FIELD X: AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

STATEMENT OF EXPECTATIONS
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The field exam is designed to measure candidates’ potential to produce advanced scholarship and to teach college-level courses on African American literature. Therefore, answers on the written exam should display extensive and specialized knowledge of the field of African American literature, including the canon of primary texts, significant secondary scholarship, and major historical developments.

Specifically, answers should demonstrate expertise in:

• Foundational African American literary genres and their conventions, histories, and cultural significance (e.g. poetry, drama, fiction, autobiography, slave narratives, oral tradition, etc.).

• The historical and literary subfields that comprise the larger field of African American studies as well as the significance of those subfields (e.g. antebellum literature, Reconstruction, the “Nadir,” Naturalism, the Harlem Renaissance, Modernism, the Civil Rights era, the Black Arts Movement, women’s writing, Postmodernism, etc.).

• Established and current literary criticism and scholarship on African American literature, including recent shifts that re-conceptualize aspects of the field (such as transnational and hemispheric studies).

Answers on the written exam should also:

• Advance and develop substantial interpretive arguments that are firmly rooted in sophisticated analysis of primary texts and engage dynamically with secondary critical sources.

• Demonstrate an authoritative, convincing, and original individual perspective on the material.

The examiners will ask questions that can—and should—be addressed with texts on the reading list. If relevant to a question, however, any texts in the field, whether studied independently or through course work, may be used by the candidate.
I. Primary Texts

A. African American Literature Before 1910
(Colonial, Antebellum, and Postbellum Literature)

- Phyllis Wheatley. “On Being Brought from Africa to America” (1773)
- Jupiter Hammon. “An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatly” (1778)
- Olaudah Equiano. *Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa* (1789)
- Frederick Douglass. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845)
- Sojourner Truth. “Speech at Akron Convention” (1851)
- William Wells Brown. *Clotel, or, The President’s Daughter* (1853)
- Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. “The Slave Mother” (1854)
- Harriet Jacobs. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)
- Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. *Iola Leroy* (1892)
- Charles Chesnutt. *The Conjure Woman and Other Tales* (1899)
- Charles Chesnutt. *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901)
- Paul Laurence Dunbar. Selections from *Complete Poems* (1913) as follows:
  - “We Wear the Mask”
  - “When Malindy Sings”
  - “The Haunted Oak”
  - “The Colored Soldiers”
  - “Sympathy”
  - “Little Brown Baby”
  - “Dinah Kneading Dough”
  - “An Ante-Bellum Sermon”
  - “Frederick Douglass”
  - “When Dey ’Listed Colored Soldiers”
B. African American Literature 1910-1960
(The Harlem Renaissance and Modernism)
Claude McKay. Selections from *Harlem Shadows* (1922) as follows:
   “The Harlem Dancer”
   “Harlem Shadows”
   “If We Must Die”
   “The Lynching”
   “Africa”
   “America”
Jean Toomer. *Cane* (1923)
Countee Cullen. *Color* (1925)
Alain Locke, ed. *The New Negro* (1925)
Langston Hughes. Selections from *Collected Poems* (1995) as follows:
   “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”
   “The Weary Blues”
   “Dream Variation”
   “I, Too”
   “Let America Be America Again”
   “Mulatto”
   “Visitors to the Black Belt”
   “Note on Commercial Theatre”
   “Trumpet Player”
   “Theme for English B”
   “Dream Deferred” (also titled “Harlem” in “Lenox Avenue Mural”)
   “Christ in Alabama”
James Weldon Johnson. Selections from *Complete Poems* (2000) as follows:
   “O Black and Unknown Bards”
   “The White Witch”
   *God’s Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* (1927)
Nella Larsen. *Quicksand* (1928)
Zora Neale Hurston. “How It Feels to Be Colored Me” (1929)
Nella Larsen. *Passing* (1929)
Claude McKay. *Banjo* (1929)
Wallace Thurman. *The Blacker the Berry* (1929)
Sterling A. Brown. Selections from *Collected Poems* (1989) as follows:
   “Ma Rainey”
   “Children of the Mississippi”
“Cabaret”
“Mister Samuel and Sam”
“Master and Man”
“Remembering Nat Turner”
“Bitter Fruit of the Tree”

George Schuyler. *Black No More* (1931)
Zora Neale Hurston. *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* (1934)
Arna Bontemps. *Black Thunder* (1936)
Zora Neale Hurston. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)
Melvin Tolson. “Dark Symphony” (1939)
Richard Wright. *Native Son* (1940)
Richard Wright. *Black Boy* (1945)
Ann Petry. *The Street* (1946)
Dorothy West. *The Living Is Easy* (1948)
Ralph Ellison. *Invisible Man* (1952)
James Baldwin. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953)

Gwendolyn Brooks. Selections from *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, 2nd ed (2003) as follows:
  “The Mother”
  “The Children of the Poor”
  “We Real Cool”
  “The Chicago Defender Sends a Man to Little Rock”

Lorraine Hansberry. *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959)

C. African American Literature 1960-Present
(Black Arts Movement to Postmodernism and Beyond)
Amiri Baraka. “Preface to a Twenty-Volume Suicide Note” (1961)
Robert Hayden. “Middle Passage” (1962)
Martin Luther King Jr. “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (1963)
Amiri Baraka. *Dutchman* (1964)
Samuel Delany. *Babel-17* (1966)
Nikki Giovanni. “Nikki-Rosa” (1968)
Ann Moody. *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (1968)
Toni Cade Bambara. “The Lesson” (1972)
Alice Walker. “Everyday Use” (1973)
Ntozake Shange. *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf* (1976)
Toni Morrison. *Song of Solomon* (1977)
Audre Lorde. “Power” (1978)
Octavia E. Butler. *Kindred* (1979)
Jesmyn Ward. *Salvage the Bones* (2011)
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. *Americanah* (2013)

**II. Secondary Scholarship**

*African Americans in Art: Selections from the Art Institute of Chicago* (1998)
John Blassingame. *The Slave Community* (1972)
Angela Davis. *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (1998)
bell hooks. “Postmodern Blackness” (1990)
Deborah Gray White. *Ar’n’t I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (1985)