

**English 741:
Nineteenth-Century African American Literary Activism
Wednesday, 7:00-9:50
223 Colson Hall**

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Office Hours:
Wednesday, 3:00-4:00
and by appointment
(or just stop by)

Words of Wisdom to Guide Our Journey This Semester:

Truth, in my belief, is something which occurs when actions take place: not when phrases are contrived. Truth is not a word which represents correct response to an examination, nor a well-written piece of prose. Truth is not a “right word” which can be printed. It is (it is only) a “right deed” which can be done.

--Jonathan Kozol. *The Night Is Dark and I Am Far from Home*

One has the feeling that nights are becoming sleepless in some quarters, and it seems to me obvious that the recoil of traditional “humanists” and some postmodern theorists to this particular aspect of the debate [she’s talking about the debate over the literary “canon”], the “race” aspect, is as severe as it is because the claims for attention come from that segment of scholarly and artistic labor in which the mention of “race” is either inevitable or elaborately, painstakingly masked; and if all of the ramifications that the term demands are taken seriously, the bases of Western civilization will require re-thinking. Thus, in spite of its implicit and explicit acknowledgment, “race” is still a virtually unspeakable thing, as can be seen in the apologies, notes of “special use” and circumscribed definitions that accompany it--not least of which is my own deference in surrounding it with quotation marks. Suddenly (for our purposes, suddenly) “race” does not exist. For three hundred years black Americans insisted that “race” was no usefully distinguishing factor in human relationships. During those same three centuries every academic discipline, including theology, history, and natural science, insisted “race” was *the* determining factor in human development. When blacks discovered they had shaped or become a culturally formed race, and that it had specific and revered difference, suddenly they were told there is no such thing as “race,” biological or cultural, that matters and that genuinely intellectual exchange cannot accommodate it.

--Toni Morrison. “Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature”

Yet if the discussion about the profession’s contemporary status seems especially heated and confused, perhaps it is because we have never discerned so many intersecting, mutually implicating crises at one time. As we question the institutional practices by which literary canons are constructed and maintained, we also question, more broadly, the university’s role as producer of knowledge and as reproducer of a social order in which knowledge is power and

information is commodity. We question the relation of critical intellectuals to popular culture, as well as the relation between intellectuals and their institutional matrices of power. We question the relation of literary theory to pedagogical practice, as well as the relation of academic, professional criticism to the nonacademic literary culture around it.

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But precisely because I am located within these various debates, I don't believe we can talk very long about the social mission or legitimation practices of criticism without distorting, by totalizing, the very positions and practices we hope to illuminate. The "institution of literary criticism" is no longer (if it ever was) one solid, monolithic thing; its practices and positions are multiple and contradictory; its canons are diachronically, historically variable (like everything else) and synchronically, socially variable as well. It is true that we can discern, even amid these variables, some of the historical tendencies of academic criticism, and we can contest some of its contemporary practices; but I sincerely hope that the moment for describing "the function of criticism" has passed forever.

--Michael Berubé. *Marginal Forces/Cultural Centers: Tolson, Pynchon, and the Politics of the Canon*

In my belief, few books on education published in the past ten years are ethical books. They are not ethical because they are not invocations to lived visions. They *tell* of challenges, *refer* to agonies, *comment* on difficulties. They do not ask an answer in the form of action from the reader. Their power begins and ends within the world of words and paragraphs alone.

If the present book does not compel transformed behavior, in the life of its own author and in that of its authentic reader too, then it does not merit the expense of labor which it now commands and has commanded for the past five years; nor can it justify the pain and anguish I would wish it to provoke within the conscience of an undefended reader.

People who are looking for "a lot of interesting ideas," and hope to dabble her for little more, offend the author and degrade themselves. They would do well to stop right now. Those who read in order to take action on their consequent beliefs--these are the only readers I respect or look for. Atrocities, real and repeated, proliferate within this social order. The deepest of all lies in our will not to respond to what we see before us. When we declare that we are troubled by the lockstep life that has been charted for us by the men and women who now govern and control our public schools, what we are doing is to state our disavowal of an evil and unwanted patrimony. We are not living in an ordinary time, but in an hour of intense and unrelenting pain for many human beings. It is not good enough to favor justice in high literary flourish and to feel compassion for the victims of the very system that sustains our privileged position. We must be able to disown and disavow that privileged position. If we cannot we are not ethical men and women, and do not lead lives worth living.

