

Stephanie Wells
Berkeley OLLI, Winter 2024
Mondays 10-12
Golden Bear Center, Suite 202
1995 University Avenue, Berkeley

Contemporary Black Women's Narratives

This course will examine novels and short fiction written (and narrated) by black American and British women from the early twentieth century to the present day, examining the ways the protagonists navigate and describe their own experiences. We'll focus on a handful of thematic and often intersectional threads that run through many of these texts, including racial identity, passing, multiracialism and the language surrounding it, historical and systemic racism, sexual identity, patriarchal culture, and cultural constructions of Black women. We'll use one earlier text (1929) as a lens and touchpoint for the rest of the texts, which are much more contemporary (1983-2021).

Our course meetings will take the form of structured discussions; I will lead with some background material and provide guided frameworks for our conversations. You'll need to acquire copies of all the longer works; PDFs of the shorter works will be posted in your course dashboard. We may opt to adjust the following reading list to be either longer or shorter, depending on the desires and time limitations of course members.

- Week 1: Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929)
- Week 2: Brit Bennett, *The Vanishing Half* (parts 1-III (pp. 3-213) (2020)
Toni Morrison, "Recitatif" (pdf) (1983)
- Week 3: *The Vanishing Half*, parts IV-VI (pp.215-366)
ZZ Packer, "Doris is Coming" (pdf) (2003)
- Week 4: Danzy Senna, "What's the Matter with Helga and Dave?" (pdf) (2011)
Danielle Evans, "The Department of Historical Corrections" (2020)
(pp. 163-265 in the collection of the same name)
- Week 5: Natasha Brown, *Assembly* (2021)
Roxane Gay, "We Are All So Happy Now" (pdf) (2017)
- Week 6: Raven Leilani, *Luster* (2020)