Engl. 669: Topics in African American and Africana Literature

Topic: What is African American and Africana Literature?
Dr. Michael Collins
F 12:45-3:45 pm LAAH 504

This class will explore the theory and practice of African American and Africana literature, keeping in mind that the fact that African American and Africana literature have been formed in a special crucible of theory because it was not always thought possible that people of African descent could produce literature. Rather than allow themselves to be confined by other people’s historiographies and aesthetics, writers of African descent have often sought to craft either their own counter-historiographies and counter-aesthetics or to write within existing traditions both for the sake of doing so and as a demonstration of equality. In this class, we will explore some of the interrelationships between key texts by American writers and thinkers, and writers and thinkers from elsewhere in the African diaspora, as they make choices between crafting counter-aesthetics and counter[1]historiographies, or carving out a place for themselves within an existing tradition. Possible readings will range from Jean Toomer’s Cane to Aime Cesaire’s Notebook of a Return to the Native Land to Derek Walcott’s Omeros to Henry Louis Gates’ The Signifying Monkey to Chinua Achebe’s A Man of the People to essays by theorists such as Stuart Hall.