--Jonathan Kozol. *The Night Is Dark and I Am Far from Home*

I speak here of poetry as a revelatory distillation of experience, not the sterile word play that, too often, the white fathers distorted the word *poetry* to mean--in order to cover a desperate wish for imagination without insight.

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For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we

help give name to the nameless so it can be thought.

--Audre Lorde, "Poetry Is Not a Luxury"

We are living in one of the most frightening moments in the history of this country. Democracies are quite rare and usually short-lived in the human adventure. The precious notion of ordinary people living lives of decency and dignity--owing to their participation in the basic decision making in those fundamental institutions that affect their life chances--is difficult to sustain over space and time. And every historic effort to forge a democratic project has been undermined by two fundamental realities: *poverty* and *paranoia*. The persistence of poverty generates levels of *despair* that deepen social conflict; the escalation of paranoia produces levels of *distrust* that reinforce cultural division. Race is the most explosive issue in American life precisely because it forces us to confront the tragic facts of poverty and paranoia, despair and distrust. In short, a candid examination of *race* matters takes us to the core of the crisis of American democracy. And the degree to which *race matters* in the plight and predicament of fellow citizens is a crucial measure of whether we can keep alive the best of this democratic experiment we call America.

--Cornel West. *Race Matters*

Prison bars do not need to be made of steel and concrete. They can be fashioned also out of words and hesitations: an "interesting seminar on hunger," "a reasonable exchange of views about despair." The language that we learn in public school is one of ethical antisepsis and of political decontamination. It is the language of an intellectual cease-fire while the victims are still dying. It is also a language which, by failing to concede real oppositions, denies a child or adult right or power to make strong, risk-taking choices. The student learns to step back and to steer away from moral confrontations. He learns to ascertain the quickest highway and the best approach to middle places of inert compassion and dysfunctional concern: places where choice does not reside and anger does not threaten.

If the child studies hard, if he assimilates the language well, and if he should grow up by any chance to be a writer, teacher, commentator or a critic even of such areas as social justice in this nation, he will have learned by then the proper means by which to make himself provocative, but not unsettling: fashionable and delightful, but not feared. He will have become, by grotesque sequences of North American recirculation, a perfect item in the same machine that polished him to size. At worst he will be somebody like Moynihan. At best he may be somebody like Galbraith. There is no danger he will be Thoreau.

--Jonathan Kozol. *The Night Is Dark and I Am Far from Home*

To engage in a serious discussion of race in America, we must begin not with the problems of black people but with the flaws of American society--flaws rooted in historic inequalities and longstanding cultural stereotypes. How we set up the terms for discussing racial issues shapes our perception and response to these issues. As long as black people are viewed as a "them," the burden falls on blacks to do all the "cultural" and "moral" work necessary for healthy race relations. The implication is that only certain Americans can define what it means to be American--and the rest must simply "fit in."

--Cornel West. *Race Matters*

When we view living in the european mode only as a problem to be solved, we rely solely upon

our ideas to make us free, for these were what our white fathers told us were precious. . . . But as we come more into touch with our own ancient, noneuropean consciousness of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge and, therefore, lasting action comes.

--Audre Lorde, "Poetry Is Not a Luxury"

In high schools, as in university circles, there is far more talk right now of "how we learn what we perceive"--still worse, of "how we learn to find out what we think we feel when we perceive"--than of the real thing which is somehow still there, at the long, long end of the extended telescope of our disjointed and neutralized perception. "Interesting things about the state of being known as RADICAL, LIBERATED, FREE" become far more important than those things that we are radical *about*, or liberated *for*. Little by little, we learn to remove ourselves from the immediate field of forces, actions, options or intentions, on which we have briefly stood, but always and forever at its indecisive margin, and situate ourselves instead upon a safe and sober ledge from which to look down on the action. It is as if the explication of the text were to precede the composition of the poem: still worse, as if *we* were to be the explicators. When we end up at the point of explication of the poem we have not written, and no longer dare to write, we have come to that point of ideal alienation at which we qualify for academic tenure, intellectual respectability and decent income.

--Jonathan Kozol. *The Night Is Dark and I Am Far from Home*

I used to think that I talked to the reader and in a sense perhaps that was true but it is really the work that talks to the reader as it was the work that talked to the writer. The work and the artist say each other as I think lovers do and, in later contact, it is the work and the reader that say each other. Or the work may be mute and the reader stone deaf.

