



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

Units: 4

Semester: Spring 2025

Days/Time: M and W 10:00-11:20 am

Location: THH 215

Instructor: Prof. Melissa Daniels-Rauterkus
Associate Professor of English

Office: THH 449D

Office Hours: M and W 12:00-1:00 pm

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 M-F 8:00 am-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."

Learning Objectives

- define the aesthetic, political, and intellectual objectives of the African American slave narrative
- trace the genre's emergence and development
- determine the enduring value of the form and its impact on contemporary audiences
- reflect on a literary work and craft a written response that prioritizes your own thoughts and feelings
- synthesize a variety of materials—both primary and secondary, written and visual—and determine what kind of cultural work the genre performs. What lessons or truths do slave narratives impart?

Required Readings and Materials:

William Wells Brown, *Clotel; Or, The President's Daughter* (1853)

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)

Alex Haley, *Roots* (1977 TV mini-series)

Charles Johnson, *Middle Passage* (1990)

Kasi Lemmons, *Harriet* (2013 film)

**Note: You may use any edition or format (print or digital) of the required texts that you desire. To supplement our understanding of the primary texts on the reading list, we will also read a few scholarly essays, which are listed on the course schedule that follows. You can find PDFs of these essays on Brightspace.*

**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. **Reaction Paper (2x/1 page each)**—Select either an essay or a chapter from one of the novels we've read and draft a response to it. Prioritize your personal experience reading and thinking about the work. What experiences and/or feelings did it evoke? What impact did it have on you? What are the major takeaways, as you see them? You don't need to use any secondary sources to complete this assignment. I want to know what you think.
2. **End of Term Assignment: Reflective Essay (10 pages)**—Why does the slave narrative/neo-slave narrative matter? Why should we study slavery and/or read African American literature inspired by it? What lessons does this literary tradition hold for us? What truths about America emerge in the novels we read and discussed? How does the legacy/unfinished business of slavery live on in American life today?

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Attendance & Participation	100	10
Reaction Paper #1	100	30
Reaction Paper #2	100	30
Final Paper	100	30
TOTAL	300	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 Submission Policy

Assignments are due on the day listed on the syllabus. Essays must be typed and double-spaced. Please submit a printed hard copy in class.

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 and Participation:** Consistent attendance and participation is critical to your success in this class. If you miss a class, then you should reach out to another student in the class for notes 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. If you need to arrive late or leave early on a specific day, please let me know as soon as possible.
2. **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 icebreaker/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.
5. **Office Hours:** I am available for walk-in office hour visits on Mondays and Wednesdays from 12:00-1:00 pm—no appointment necessary. If this time slot doesn't work for you, then please email me to set up a Zoom appointment. I typically schedule Zoom sessions in 20-minute increments. In office hours, I can elaborate on class discussions and help with assignments.

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	1/13: Introductions, Course Overview, and Syllabus 1/15: Gordon-Reed; What's involved in representing slavery?	Annette Gordon-Reed, "Slavery's Shadow" No homework	
Week 2	1/20: MLK Day/No Class 1/22: Sharpe/"Wake Work"	Christina Sharpe, <i>In The Wake</i> (ch. 1) James Olney, "I Was Born"	

Week 3	1/27: Identifying the Form/Olney 1/29: Dialogizing the Slave Narrative and the Emergence of the Fictive Voice; Andrews and Intro. to <i>Clotel</i>	William L. Andrews, "The Novelization of Voice" <i>Clotel</i> , chs. i-vi (1-6)	
Week 4	2/3: <i>Clotel</i> , chs. i-vi (1-6) 2/5: <i>Clotel</i> , chs. vii-xiii (7-13)	<i>Clotel</i> , chs. vii-xiii (7-13) <i>Clotel</i> , chs. xiv-xx (14-20)	Reaction Paper #1 Due
Week 5	2/10: <i>Clotel</i> , chs. xiv-xx (14-20) 2/12: <i>Clotel</i> , chs. xxi-xxix (21-29)	<i>Clotel</i> , chs. xxi-xxix (21-29) No homework	
Week 6	2/17: President's Day/No Class 2/19: From Slavery to Free Black Womanhood: Intro. to <i>Incidents</i>	No homework <i>Incidents</i> , preface by the author and into. by L. Maria Child, chs. i-vii (1-7)	
Week 7	2/24: <i>Incidents</i> , preface by the author and Intro. by L. Maria Child, chs. i-vii (1-7) 2/26: <i>Incidents</i> , chs. viii-xiii (8-13)	<i>Incidents</i> , chs. viii-xiii (8-13) <i>Incidents</i> , chs. xiv-xxi (14-21)	
Week 8	3/3: <i>Incidents</i> , chs. xiv-xxi (14-21) 3/5: <i>Incidents</i> , chs. xxii-xxix (22-29)	<i>Incidents</i> , chs. xxii-xxix (22-29) <i>Incidents</i> , chs. xxx-xxxvii (30-37)	
Week 9	3/10: <i>Incidents</i> , chs. xxx-xxxvii (30-37) 3/12: <i>Incidents</i> , chs. xxxviii-xli (38-41)	<i>Incidents</i> , chs. xxxviii-xli (38-41) No homework	Reaction Paper #2 Due
Week 10	Spring Break/No Class	No reading...have a great spring break!	

Week 11	3/24: What is the Neo-Slave Narrative? Intro. to the form and Alex Haley's <i>Roots</i> (TV mini-series) 3/26: Dubey and <i>Roots</i> , segments of part 1	Madhu Dubey, "Neo-Slave Narratives" No homework	
Week 12	3/31: Dubey and <i>Roots</i> , segments of part 2 4/2: Intro. to Charles Johnson and <i>Middle Passage</i> , pp. 1-43	<i>Middle Passage</i> , pp. 1-43 <i>Middle Passage</i> , pp. 44-85	
Week 13	4/7: <i>Middle Passage</i> , pp. 44-85 4/9: <i>Middle Passage</i> , pp. 85-141	<i>Middle Passage</i> , pp. 85-141 <i>Middle Passage</i> , pp. 142-182	
Week 14	4/14: <i>Middle Passage</i> , pp. 142-182 4/16: <i>Middle Passage</i> , pp. 182-209	<i>Middle Passage</i> , pp. 182-209 No homework	
Week 15	4/21: Watch Kasi Lemmons's film <i>Harriet</i> 4/23: finish viewing <i>Harriet</i>	Draft a paragraph on a key scene Draft a paragraph on another key scene	
Week 16	4/28: Discuss the film and issues of representation and reception 4/30: Course wrap up and reflection activities	Work on final paper Work on final paper	
FINAL			Final Paper Due by 5/7

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>