



## ENGL 447 (Section 32851R): The Slave Narrative & Its Contemporary Expressions

**Units:** 4

**Fall 2019; Tuesday/Thursday 11-12:20 PM**

**Location:** Taper Hall of Humanities (THH) 203

**Instructor:** Dr. Melissa Daniels-Rauterkus,  
Assistant Professor of English

**Office:** Taper Hall of Humanities 439

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30-1:30 pm

**Contact Info:** [rauterku@usc.edu](mailto:rauterku@usc.edu)

**IT Help:** USC Information Technology Services

**Hours of Service:** Telephone support available 24 hours a day, 7 days per week; Email support available Mon-Fri. 8:00am-6:00 pm.

**Contact Info:** [consult@usc.edu](mailto:consult@usc.edu); (213)-740-5555



**Course Description:** The African American slave narrative is one of the most organic forms of expression in the American literary tradition. The outgrowth of autobiography and sentimental literature as well as antislavery and abolitionist discourses, the slave narrative

chronicles the horrors of the black experience in bondage. Featuring scenes of brutal violence, sexual abuse, and emotional trauma, the slave narrative functions as an important critique of slavery's innate perversity and inhumanity in addition to the implicit contradictions and failures of American democracy. This course examines the slave narrative as an artistic, intellectual, and political tool of agitation and resistance. We will trace the genre's emergence and development in relationship to its aesthetic precursors, influences, and contemporary interpretations, while identifying the essential patterns and motifs that structure the form. Some of the dominant conventions and tropes that we will analyze include: the use of "authenticating documents," the descent from innocence into the hell of slavery, the critical confrontation with the master, the quest for literacy, flight, fugitivity, and freedom. We will discuss how slave narratives mobilize the discourses of realism and sentimentalism; the ways in which enslaved African Americans chart the transition from bondsman/woman to personhood; how and why the genre continues to dominate the literary and cinematic imaginations in the form of "neo-slave narratives"; and how issues of race, representation, and cultural ownership affect our understanding of the genre when it is adapted to the screen by a white director, as in the case in Quentin Tarantino's film, *Django Unchained* (2012).

### Learning Objectives

Students who successfully complete this class will be able to:

- Perform a close reading of a literary text
- Identify the narrative elements and interpretive problems that distinguish a literary work
- Locate imaginative and critical works within their appropriate contexts and traditions, and thus therefore, better understand literary history and intellectual genealogy
- Come up with a cogent thesis and craft a well-developed and polished analysis of a work or group of texts
- Conduct scholarly research and use secondary sources to substantiate and compose an original argument

## Course Notes

This is a web-enhanced course that utilizes Blackboard. I will post assignments, supplemental readings, and digital content on the platform.

## Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

Beginner; access to Blackboard and the ability to stream digital content.

## Required Readings and Supplementary Materials:

Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

Brown, William Wells. *Clotel; Or, The President's Daughter*.

Wilson, Harriet. *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black*.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*.

*Roots* (1976 miniseries) and (2016 remake)

*Django Unchained*, Dir. by Quentin Tarantino

\*Scholarly essays/excerpts on Blackboard

\*\*All books are available for purchase/rent at the USC Bookstore: 840 Childs Way, Los Angeles 90089 (213) 740-0066.

