



ENGL 447 (Section 32754R): African American Narrative: The Slave Narrative & Its Contemporary Expressions

Units: 4

Spring 2022; MWF 11:00-11:50 am

**Note: We will not meet on Fridays, as they will be reserved for asynchronous, independent work.*

Location: THH 217

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

Office: THH 449D

Office Hours: By appointment, on Zoom, for the duration of the

Covid-19 pandemic.

Contact Info: 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; (213)-740-5555
dornsife.usc.edu/contact-cts

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 persistent anti-blackness affect our understanding of the genre when it is adapted to the screen.

Required texts include: William Wells Brown's *Clotel; Or, The President's Daughter* (1853), Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* (1859), Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Alex Haley's *Roots* (1977 miniseries), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), and Steve McQueen's *12 Years a Slave* (2013). Students will be expected to deliver an oral presentation of about 15 minutes, write one short paper (2-3 pages), a medium-length paper (4-6 pages), and a final seminar paper (8-10 pages).

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, Zoom, and the ability to stream digital content on Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, etc.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials:

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

Haley, Alex. *Roots* (miniseries)

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

McQueen, Steve. *12 Years a Slave* (film)

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*.

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

**Note: additional readings will appear 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. **Oral Presentation (15 minutes)**—Select one of the assigned readings and create an oral presentation of about 15 minutes. 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 think and what you have to say about what you read.
2. **Close Reading (2-3 pages)**—Select a passage from one of the assigned readings and provide an 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: Critical Analysis Paper (4-6 pages)**—In this essay, you will construct a critical analysis on one of the literary works we've already read and discussed by mid-semester. Your analysis must address one of the following concerns: a) issues of aesthetics (e.g. formal/literary attributes such as genre—autobiography, the sentimental novel, the slave narrative—or narrative strategies—the tragic mulatto/a device, the racial passing plot, or the cross-dressing trope); b) historical/political matters (e.g. anti-miscegenation laws, the Fugitive Slave Act, the Civil War, emancipation); or c) cultural/social issues or problems (e.g. abolition, racial divisions and hierarchies, literacy, fugitivity, physical and sexual violence and abuse). You may, and should, consult a few secondary sources to support your argument, but you should draw the bulk of your information from the literary work itself. The objective of this assignment is twofold: 1) to strengthen your analytical skills, and 2) to identify and articulate the concrete, practical value of literature and its ability to teach us about the world.

4. **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. 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
Oral Presentation	100	15
Close Reading	100	20
Midterm Paper	100	25
Final Paper	100	30
TOTAL	600	100

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

A	93-100	C	73-76
A-	90-92	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 or Chicago 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/engagement, or the student failed to submit the assignment.

Grading Philosophy

For each written assignment you complete and submit, you will receive a brief narrative statement (about 3-4 sentences) summarizing the strengths and weaknesses of your paper. You will also receive two scores: one for content (i.e. the quality and rigor of your ideas or argument), and another for composition (i.e. how well you write, including organization, grammar, mechanics, and usage). At the end of the semester when I compute final grades, I will average the two scores to calculate a final composite score for each assignment. The rationale for this particular grading scheme lies in my acknowledgement of the very subjective nature of grading. It is extremely difficult to assess learning, and personally, I believe that our current educational system encourages students to place too much focus on the grade and too little focus on the learning. This is an earnest attempt to prioritize the learning and to de-emphasize the grade.

Assignment Submission Policy

Assignments are due on the day listed on the syllabus. Please submit all work directly to me via email. Essays must be typed and formatted according to Chicago or MLA guidelines. Your work should be submitted as a MS Word document so that I can use the “reviewing” feature to comment on your paper. I will not accept other file formats. The file name should be: your first and last name _the name of the class_ and the name of the assignment. There is no time stamp on assignments. They are simply due during the week listed on the syllabus. That said, I do accept late work through the end of the final week of class.

Grading Timeline

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

Additional Policies

1. **Attendance and Participation:** Consistent attendance and participation is absolutely critical to your success in this class. You are allotted three 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. If you miss a class, please do not email me, asking me if you missed anything important or if I can tell you what you missed. You will need to either get that information from another student in the class or make an appointment to see me during office hours. 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:** To receive full credit, all assignments must be submitted by or on 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 the final grade must be submitted before the last week of class.
3. **Course Format/Meeting Structure:** The format of this course is a mixture of lecture, discussion, and applied learning activities. I’m a big fan of the “flipped” classroom, in which activities that would traditionally be assigned as homework are completed during class time. Towards this end, I may use freewriting exercises, media, visual art, op-eds, supplemental readings, or other aids to enhance our understanding of the material and structure our time in class. Always bring your reading and writing materials to our meetings. Class will generally begin with an ice-breaker/warm up activity—e.g. we might discuss a quote, screen a clip, or engage in a freewriting activity. After this, I/or another student might present important information in the form of a mini-lecture, guided discussion, or a reaction paper. Other times, I will give you an applied learning activity to work on in a pair or smaller group. Class will end with a summary/wrap-up of the material discussed.
4. **Email:** I will respond to emails during normal business hours, Monday through Friday, from 9 am to 5 pm. Emails sent outside of this window will be responded to during the next business day. I generally reply to emails within a day, but if it takes me longer, please be patient. When you email

me, please put the name of the class you are in in the subject field, so that I know which class you are enrolled in. Please do not email me about long, complex problems. Email is for short, direct exchanges. It is not a substitute for office hours. Please do not email me any unsolicited work, asking me to proofread, edit, or develop content for you. I do not read drafts or unfinished work. However, I am willing to assist with thesis statements or look at a particular paragraph during office hours. Please email me to make your request known.