Insofar as there can be anything about me worth writing about it would have to be the work and the importance of the work can only be to the reader who has entered into a relation with it. This is at variance with the generally--not only academically--held idea that works of art can be examined, described and assessed as though they were precious stones. Or houses. But the importance of houses is lost in their selling price. We live in them. Or we don't.

--William Bronk

The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized. This is poetry as illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are--until the poem--nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but already felt. That distillation of experience from which true poetry springs births thought as dream births concept, as feeling births idea, as knowledge births (precedes) understanding.

As we learn to bear the intimacy of scrutiny and to flourish within it, as we learn to use the products of that scrutiny for power within our living, those fears which rule our lives and form our silences begin to lose their control over us.

--Audre Lorde, "Poetry Is Not a Luxury"

Required Texts

Note: Specific editions, where noted

- Andrews, William L., ed. *The Oxford Frederick Douglass Reader*
- Brown, William Wells. *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter*
- Brown, William Wells. *The Escape; Or, A Leap for Freedom*
- Craft, William. *Running A Thousand Miles for Freedom*
- Delany, Martin. *Blake; or, The Huts of America*
- Delany, Martin. *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*
- Foner, Philip S. and Robert James Branham, eds. *Lift Every Voice: African American Oratory, 1787-1900*. The University of Alabama Press
- Fredrickson, George M. *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*
- Harper, Frances E. W. *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted*
- Hopkins, Pauline E. *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*.
- Jacobs, Harriet A. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*. Enlarged Edition. Harvard University Press.
- Litwack, Leon F. *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860*
- Newman, Richard, Patrick Rael, & Philip Lapsansky, eds. *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African-American Protest Literature, 1790-1860*. Routledge.
- Quarles, Benjamin. *Black Abolitionists*
- Sherman, Joan R., ed. *African-American Poetry of the Nineteenth Century: An Anthology*.
- Walker, David. *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*. Ed. Peter P. Hinks. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000.
- Wilson, Harriet E. *Our Nig; or, Sketches in the Life of a Free Black* (1859). Penguin Classics. Edited by P. Gabrielle Foreman and Reginald Pitts

Requirements:

1. A presentation on scholarship in the field (15%)

Part of the purpose of this seminar is to give you some sense of what it means to be a scholar in the field of African American literary and cultural studies. Unless your education has been somewhat unusual, you probably have not received much instruction in or exposure to African American history, and much of what you have been taught in this regard has likely included a number of misrepresentations, a great deal of misinformation, and faulty conceptual frameworks. Scholars devoted to African American Studies necessarily deal with these misrepresentations, and we work in a field that is constantly in a state of (re)construction. It is important, then, for us to cover a wide range of intellectual and cultural territory, and it makes sense to divide the labor and to rely on one another as we go.

Accordingly, throughout the semester we will have reports on an important work of scholarship in the field. For your report on scholarship, I'd like you to summarize the book's

argument, briefly discuss published reviews on the book, and offer some commentary on it, focusing on how it might be useful in our discussions. I do not expect you to have a detailed understanding of the texts or of their historical or scholarly contexts. We'll use this assignment as an entrance into a field of concerns that we can discuss, and for which I can provide background in class.

As part of your report, you should prepare a one- to two-page handout for the class. Include on this handout the book's author and title, the publisher and year of publication, a brief overview of each book's purpose (the sort of thing that one finds on the back cover or in the book's introduction), an overview of the central argument of each chapter, and perhaps one or two quotations from the books that you find particularly intriguing. For the brief overview, it is acceptable to reprint passages from the text or even from its back cover, as long as you are careful to note the source. But you should give the class some sense of how the book's argument is organized (chapter overview) and how the author defines her or his approach to the subject (theoretical or otherwise).

Since you will be *handing out* your handout, **you shouldn't read it for the presentation.** Indeed, you should give the other scholars in the room your handout **at the end of your presentation.** Your audience is a group of scholars interested in learning more about the subject, and you should talk to them. Your tone should be informal (since you are talking with peers). Naturally, you will not master this subject in a short time, so in your presentation, you can talk of what you've learned so far and also lingering questions you'd like to address if you could have more time. **This report should last about 10 minutes. If it runs longer than 10 minutes, I will not say anything in class, but I will lower your grade for the assignment.**

Let me emphasize that your talk should be structured, focused, and interesting. **Do not present a chapter-by-chapter overview of the book.** Find another, more interesting, way to summarize the book's overall argument and method.