## Description and Assessment of Assignments:

1. Blackboard Posts (250 words)—For each reading assignment you complete, you will need to draft an informal response to it. Privileging your own voice and perspective, tell me what you think the author was trying to say, achieve, or reveal. What is your personal position in relationship to the author's? How does the work affirm or challenge your own experience or viewpoint? How did the work affect you? The purpose of this activity is to establish a personal connection with the text and to help you contribute to in-class discussions. This is a more subjective exercise. Do not provide a formal, academic appraisal of the work. Focus on what you feel and what you have to say about what you read. I will call on you from time to time to share your writings with the class. Post your remarks to the appropriate discussion thread on Blackboard.
2. Close Reading (2-3 pages)—Select a passage from one of the assigned readings and provide a critical interpretation of it, paying special attention to its formal attributes (e.g. style, grammar, syntax, tropes, literary devices), its cultural, historical, or political implications, and its bearing on other phenomena/events outside of the text. You should begin by annotating your passage of choice. Make observations about all of the striking details or facts about the text. Look for patterns. Pay close attention to language. Then interpret the details. Why are they fascinating? What deeper meaning do they impart on the passage?
3. Midterm Assignment: Book Review (3-4 pages)—Select one of the literary works we have already completed reading. Imagine that you are a book reviewer for an anti-slavery newspaper or literary magazine. Compose a review that summarizes the work, assesses its aesthetic components and political value, and explains its effectiveness as an agent of social change.
4. Abstract & Annotated Bibliography (250 words/8-10 sources)—To help you prepare for your final assessment in this class, which is a seminar paper, you will assemble an abstract and an annotated bibliography. The former is a brief overview of what you intend to explore in your paper; whereas the latter is an MLA Works Cited list with bibliographical summaries for each entry. Your abstract should have a working title, state your thesis, and provide a basic description and trajectory of your argument. Your annotated bibliography should list the sources you intend to use to write your paper. This will require you to plan/think ahead. Do not wait until the last few weeks of class to select a topic, but rather contemplate possible topics as you make your way through the course. Towards this end, you might choose to keep an idea notebook or detailed notes about your reading and/or our class discussions. Once you've settled on a topic and have done some preliminary research you should be ready to select your sources. Your sources should all be scholarly works written for an academic audience. This includes books of literary or historical criticism, journal articles, or book chapters in an edited volume. You may use an op-ed piece provided that it is scholarly in tone or engages with the material in a scholarly way. For each entry, you will need to draft a 100-word summary of the work, redacting its argument, explaining its significance to your proposed thesis,

how you intend to use the source, and why you think it is relevant. The abstract and the annotated bibliography will be due about a month before class ends so as to give you ample time to draft and revise your final paper.

5. End of Term Assignment: Seminar Paper (8-10 pages)—This course culminates in a seminar paper. This essay should reflect your mastery of the content we studied over the course of the semester. Towards this end, it should be your best and most sophisticated work. In terms of structure, it should have an introduction that provides background and contextual information about your topic and announces your thesis, it should demonstrate your ability to develop an argument across multiple paragraphs (using relevant examples and evidentiary material in the form of primary and secondary sources), it should connect the literature to its relevant cultural and political contexts, and finally, it should have a conclusion that underscores the significance of your argument. For example, you may choose to focus on how your essay contributes to/or intervenes in the existing scholarly conversation about your topic or you may choose to discuss the implications of your argument in the context of the current political moment. Why does this matter outside of this class? Why does this matter now? You may choose to build off your close reading essay, provided that you add a substantial amount of new work and significantly enhance your earlier arguments. Your paper is due on Wednesday, December 11<sup>th</sup> by 9:00 a.m. You may submit your final essay via email, but you are responsible for confirming that I have received it and that your file is accessible. I will provide a more detailed assignment sheet/guide well in advance of the due date.

### Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Attendance & Participation	100	10
Journals	100	10
Close reading	100	20
Midterm	100	20
Abstract & Bibliography	100	10
Seminar Paper	100	30
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>100</b>

### Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

A	95-100	C	73-76
A-	90-94	C-	70-72
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	83-86	D	63-66
B-	80-82	D-	60-62
C+	77-79	F	59 and below

### Assignment Rubric

A-range (90-100): Essay provides a sophisticated analysis of the topic or work in question; contains an identifiable argument and engages with the material in a complex way to illuminate cultural, historical or political issues relevant to its discussion. The essay is well-written and highly polished. The essay is formatted according to MLA citation guidelines.

B-range (80-89): Essay provides a solid analysis of the topic or work in question and attempts to engage with the material in a complex and thorough manner, but it does not fully address all of the relevant issues or does not provide a thorough accounting of the cultural, historical, or political factors involved. The essay may have a few compositional, structural, or grammatical errors. The essay may contain minor citation errors.