5. **Office Hours:** I am available, by appointment, for virtual office hour visits via Zoom. If you'd like to schedule a virtual visit, please email me for a 20-minute consultation. In office hours, I can elaborate on class discussions and offer more hands-on assistance with assignments.
6. **The Writing Center:** While I am always happy to meet with you in office hours to discuss the materials we read/discuss in class as well as assist you with approaches to your written assignments, if you need writing help, then I recommend that you make an appointment for a consultation with a tutor at the writing center. The staff is comprised of scholars and teachers trained in Composition and Rhetoric as academic fields who are very good at what they do and can assist you with the writing process from start to finish so that your paper is well-organized, well-written, and polished. They do not do "proofreading," but they can give you some tips on how to do this yourself. It's a wonderful service and you should definitely use it. You can book a consultation here: <https://dornsife.usc.edu/writingcenter/>.
7. **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. Please refrain from voicing opinions that may be perceived as being offensive or insensitive.
8. **Synchronous Session Recording Notice:**
All synchronous sessions will be recorded and provided to all students asynchronously. USC prohibits the sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment. Please take note of the following policy:

S Campus Section 11.12(B)

Distribution or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a violation of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribution by services publishing class notes. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the Internet or via any other media. (See Section C.1 Class Notes Policy).

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

**Note: assignments are subject to change at the instructor's discretion.*

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings/Homework	Deliverable/ Due
Week 1	1/10: Course Overview: The Slave Narrative & Its Lasting Influence	Read the syllabus in its entirety. Review the course BB page. Sign up for oral presentations on Google Doc! Read Annette Gordon-Reed's essay, "Slavery's Shadow"	
	1/12: Gordon-Reed; What's involved in representing slavery?	Christina Sharpe, <i>In The Wake</i> (ch. 1)	

Week 2	1/17: MLK Day/No Class 1/19: Sharpe/"Wake Work"	Sharpe, con't. James Olney, "I Was Born"	
Week 3	1/24: Identifying the Form/Olney 1/26: "A Perilous Passage": From Slavery to Free Black Womanhood: Intro to Jacobs & <i>Incidents</i> ; Yellin	Jean Fagan Yellin, "Written by Herself" <i>Incidents</i> , preface + intro. by L. Maria Child, chs. i-vii	
Week 4	1/31: <i>Incidents</i> , preface + intro., chs. i-vii 2/02: <i>Incidents</i> , chs. viii-xxiii	<i>Incidents</i> , chs. viii-xxiii <i>Incidents</i> , chs. xxiv-xxxii	Close Reading Essay
Week 5	2/07: <i>Incidents</i> , chs. xxiv-xxxii 2/09: <i>Incidents</i> , chs. xxxiii-xli + appendix	<i>Incidents</i> , chs. xxxiii-xli + appendix William Andrews, "The Novelization of Voice"	
Week 6	2/14: Dialogizing the Black Narrative and the Emergence of the Fictive Voice: Intro to Brown & <i>Clotel</i> ; Andrews 2/16: <i>Clotel</i> , chs. i-vi	<i>Clotel</i> , chs. i-vi <i>Clotel</i> , chs. vii-xiii	
Week 7	2/21: President's Day/No Class 2/23: <i>Clotel</i> , chs. vii-xiii	<i>Clotel</i> , chs. vii-xiii, con't. <i>Clotel</i> , chs. xiv-xx	
Week 8	2/28: <i>Clotel</i> , chs. xiv-xx 3/02: <i>Clotel</i> , chs. xxi-xxiv	<i>Clotel</i> , chs. xxi-xxiv <i>Clotel</i> , chs. xxv-xxix	Midterm Paper
Week 9	3/07: <i>Clotel</i> , chs. xxv-xxix 3/09: Variations on the Form: Intro to Wilson & <i>Our Nig</i> ; preface + chs. i-iii	<i>Our Nig</i> , preface + chs. i-iii <i>Our Nig</i> , chs. iv-vii	
Week 10	Spring Break/No Class	No reading...have a great spring break!	
Week 11	3/21: <i>Our Nig</i> , chs. iv-vii 3/23: <i>Our Nig</i> , chs. viii-x	<i>Our Nig</i> , chs. viii-x <i>Our Nig</i> , chs. xi-appendix	
Week 12	3/28: <i>Our Nig</i> , chs. xi-appendix 3/30: Stern	Julia Stern, "Excavating Genre in <i>Our Nig</i> " Ashraf Rushdy, <i>Neo-Slave Narratives</i> (ch. 1); Madhu Dubey, "Neo-Slave Narratives"; Watch <i>Roots</i> , Part I (HBO Max)	

Week 13	4/04: Intro to the Neo-Slave Narrative; Rushdy and <i>Roots</i> 4/06: <i>12 Years a Slave</i>	Watch <i>12 Years a Slave</i> Toni Morrison, “The Site of Memory”	
Week 14	4/11: Exorcising the Ghosts of Slavery: Intro to Morrison & <i>Beloved</i> ; Morrison, “The Site of Memory” 4/13: Morrison, <i>Beloved</i> , foreword + pp. 3-75	Morrison, <i>Beloved</i> , foreword + pp. 3-75 <i>Beloved</i> , pp. 76-156	
Week 15	4/18: <i>Beloved</i> , pp. 76-156 4/20: <i>Beloved</i> , pp. 157-195	<i>Beloved</i> , pp. 157-195 <i>Beloved</i> , pp. 199-270	
Week 16	4/25: <i>Beloved</i> , pp. 199-270 4/27: <i>Beloved</i> , pp. 271-324; Course wrap-up and evals	<i>Beloved</i> , pp. 271-324	
FINAL			Final Paper 5/04

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).

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). 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>