2. A presentation on a scholarly journal (15%)

This course leads to a seminar essay, and it is useful to think of this as an essay that you are preparing for publication--that is, an essay containing research and an argument that you want to share with a broad scholarly audience. You want publishers to accept the essay so that your intended audience can read the essay, and you want to have some influence on those readers. Accordingly, you should therefore think about (and study) the conventions of the genre.

That's what you'll do for this assignment. You will examine and then describe in an oral presentation a prominent journal in the field. Look at the editorial board or advisory committee for the journal. Find out what the journal's acceptance/rejection rate is. Identify the range of articles in a sampling of the journals (three or four recent issues). Identify specific conventions of the articles in the journals. What kind of introduction do you encounter in those essays? Where do you encounter the thesis, and how long does it take for the author to present the thesis? Does the author offer an overview of the scholarship on the subject--and, if so, where and how? Often, for example, one will encounter that sort of overview in the main text, close to the beginning, of a *PMLA* article; in an *American Literature* article, one is likely to encounter the relevant scholarship not through a focused overview but through various endnotes. In what other ways do the articles deal with the relevant scholarship--and what is the range of that scholarship (archival, historical, cultural, literary)?

For your presentation, you should give advice to the other scholars in the room about what they should think about if they are planning to submit an essay to this journal. Again, do

not read from your handout, and **hand out your handout at the end of your presentation.** The handout (probably, one page will be enough) should include the essential information for someone interested in submitting something to that journal.

3. Three “Occasional Responses” (due as the occasions present themselves to you, as long as they present themselves to you once each month) (5% each)

This assignment is intended as an opportunity for you to try out ideas, ask questions, challenge assumptions, reconsider texts, or just rant about the infuriating complexity of it all. Anything, in other words, is fair game here. You can address any subject--perhaps especially those you don't feel comfortable addressing in class. I'll respond as helpfully as I can. If I don't have the answers to your questions, I'll try to figure out where we can find them.

Too often, I think, younger scholars are asked to present an argument in which they claim authority over the subject--in the form of a definite thesis and absolute conclusions. In my view, this practice encourages intellectual dishonesty, for you are asked to be certain about something about which you might feel very uncertain. There is much to learn about African American history, literature and culture--and there is a great deal of misinformation that you will need to sort through. It is simply good scholarship to note as much, and to recognize that although you can do some preliminary research and thinking this semester, you will hardly be in a position to claim ultimate authority over this subject. If all goes well, you will be in a position by the end of the semester to write a strong essay. That is, you'll know the kind of information you need to question, the kinds of questions you need to ask, the kinds of conceptual frameworks you will need to develop over time, and the kind of essay you can honestly write in the meantime. It is good scholarly practice, in short, to recognize that you are involved in a process of understanding that will develop over time. Use this assignment to talk about where you are now, and where you are trying to go.

This assignment will provide me with an opportunity to help you prepare for the major course essay. Please keep that in mind as you write these responses, and let me know if there is anything in particular you would like me to attend to in my response to your comments.

Length on this one is up to you, though it should be at least two pages (typed, double-spaced). Don't be worried about writing too much: I love long responses. You should hand this in as questions or ideas occur to you--but since this is a process-oriented assignment, I'll need one response from you each month. There is no grade for this assignment; just be sure to hand in one each month, and at least four (more if you want) by the end of the semester.

4. 25-page (minimum) Seminar Essay (55% of final grade).

This is the standard analytical/research essay--the kind you will study in the presentations on scholarly journals. I recommend that you devote the essay to a single text or to a narrowly-defined set of concerns, but I'm open to all possibilities. **However, regardless of your main text for this essay, you are required to mention briefly in your essay at least three orations from the required text *Lift Every Voice*.** Use these three orations, briefly, to contextualize your essay's main text or to otherwise draw out driving issues or rhetorical conventions of the time. Do not offer close readings of these three orations--unless, of course, your essay is devoted entirely to orations, in which case you should look at more than three.