C-range (70-79): Essay does not provide a compelling analysis of the topic or work in question and does not earnestly attempt to address the cultural, historical, or political realms in a complex way. The argument is underdeveloped. The essay may have several compositional, structural, or grammatical errors. The essay may have multiple citation errors or may not properly cite sources or include a bibliography.

D-range (60-69): Essay lacks an argument and does not do the work of analysis. The essay does not engage with the relevant material and does not address cultural, historical, or political issues. The essay may be rife with compositional, structural, or grammatical errors. The essay may not reflect the use of a citation method.

F (59 and below): The essay does not demonstrate appropriate scholarly effort/critical engagement, or the student failed to submit the assignment.

### **Assignment Submission Policy**

With the exception of the final, seminar paper, all writing assignments must be submitted in hard copy form. Essays must be typed, formatted according to MLA guidelines, and fastened with staples.

### **Grading Timeline**

All assignments will be graded and returned no later than two weeks after submission. Final seminar papers will not be returned unless requested.

### **Additional Policies**

1. Attendance:

Consistent attendance and participation is absolutely critical to your success in this class. You are allotted two unexcused absences—without penalty—for the duration of the semester. Unexcused absences beyond this number will result in a penalty of a 5% grade reduction off your final grade for each class session that you miss. Please do not come to class late or leave early, as this is disruptive to me and your fellow classmates. Excessively late arrivals and early departures will be counted as absences. If you need to arrive late or leave early on a specific day, please let me know as soon as possible.

2. Late/Missing Work:

In order to receive full credit, all assignments must be submitted by their respective due dates. Late assignments will be docked by 5% for each week that they are late. Any outstanding work that you want included in your final grade must be submitted before the last week of class.

3. Course Format/Meeting Structure:

The format of this course is a hybrid of lecture and seminar-style discussion. Most of our meetings will begin with an ice-breaker activity, followed by a brief, interactive mini-lecture to frame our analysis of the reading, and will end with a more applied, hands-on kind of assignment. I may rely on your journal entries, media, visual art, op-eds, supplemental readings, or other aids to structure our class time.

4. In-class Behavior:

You are expected to demonstrate proper academic etiquette at all times. Please do not check and/or send emails while in class, text-message, or complete assignments for other classes. You are welcome to bring beverages to class, but please do not eat in class, as it can be distracting. Please refrain from voicing opinions that may be perceived as racist, homophobic, sexist, or generally insensitive.

### Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

\*Please note that assignments are subject to change at the instructor's discretion.

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings/Homework	Deliverable/ Due
<b>Week 1</b>	8/27: Course Overview: The Slave Narrative & Its Lasting Influence	Annette Gordon-Reed, "Slavery's Shadow"	BB Post
	8/29: Gordon-Reed; What's involved in representing slavery?	Christina Sharpe, <i>In The Wake</i> (ch. 1)	BB Post
<b>Week 2</b>	9/03: Sharpe/"Wake Work"	James Olney, "I Was Born"	BB Post
	9/05: Identifying the Form/Olney	Jean Fagan Yellin, "Written by Herself"	BB Post
<b>Week 3</b>	9/10: "A Perilous Passage": From Slavery to Free Black Womanhood: Intro to Jacobs & <i>Incidents</i> ; Yellin	<i>Incidents</i> , preface + intro. by L. Maria Child, chs. i-vii	BB Post
	9/12: <i>Incidents</i> , preface + intro., chs. i-vii	<i>Incidents</i> , chs. viii-xxiii	BB Post
<b>Week 4</b>	9/17: <i>Incidents</i> , chs. viii-xxiii	<i>Incidents</i> , chs. xxiv-xxxii	Close Reading 9/19
	9/19: <i>Incidents</i> , chs. xxiv-xxxii	<i>Incidents</i> , chs. xxxiii-xli + appendix	BB Post
<b>Week 5</b>	9/24: <i>Incidents</i> , chs. xxxiii-xli + appendix	NA	BB Post
	9/26: No Class/Conference	William Andrews, "The Novelization of Voice"	BB Post
<b>Week 6</b>	10/01: Dialogizing the Black Narrative and the Emergence of the Fictive Voice: Intro to Brown & <i>Clotel</i> ; Andrews	<i>Clotel</i> , chs. i-vi	BB Post
	10/03: <i>Clotel</i> , chs. i-vi	<i>Clotel</i> , chs. vii-xiii	BB Post
<b>Week 7</b>	10/08: <i>Clotel</i> , chs. vii-xiii	<i>Clotel</i> , chs. xiv-xx	BB Post
	10/10: <i>Clotel</i> , chs. xiv-xx	<i>Clotel</i> , chs. xxi-xxiv	BB Post
<b>Week 8</b>	10/15: <i>Clotel</i> , chs. xxi-xxiv	<i>Clotel</i> , chs. xxv-xxix	Midterm 10/17
	10/17: No Class/Fall Recess		
<b>Week 9</b>	10/22: <i>Clotel</i> , chs. xxv-xxix; Variations on the Form: Intro to Wilson & <i>Our Nig</i>	<i>Our Nig</i> , preface + chs. i-iii	BB Post
	10/24: <i>Our Nig</i> , preface + chs. i-iii	<i>Our Nig</i> , chs. iv-vii	BB Post
<b>Week 10</b>	10/29: <i>Our Nig</i> , chs. iv-vii	<i>Our Nig</i> , chs. viii-x	BB Post
	10/31: <i>Our Nig</i> , chs. viii-x	<i>Our Nig</i> , chs. xi-appendix	BB Post
<b>Week 11</b>	11/05: <i>Our Nig</i> , chs. xi-appendix	Julia Stern, "Excavating Genre in <i>Our Nig</i> "	Abstract & Bib 11/07 BB Post

