

Spring 2023

Prof. Kayleigh Quarterman

Course Title: En 180. Special Topics in English – Topic: The Queer Harlem Renaissance

Description: This course is designed to introduce students to the significance and implications of the Harlem Renaissance, a time of immense artistic, political, historical, and social innovation and creativity amongst African American writers and artists during the 1920s and '30s. Keeping scholar Henry Louis Gates's declaration that the Harlem Renaissance is "surely as gay as it [is] Black" in mind, we will examine the subjective and artistic liminal spaces that reveal and perform notions of queerness and Blackness. It is important that, during a period of such innovation, creativity, fluidity, and artistic and individual expression, the discourses surrounding the period be centered around the same heterogeneity it exemplified. Moreover, since the Harlem Renaissance's textual forms—much like representations of gender—are more fluid and performative rather than prescriptive, this course will investigate how race, gender, and sexuality serve as specific markers of the tensions and fissures between individuality and conformity in twentieth-century Western culture. Since the Harlem Renaissance was a celebration of varying forms, this class will also focus on varying genres and media, including poetry, plays, blues, jazz, short stories, novels, and visual art. Artists may include Harlem Renaissance giants such as Langston Hughes, Nella Larsen, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, and Ma Rainey, but we will also study lesser known figures' work, such as Angelina Weld Grimké, Richmond Barthé, Mae Cowdery, Helene Johnson, and more.