As you explore literary and cultural history, it is good to remember that what *and how* you see can depend significantly on what you know. You will need some historical and cultural background. I expect you to support any assertion you make about the past. I recommend that

you begin by gathering the conventional wisdom on the subject, which you can do by consulting specialized encyclopedias and other texts in the library's Reference section.

I've included in the syllabus the "Guide for Papers" that I give to my undergraduates, which I hope will be helpful and not an insult to your intelligence and abilities. Although the document is designed to guide undergraduate writing, the advice is still useful at the graduate level. In my own work, I run into trouble whenever I stray from the guidelines I've put together in this document.

Because I would like to encourage you to think about research and writing as a process, I am requiring that you check in with me along the way. **By January 26**, you should give me a "statement of interest," a brief statement telling me what kinds of issues you are drawn to. This will give me a chance to recommend texts for you to read--that is, required texts that are scheduled for later in the semester but which you might want to read sooner. **On April 13**, I want a progress report on your essay, so that I can look for any problems that might come up. **Finally, on either Thursday, April 28, or Friday, April 29, depending on your schedules, I will host a workshop on the seminar essays at my apartment.** Food will be provided, and we'll spend an evening workshopping your essays.

In addition to these required times of checking in, please feel free to check in with me at any time about your essay. Send me ideas, a prospectus, an outline, if that is the way you work--or just come in to talk with me about your project. This will give me an opportunity to help you bring your topic into focus, define and refine your thesis, identify the sources you will need to consult, and plan the strategy for your argument. Accordingly, the more you can tell me along the way, the more I can help you prepare for the essay. When you have a rough draft, I will be happy to skim-read the draft to look for potential problems or to evaluate the general shape and strategy of your argument. Although I'll read the opening paragraphs closely, I will use the draft only to comment on broader concerns. In other words, you'll need to proofread for the details (style, grammar, etc.) on your own.

Although this essay isn't due until the end of the semester, please start your work on it as soon as possible. You should make good use of the informal responses to prepare for this essay, which means that you should identify your topic for this assignment as soon as possible. I expect detailed research and a finished essay that has benefitted from careful proofreading and revision.

Recent Scholarship on African American Literature and Related Concerns

Note: Below is a selected list of relevant scholarship from 2004-2010. Use this list to think about what kinds of topics have been coming up in the published scholarship, so that you can get a sense of the kinds of issues you might want to explore in your paper. I hope that this list will be useful as you prepare your "statement of interest" and also as you work on your seminar essay. Please let me know if you have any questions about any of these books, or if you want to discuss topics that are not represented in this list.

Allen, Thomas M. *Temporality and Social Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008.

Bacon, Jacqueline. *Freedom's Journal: The First African-American Newspaper*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007.

Bassard, Katherine Clay. *Transforming Scriptures: African American Women Writers and the*

- Bible*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010.
- Bennett, Michael. *Democratic Discourses: The Radical Abolition Movement and Antebellum American Literature*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005.
- Bergman, Jill and Debra Bernardi, eds. *Our Sisters' Keepers: Nineteenth-Century Benevolence Literature by American Women*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2005.
- Boggis, JerriAnne, Eve Allegra Raimon, and Barbara A. White, eds. *Harriet Wilson's New England: Race, Writing, and Region*. Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2007.
- Brooks, Daphne A. *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.
- Buchanan, Thomas C. *Black Life on the Mississippi: Slaves, Free Blacks, and the Western Steamboat World*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- Callahan, Allen Dwight. *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Carey, Brycchan, Markman Ellis, and Sara Salih, eds. *Discourses of Slavery and Abolition: Britain and its Colonies, 1760-1838*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Castiglia, Christopher. *Interior States: Institutional Consciousness and the Inner Life of Democracy in the Antebellum United States*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.
- Chaney, Michael A. *Fugitive Vision: Slave Image and Black Identity in Antebellum Narrative*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008.
- Colaiaco, James A. *Frederick Douglass and the Fourth of July*. New York: Palgrave, 2006.
- Cox, John D. *Traveling South: Travel Narratives and the Construction of American Identity*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2005.
- DeLombard, Jeannine Marie. *Slavery On Trial: Law, Abolitionism, and Print Culture*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007.
- Dickerson, Vanessa D. *Dark Victorians*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008.
- Doolen, Andy. *Fugitive Empire: Locating Early American Imperialism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.
- Dowling, David. *Capital Letters: Authorship in the Antebellum Literary Market*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009.
- Doyle, Laura. *Freedom's Empire: Race and the Rise of the Novel in Atlantic Modernity, 1640-1940*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.
- Dunbar, Erica Armstrong. *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Elrod, Eileen Razzari. *Piety and Dissent: Race, Gender, and Biblical Rhetoric in Early American Autobiography*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008.
- Ernest, John. *Chaotic Justice: Rethinking African American Literary History*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Ernest, John. *Liberation Historiography: African American Writers and the Challenge of History, 1794-1861*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- Finseth, Ian Frederick. *Shades of Green: Visions of Nature in the Literature of American Slavery, 1770-1860*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009.
- French, Scot. *The Rebellious Slave: Nat Turner in American Memory*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004.
- Fulton, DoVeanna S. *Speaking Power: Black Feminist Orality in Women's Narratives of*

