theme: Portrayals of Children, Black and White</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenter:</li> </ul> <p><b>Session #2:</b> Poetry discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion Leader: Liz Kaplan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Poems: TBA</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Session #3:</b> Poetry discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion Leader: Wendy Salkind <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Etheridge Knight “Circling the Daughter” pg. 240</li> <li>○ Naomi Long Madgett “Offspring” pg. 243.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Rampersad reminds us that portrayals of children in literature tend toward the sentimental. Are any of the poems in this chapter on Black children sentimental? What other emotions are evoked by these poems? Do these emotions arise because the poems about children or about Black children?</p> <p>Some of the poem in this chapter portray parent-child interactions or relationships. What is the nature of those relationships? Of these, are there any that you found particularly powerful? Any with which you could easily identify?</p> <p>Some of the poems proclaim the specialness of a Black child. What qualities are being celebrated? What aspects of the African American experience contribute to the impact of these poems?</p> <p>Rampersad reminds us that from slavery onward, whites proclaimed that Blacks were emotionally shallow and could not experience genuine love. These poems powerfully prove the absurdity of this assumption. Which poems, for you, most powerfully express love between parent and child? Through what poetic forms, styles, and language?</p>
<p><b>Day # 5</b> <b>April 12</b></p>	<p><b>Soul Support: Family and love</b> <b>Chapter #11: “They Are All of Me” pgs. 245 - 282</b></p> <p><b>Session #1:</b> Theme: The Black Family: The Ties that Bind—or Not?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenter:</li> </ul> <p><b>Session #2:</b> Poetry discussion:</p>	<p>In 1965, the US government-sanctioned Moynihan Report proclaimed that 'at the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro family. It is the fundamental source of the weakness of the Negro community at the present time.' This report was and still is influential in shaping national social policies while being soundly denounced by the African American community. Do the poems in this chapter portray the Black family as weak and deteriorating? What features of the Black family emerge from these poems?</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion leader: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Poems:</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Session #3:</b> Poetry discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion leader: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Poems:</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>The Moynihan Report argued that the matriarchal structure of black culture weakened the ability of black men to function as authority figures. Does that portrayal ring true to the portrayals of fathers and mothers in this chapter?</p> <p>In many of the poems in this chapter, adult children are coming to terms with their feelings about a mother or a father. These are powerful statements. Which speak most powerfully to you? Do the moments and issues portrayed in these poems go across racial categories? Are the poems on this theme more powerful when seen from the African American perspective?</p>
<b>Day #6 April 19</b>	<p><b>Soul support: Music</b> <b>Chapt. #12: “Oh, Singing Tree!” 283 - 296</b></p> <p><b>Session #1:</b> Music and the African American Experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenter:</li> </ul> <p><b>Session #2:</b> Poetry discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion leader: Patricia Bisshopp <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Poems: TBA</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Session #3:</b> Poetry discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion Leader: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Poems:</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>The poems in this chapter are about music. How familiar are you with the kinds of music and the musicians portrayed in these poems?</p> <p>How do the rhythms of the poems capture the rhythms of music? Of particular types of music?</p> <p>Music has been important in African American life and culture. Why do you think that is so? Do these poems provide answers to that question?</p> <p>Can you imagine any of these poems set to music? Which ones? Why these poems? How would they sound?</p>
<b>Day #7 April 26</b>	<p><b>Soul Support: Religion</b> <b>Chapt. #13: “Oh, My Soul is in the Whirlwind”</b> <b>pgs. 297 - 314</b></p> <p><b>Session #1:</b> The Church in the African American Experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenter:</li> </ul> <p><b>Session #2:</b> Poetry discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion leader: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Poems:</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Session #3:</b> Poetry discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion leader:</li> </ul>	<p>Religion has been important in African American life and culture. Why do you think that is? Do these poems suggest answers to that question?</p> <p>What echoes of the bible do you find here? How do these allusions contribute to the meaning and emotion of the poems?</p> <p>What imagery of the sacred do these poems present?</p> <p>To what extent do these poems explore particular black experiences and emotions? To what extent are these poems</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Poems:</li> </ul>	applicable to other people or groups? If others find these poems meaningful is that misappropriation?
<b>Day #8</b> <b>May 3</b>	<p><b>Life's Journey: Death</b>  <b>Chapt. #14: "Dear Lovely Death" pgs. 315 - 346</b></p> <p><b>Session #1:</b> Theme: Attitudes toward Death, Black and White.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenter:</li> </ul> <p><b>Session #2:</b> Poetry discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion leader: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Poems:</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Session #3:</b> Poetry discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion leader: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Poems:</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Were you surprised by this chapter title, "Dear Lovely Death?" Rampersad writes in his introduction to our anthology, "Blacks historically have seen death as a phenomenon neither to fear nor to revile but to accept." To what extent do the poems in this chapter deal with death "as a natural part of the fabric of [Black] culture"?</p> <p>What attitudes toward death do these poems express?</p> <p>Do these poems suggest a uniquely black experience of death? Or are they more universally applicable?</p> <p>What poetic forms do you find in this chapter? How are the forms suited to the subject matter?</p> <p>What other poems from this book might Rampersad have included in this chapter?</p>
<b>Day #9</b> <b>Black</b> <b>Lives</b> <b>Matter</b> <b>May 10</b>	<p><b>Life's Journey:</b> "<a href="#">Black Lives Matter: A Poetry Reader</a>" An online reader: ". . . a starting place for reading poetry that celebrates, protests, calls out, and responds. We believe Black Lives Matter. Justice matters. Poetry matters."</p> <p><b>Session #1:</b> Theme: The Genre of Protest Poetry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenter:</li> </ul> <p><b>Session #2:</b> Poetry discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion leader: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Poems:</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Session #3:</b> Poetry discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion leader:</li> </ul>	<p><b>Questions TBA</b></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Poems:</li> </ul>	
<b>Day #10</b> <b>May 17</b>	<p><b>Life's Journey: The future</b>  <b>Chapt. #15: "I Dream a World" pgs. 347 - 366</b></p> <p><b>Session #1:</b> Theme: Predicting a Future—A Poetic Genre?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenter:</li> </ul> <p><b>Session #2:</b> Poetry discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion leader: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Poems:</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Session #3:</b> Poetry discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion leader: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Poems:</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Which of these poems do you find the most powerful / optimistic / hopeful? Why?</p> <p>Why do so many of these poems combine painful imagery with dreams for the future?</p> <p>If you were compiling an African American poetry anthology, what other poems might you include in this chapter? Thinking of some of the poems that look like prose, could Reverend Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech be called a poem and included here?</p> <p>How do the forms and language of these poems contribute to their meaning?</p>