

**English 461-03: The African American Sonnet:**  
*Reading and Writing Metrical Verse*  
**Fall Semester 2009**

**Dr. Reginald Flood**  
Mondays 4pm-6:45  
Winthrop 100A

*"We all do 'do, re, mi,' but you have got to find the other notes yourself."*

Louis Armstrong



The premise of this seminar is simple: that there is an inextricable link between culture and creativity. We will spend the year working in the intellectual space where critical race theory, gender studies and creative writing converge. Therefore, this seminar will mesh two activities that are usually separate in English departments: writing original, analytical prose shaped by cultural studies and writing poems reflecting traditional British forms. We will begin with a close look at the African American sonnet, and then consider other traditional forms (for example the sestina, villanelle, ballad) and the way those forms are transformed by Black writers. At the same time as a

class we will work through a series of writing exercises to gain competence and creative experience working in form.

The seminar will culminate with each student writing a critical essay shaped by our theoretical work in cultural studies and a creative writing portfolio that demonstrates artistic engagement with metrical verse. Both student texts will have a significant intellectual connection. One of the primary goals of the seminar will be to challenge the traditional barriers in English departments between the creative process and cultural studies, and this explicit skepticism about the ways in which cultural studies is taught and creative writing experienced will inform the conduct of the seminar and evaluation of final projects.

**All English majors who have taken ENG 203 and have senior status are welcome**, no matter their experience with cultural studies or creative writing. This seminar will be a process of learning for all of us, and it will be designed to accommodate writers with a range of experiences (including those with no experience with cultural studies or creative writing). Some of the authors we will read include:



**Countee Cullen**



**Gwendolyn Books**



**Paul Laurence Dunbar**