

LP² STUDY GROUP PROPOSAL FOR SPRING 2023

BLACK POETRY IN AMERICA

Coordinators: Terry Hamilton and Irene Sax

Black people have been writing poems on this continent since before we were a nation. Mixing Africa's oral and communal performances with Europe's written tradition, it's an art that remains rich and alive. From Amanda Gorman's inaugural verses to rap's intricate rhymes, the legacy continues to flourish in the 21st century. We examine the poetry written by Black people in America through themes such as slavery and freedom, religion and music, community, social justice and identity.

Terry Hamilton completed an experimental college degree then graduate school at Teachers College, Columbia. She has experience in program development, helping people learn and in teaching and healthcare.

Irene Sax, a former food writer, has coordinated study groups on MFK Fisher, Food Memoirs, The Sonnet, The Confessional Poets and the Harlem Renaissance.

Type of Study Group:

Some lecture, but mainly discussion of essays and close reading of poems led by coordinators and students.

Readings and other Materials/Online Services:

Poems and relevant texts will be emailed to participants.

Coordinators will recommend, but not require, several anthologies.

***** **SYLLABUS - A WORK IN PROGRESS** *****

WEEK 1

TOPIC: Introduction with time line of African-American history; how Black poetry combines African oral and European written traditions; dealing with sensitive material.

READING:

June Jordan: "The Difficult Miracle of Black Poetry in America"

In class:

Discussion of persistent themes in Black poetry drawn from June Jordan essay; close readings of Dunbar "We Wear the Mask" and "Philosophy" plus

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a hip-hop poem.

QUESTIONS:

Is African-American poetry part of, or separate from, American and English poetry as a whole? Let's talk about dialect.

WEEK 2

TOPIC: Africa, enslavement

READING:

Langston Hughes: "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain"; poems by Hughes, Cullen, Giovanni, Randall, Clifton, Dove.

In class:

Discussion of Hughes essay, close reading of poems.

QUESTIONS:

What does Hughes mean by "the racial mountain"? By "low-down folk"? Describe the Black artist's conflicted views of Africa. Were spirituals the poetry of enslavement?

WEEK 3

TOPIC: Religion, music

READING:

H. L. Gates' "How the Church Saved Black America."

In class:

Discussion of Gates essay; close reading of Johnson, Brown, Dove, Young, Clifton, Hayes and of 1-2 spiritual lyrics.

QUESTIONS:

Was Christianity "the opium of the people," quashing rebellion? Discuss Gates: the church was the first formalized site for the performance of the Black aesthetic; African influence on uses of music in worship; how did the use of music in religious practice influence blues, jazz, rap?

WEEK 4

TOPIC: Community and family

READING:

Essay on Great Migration.

In class:

Discussion and close reading of poems by Brooks, Hughes, McKay, Clifton, Hayden, Coleman.

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WEEK 5

TOPIC: Social Justice

READING:

Essay.

In class:

Close reading of poems by Trethewey, Angelou, Baraka, Giovanni, Brooks, Dove.

WEEK 6

TOPIC: Black poetry today; visit from a young Black poet.

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