Fall 2019

HSS 403-001: Literature of American Slavery and its Legacy

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LITERATURE OF AMERICAN SLAVERY AND ITS LEGACY

(HYBRID FORMAT)

HSS 403-001, Fall 2019
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[THIS SYLLABUS IS A HARD COPY OF WHAT CAN BE FOUND HERE:
https://web.njit.edu/~kimmelma/hss403LiteratureOfAmericanSlaveryHybrid.html]

PLEASE NOTE: IF YOU ARE NOT ADEPT AT READING IN ENGLISH, THEN YOU SHOULD NOT SIGN UP FOR THIS COURSE (INSTEAD, YOU SHOULD ENROLL IN A SENIOR SEMINAR COURSE THAT IS NOT CONCERNED WITH LITERATURE). THE COURSE WILL REQUIRE ANALYZING LITERATURE IN ENGLISH, AND IT ALSO WILL REQUIRE BEING ABLE TO WRITE CLEARLY ABOUT IT.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will examine literary and some supportive historical works written before, during and after the American Civil War, having mostly to do with slavery in America. In particular, the course will consider how writers have dealt with this keystone experience in American history and culture stylistically and ethically. The course will also reflect upon how these works have helped to shape the American ethos and identity, and how slavery in America has, as a legacy, helped to create the larger sense of American culture and literature as a body of work unique to the United States.

Literary works will be compared with each other and will be read within the framework primarily of their respective times. The course aims to inculcate in students a perceptive knowledge of American literature and culture as seen through the lens of the institution of slavery and its aftermath. To this end online postings, papers and the final take-home exam will provide opportunities for students to create for themselves such an understanding and to demonstrate that knowledge to the other participants in the course, including the instructor. In this regard the course also aims to provide opportunities for improvement of writing ability, and of course reading ability, so that students will be able, through the power of interpretation, to convey to others insights into the assigned literature.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of this course it is expected that you will have had the experience of thinking deeply into a narrowly focused subject area, in a nuanced way, and that you will have been able to communicate effectively about it both orally and in writing; furthermore you will have written an in-depth, narrowly focused, polemical, researched essay that will be fully documented, an essay of substantial length. As well, you will have been able,
successfully, to write argumentative, substantive and informed essays in response to thematic questions posed to you in the form of a take-home examination. These abilities and generally the skills you will develop in this course are necessary for success in the present world, for any professional, and indeed they are salutary for any citizen. In this regard, this course comports with NJIT's mission as set out in its most recent mission statement.

**COURSE TEXTS**

(you should read the editions of the works below as specified, not other versions)

Baldwin, James. "Notes of a Native Son," "Nobody Knows My Name," and Fifth Avenue Uptown" (in Canvas).


Kearns Goodwin, Doris. "The Seward's Trip South, 1835." (See in Canvas.)


Slave Narratives by Olaudah Equiano, Frederic Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Mary Prince (in Canvas and available online).


Wheatley, Phillis. Selected poems to be found at the Poetry Foundation website: [http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/phillis-wheatley#about](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/phillis-wheatley#about)


Also:

Glossary of Terms and Definitions

Other Online Literary Resources


Abbreviations for Marking Papers

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

* Final take-home examination, comprehensive, essay in format, open-book; the exam question(s) will be distributed to you at least a week ahead of time. The exam essay(s) must be uploaded as a Word file in the proper place in the Assignments section of our course in Canvas.

* An end-of-term research paper (the Term Paper), to be 1500 to 3000 words (excluding bibliography) in length; this essay must be a researched, fully-documented, original and critical,
discursive, polemical and otherwise argumentative essay that must include at least some detailed literary analysis (see below^), along with a bibliography of all primary and secondary sources † (again, the bibliography is not to be considered part of your word count)—the essay must not be a mere report, and should be one that is appropriate to a course in literature (as opposed to, for example, a course in history, although historical matters may be included in the essay for this course). The term paper topic is open (yet the topic must have something to do with the literature of American slavery and/or American slavery's legacy) but must be approved ahead of time by the instructor.

* A Term Paper Announcement (see full description below^) consisting of a Working Title and Subtitle, a one-sentence Thesis Statement indicating what of a truly polemical nature is to be proven in your essay, a Description of your future paper’s writing strategy (one paragraph can be enough here, but more than one is acceptable—this is not to be a summary of what you think your paper will turn out to be, but rather a narrative describing how you will prove your thesis), and a Bibliography of at least three secondary sources, † one of which must be a hard-copy source (see full description of bibliography requirements below^).

