The Black Chicago Renaissance
Professor Bill Mullen
T. 4:30-7:20 Rec 112
Office: 315 Heavilon Hall
Office Hrs:
e-mail: bvmullen@purdue.edu

Course Description: The Chicago Renaissance is the name given to the upsurge in
cultural production and radical political activity in Chicago between, approximately,
1919 and 1947. This course will examine largely from an historical materialist
perspective how the Renaissance was as a byproduct of several interrelated
developments: the African American Migration and World War I; industrialization
and unionization; the formation of Left political movements including the
Communist Party; the emergence of a stable African American bourgeoisie in
Chicago; the influence of related cultural movements in Harlem especially; the
internationalization of Chicago as a city, and African Americans as a people, in the
era after 1919. The course will examine what led to the waning of Chicago’s
Renaissance and what came in its wake, and how to understand its legacy for the
current political and economic crises afflicting Black Chicago today, as well as
ongoing means of fighting back and through those crises.

Books: All books for the course are available at Von’s Bookstore.

Course Requirements:

Midterm Essay: 6-8 pages. Due Week IX. Choose a topic or theme emerging from
the course. Write a critical essay that uses the theme to explain the larger contours
of the Chicago Renaissance. The essay should work from the middle out: trying to
understand how the local topic interrelates differing aspects of features of the
Renaissance. The paper must use sources from at least two scholarly disciplines. It
must use a minimum of 8 sources altogether. At least two should be from the course
syllabus.

Annotated Bibliography: Create an annotated bibliography around a single theme
or area of research related to the course. The bibliography can include sources you
use to write your midterm or final essay. Please use a discipline-appropriate
citation style. For questions about citation and creating an annotated bibliography
please consult the Purdue Online Writing Lab at https://owl.english.purdue.edu/
Due Week XIII. Please note: a hardcopy should be delivered to me while an
electronic version should be sent by e-mail to each of your classmates at the due
date.

In-class Teaching Assignment: Lead class discussion for the first hours during one
week of your choosing from the schedule. The assignment is to teach. Devise a
lesson plan and bring at least one teaching tool to assist with your presentation (i.e.
powerpoint, handout, supplementary reading). The assignment will be evaluated by
how well you engage with the reading material for the week and how well you
engage your classmates in producing critical thought and discussion.

**Final Paper:** This extended paper (20-25 pages) should take up a single theme or
problem from the course. It may be an extension of your midterm essay. Here, the
essay should offer a thesis which provides a clear interpretation of one aspect of the
Chicago Black Renaissance. The essay should use sources from at least three
different disciplines. It should use at least three sources from the syllabus. It
should at least ONE source a Chicago-based archive, meaning an archive in Chicago,
or one available on-line. In total, it should use a minimum of 15 sources. **Due last
day of class.**

**Using the Archives in Chicago:**

The course presents an important opportunity to access primary source materials
available in Chicago. Below are links to some sites you may consider exploring
depending on your research:

Harold Washington Library Chicago:  

Harsh Research Collection Carter Woodson Library:  

Art Institute of Chicago: http://www.artic.edu/

Chicago History Museum Research Center:  
http://www.chicagohistory.org/research

University of Chicago Special Collections Research Center:  
http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/srcr/

University of Chicago Illinois: http://library.uic.edu/

Newberry Library: http://www.newberry.org/

DuSable Museum of Black History and Culture: http://www.dusableduseum.org/

Chicago Defender: http://www.dusabledmuseum.org/

Ebony Magazine: http://www.ebony.com/

South Side Community Art Center:  
http://www.southsidecommunityartcenter.com/index.html
Supplemental Research Sources Recently Published:


Course Schedule:

**Week I Aug. 20:** Introduction. Who Makes History? Who Makes a Renaissance?

**Week II: Aug. 27** The Personal is Political: *Black Communist in the Freedom Struggle.* Harry Haywood.

**Week III Sept. 3** Archiving The Black Public: *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City.* St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton. The book is massive. Choose sections that interest you to read and prepare to discuss these in class. We will make the seminar a collective, collaborative reading of a collaborative book.

**Week IV Sept. 10** The WPA and Migration Study: *Anyplace But Here.* Jack Conroy and Arna Bontemps.

**Week V Sept. 17** Chicago as New Negro?: *Chicago’s New Negroes: Modernity, Migration and Black Urban Life.* Davarian Baldwin.

**Week VI Sept. 24** Women in Charge: *The Chicago Black Renaissance and Black Women’s Activism.* Anne Knupfer

**Week VII Oct. 1:** Visit to Chicago and Vivian Harsh Collection.

**Week VIII Oct. 8:** Fall Break. No Class.


Week XII Nov. 5 We Are Not How We Seem: Visual Culture: They Seek a City: Chicago and the Art of Migration 1910-1950. Sarah Oehler.

Week XIII Nov. 12 Turning White Space Into Black Space: Langston Hughes and the Chicago Defender. Christopher DeSantis.

Week IV Nov. 19 Real Estate and Resistance: People Wasn’t Made to Burn. Joe Allen.


Week XVI Dec. 3: The Chicago Teachers Union Strike and the Legacy of the Black Chicago Renaissance. Closing Dinner and Reports.