	11/07: Stern; Intro to the Neo-Slave Narrative (Rushdy and <i>Roots</i> )	Toni Morrison, “The Site of Memory”; Aida Levy-Hussen, <i>How to Read African American Literature</i> (introduction)	BB Post
<b>Week 12</b>	11/12: Exorcising the Ghosts of Slavery: Intro to Morrison & <i>Beloved</i> ; “The Site of Memory”; Morrison & Levy  11/14: No Class/Conference	Morrison, <i>Beloved</i> , foreword + pp. 3-75  <i>Beloved</i> , pp. 76-156	BB Post  BB Post
<b>Week 13</b>	11/19: Morrison, <i>Beloved</i> , foreword + pp. 3-156  11/21: <i>Beloved</i> , pp. 157-195	<i>Beloved</i> , pp. 157-195  <i>Beloved</i> , pp. 199-270	BB Post  BB Post
<b>Week 14</b>	11/26: <i>Beloved</i> , pp. 199-270  11/28: No Class/Thanksgiving Holiday	<i>Beloved</i> , pp. 271-324  Work on seminar paper	BB Post
<b>Week 15</b>	12/03: <i>Beloved</i> , pp. 271-324  12/05: Course wrap-up and evals; <i>Django</i>	Watch <i>Django Unchained</i> ; Erin Aubrey Kaplan, “Django”	Journal entries/all outstanding work
<b>FINAL</b>			Seminar paper due 12/11

### Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

#### Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* (see <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions>). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct (at <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>).

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* (see <http://equity.usc.edu>) or to the *Department of Public Safety* (see <http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>). This is important for the safety whole USC community.

Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* provides 24/7 confidential support (see <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm>), and the sexual assault resource center webpage describes reporting options and other resources (see [sarc@usc.edu](mailto:sarc@usc.edu)).

#### Support Systems:

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students (see <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>). *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations (see [http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home\\_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html)). If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction

will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology (see <http://emergency.usc.edu/>).

*Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255*

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

*Sexual Assault Resource Center*

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086*

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>  
*Bias Assessment Response and Support*

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs*

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. <http://dsp.usc.edu>

*Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710*

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

*Diversity at USC*

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

*USC Emergency Information*

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, <http://emergency.usc.edu>

*USC Department of Public Safety – 213-740-4321 (UPC) and 323-442-1000 (HSC) for 24-hour emergency assistance or to report a crime.*

Provides overall safety to USC community. <http://dps.usc.edu>