N.B.: Research Term Paper assignments should be submitted in order, and the TPA should be preceded by your submission of a proposed topic for the paper. Your topic must meet be approved by the instructor. There are Discussion areas where you are expected to post ideas for your paper, and once your idea has been approved where your TPA should also be posted (the TPA can be simple and short but must contain all the elements mentioned above, and this too must be approved). Please don't upload attachments to the discussion forums.

* A group project to be submitted in Power Point at the end of the course. This group-composed document would contain both visual imagery and text, and possibly music, and would delve into a chosen issue or facet of literature involving American slavery and/or its legacy.

* A portofolio of your 8 best posts in the course (your selection). How to create this portfolio: select by copying and pasting the 8 posts you think best demonstrate your performance in this course in the weekly exchanges of commentary, including the time stamp of each post. Paste the posts in chronological order in a Word file and upload it, at the end of the term, in the appropriate place in the Assignment section of our course in Canvas.

* Posted commentary of various kinds.

N.B.: Initial posts will receive a grade—but this grade is advisory only, meant only to guide you so you can get a clear sense of the expectations you must meet in our course; however, when actually grading a student's posts, at the end of the course, no post will receive a grade lower than the advisory grade, and the ultimate grade for a post could be higher than the advisory grade. (Note also that a grade of "D-" is to be reserved for posted writing that does not conform to the minimum standards as regarding protocols for writing in our course—you are expected, in all posts to the class, to use standard writing protocols and Standard English, to have spell checked your writing before posting it and as best you can to have grammar checked it—so don't write as you normally might write when texting or emailing. A "D-" may also be assigned for posts not meeting the minimum word length—see below.)
Initial weekly posts must be a minimum of 100 words and normally not more than 150 words. Secondary posts—i.e., posts in response to initial posts—should be from 50 to 100 words. Follow-up posts, in the form of questions or comments, or in reply to the instructor's comments or questions or both, can be of any length. One initial post per weekly reading assignment and one secondary post are required.

N.B.: Failure to participate in class discussions (i.e., the posts as described above) at a minimally acceptable level will result in disqualification of end-of-term assignments such as the term paper and final exam; such disqualification must inevitably spell failure in the course. In order to pass this course a student must be consistently active in daily/weekly class work starting from the beginning of the course term.

Disqualification of prior work can also result from failure to submit a minimally-acceptable response to the final exam question(s).

^ Term Paper Announcement:

Consists of 1) a descriptive paper title and subtitle, 2) a thesis statement that includes the point of your argument, the breadth of that argument, and the argument’s significant concepts and details, 3) a description of the writing or argumentative strategy to be employed in your paper (this is not to be confused with a summary of your projected essay), 4) an alphabetized bibliography of at least three secondary sources, to be listed along with any primary sources to be used,† which you plan to consult as part of your research project, presented in proper MLA format (see writing and documentation guidelines above, listed with the course readings), one of which must be a hard-copy source (for the purposes of this assignment encyclopedias, dictionaries, and textbooks will not be considered as counting toward the requisite minimum number of secondary sources, although they can be used in your term paper project and should be listed in your bibliography—but articles obtained from a NJIT or Rutgers database should be considered as "hard copy").

^^ Term Paper:

Consists of: 1) a descriptive paper title and subtitle, 2) a full-length essay, 3) a bibliography in MLA format and alphabetized. For the purposes of this assignment, use must be made of at least three secondary research sources ‡ (one of them hard copy) excluding textbooks, encyclopedias and dictionaries that may also be used and should be cited if used, presented in proper MLA format (see writing and documentation guidelines above, listed with the course readings); encyclopedias, dictionaries, and textbooks will not be considered as counting toward the requisite minimum number of secondary sources, although, again, they can be used in your term paper project and should be listed in your bibliography—but articles obtained from a NJIT or Rutgers database should be considered as "hard copy"—feel free to check with me about the suitability of such an article or for that matter about any of your possible sources).

It is STRONGLY recommended that research begin with the MLA Bibliography (locally to be found at the Rutgers-Newark library research room—ask a librarian there to show you how it works).
†If you don't know the difference between a primary and secondary source then find out right away; I've provided links here and in our Moodle space that will help you with this and all matters regarding researching and writing a polemical research essay.

N.B.: All papers must be word processed, spell-checked, and to the best of one's ability grammar-checked. **If on occasion use is made of the ideas or words of someone else in one's writing—not only in formally submitted papers but all work you submit in this course, including the weekly posts—then the source(s) of those ideas and/or words must be cited; that is, when appropriate, your writing must be fully documented in MLA format (you must cite sources—using footnotes, endnotes, or parenthetical documentation, which include specific page numbers keyed to particular passages in your text, and complete bibliographical information).** PAPERS NOT MEETING ALL OF THESE REQUIREMENTS WILL NOT BE READ AND WILL NOT RECEIVE CREDIT. Papers must be submitted to the instructor via Canvas only, as attachments, using a proper indentifying subject line.

Keep in mind that academic integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at: [http://www5.njit.edu/policies/sites/policies/files/academic-integrity-code.pdf](http://www5.njit.edu/policies/sites/policies/files/academic-integrity-code.pdf).

Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. **Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university.** If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu.

**COURSE GRADE**

The final course grade is the result of the below categories of activity, according to the proportions shown.

Initial posts (one per weekly reading assignment), 10% (half credit if late)

Secondary posts (one per weekly reading assignment), 5% (half credit if late)

Follow-up posts, 5%
Portfolio of Eight Best Individual Posts (not including introduction to the class), 5%

Group Project, 5%

Term Paper Announcement, 10%

End of Term Research Paper, 25%

Final Examination, 35%

COURSE SCHEDULE
(see specific due dates in Canvas)

Week 1: Introducing ourselves and general introduction to the course. Post commentary on "The Seward's Trip South"; Poems of Phillis Wheatley.

Week 2: "Introduction" to The Classic Slave Narratives, by Henry Louis Gates, xi-xxx. Selections from The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African, 31-61, 127-40; selections from The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, 231-63; selections from Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, 315-329, 355-72, 385-403; and, selections from Linda Brent's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, 413-17, 446-52, 463-68, 486-90, 525-29, 607-14.

Week 3: Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, Preface and Chapters 1, 3, 4, 7, 9, 13, 20, 30, 31, 33, 34, 40, and 44, and Concluding Remarks.

Week 4: Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn, "Explanatory" note and chapters 1-18, 31-36, 40-43 ("Chapter the Last").

Week 5: Selections from W. E. B. Dubois' The Souls of Black Folk, 1-8, 24-42, 104-14, 137-46 ("Forethought," chapters 1, 3, 4, 10, 14, and "The Afterthought").

Week 6: Richard Wright's Native Son (1939), Book One.

Week 7: Richard Wright's Native Son (1939), Book Two; Book Three, 273-310 (ending with "He lay on the cold floor"), 418-30 (ending with "How Bigger Was Born").
**Week 8:** Ellison, *Invisible Man* (Prologue and Chapter 1); Baldwin, "Notes of a Native Son," "Nobody Knows My Name" and “Fifth Avenue, Uptown."

**Week 9:** *Dutchman* by Leroi Jones / Amiri Baraka.

**Week 10:** *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison (1970), up to p. 93.

**Week 11:** *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison (1970), remainder of the book, starting with the section titled "Spring."

**Week 12:** August Wilson, *The Piano Lesson*.

**Week 13:** *Citizen* by Claudia Rankine (2014); *The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead (excerpt).

**Week 14:** Oral reports on individual research projects.

**Week 15:** Oral reports on individual research projects. (See various assignment due dates.)

Week 16: See various assignment due dates.

**ABBREVIATIONS FOR MARKING PAPERS**

Key: Abbreviation - Meaning

A - Article
Agr - Agreement
Awk - Awkward
CS - Comma Splice
Dic - Diction
Exp - Explain
FS - Fused Sentences
RO - Run On Sentence
SF - Sentence Fragment
Sp - Spelling
SS - Sentence Structure
Syn - Syntax or Word Order
Tr - Transition
Un - Unclear
Uncl - Unclear
Us - Usage
V - Verb
Va - Vague
VF - Verb Form
VT - Verb Tense
WF - Word Form
WW - Wrong Word