- Slavery*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006.
- Gardner, Eric. *Unexpected Places: Relocating Nineteenth-Century African American Literature*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009.
- Garvey, T. Gregory. *Creating the Culture of Reform in Antebellum America*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2006.
- Glass, Kathy L. *Courting Communities: Black Female Nationalism and "Syncre-Nationalism" in the Nineteenth-Century North*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Glave, Dianne D., and Mark Stoll, eds. *"To Love the Wind and the Rain": African Americans and Environmental History*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006.
- Hall, Stephen G. *A Faithful Account of the Race: African American Historical Writing in Nineteenth-Century America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009.
- Harrold, Stanley. *The Rise of Aggressive Abolitionism: Addresses to the Slaves*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004.
- Holmes, David G. *Revisiting Racialized Voice: African American Ethos in Language and Literature*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004.
- Jackson, Leon. *The Business of Letters: Authorial Economies in Antebellum America*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.
- Jeffrey, Julie Roy. *Abolitionists Remember: Antislavery Autobiographies & the Unfinished Work of Emancipation*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008.
- Johnson, Sylvester A. *The Myth of Ham in Nineteenth-Century American Christianity: Race, Heathens, and the People of God*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Jackson, Cassandra. *Barriers between Us: Interracial Sex in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.
- Jones, Martha S. *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.
- Mitchell, Michele. *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- King, Wilma. *The Essence of Liberty: Free Black Women during the Slave Era*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006.
- Lee, Maurice S. *Slavery, Philosophy, and American Literature, 1830-1860*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Levine, Robert S. *Dislocating Race & Nation: Episodes in Nineteenth-Century American Literary Nationalism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008.
- Levine, Robert S., and Samuel Otter, eds. *Frederick Douglass & Herman Melville: Essays in Relation*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008.
- Logan, Shirley Wilson. *Liberating Language: Sites of Rhetorical Education in Nineteenth-Century Black America*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008.
- Loughran, Trish. *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770-1870*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.
- Luciano, Dana. *Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: New York University Press, 2007.
- Maffly-Kipp, Laurie F. *Setting Down the Sacred Past: African-American Race Histories*. Cambridge, Mass., The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010.
- May, Cedrick. *Evangelism and Resistance in the Black Atlantic, 1760-1835*. Athens: The

- University of Georgia Press, 2008.
- McCarthy, Timothy Patrick, and John Stauffer, eds. *Prophets of Protest: Reconsidering the History of American Abolitionism*. New York: The New Press, 2006.
- McGarry, Molly. *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.
- Meer, Sarah. *Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelsy and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850s*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2005.
- Meehan, Sean Ross. *Mediating American Autobiography: Photography in Emerson, Thoreau, Douglass, and Whitman*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008.
- McKittrick, Katherine. *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.
- McKittrick, Katherine and Clyde Woods, eds. *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*. Toronto: Between the Lines/Cambridge: South End Press, 2007.
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- Roberts-Miller, Patricia. *Fanatical Schemes: Proslavery Rhetoric and the Tragedy of Consensus*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009.
- Rucker, Walter C. *The River Flows On: Black Resistance, Culture, and Identity Formation in Early America*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006.
- Ryan, Barbara. *Love, Wages, Slavery: The Literature of Servitude in the United States*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006.
- Sánchez, Maria Carla. *Performing the World: Social Activism and the Problem of Fiction in Nineteenth-Century America*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2008.
- Smith, Kimberly K. *African American Environmental Thought: Foundations*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007.
- Stadler, Gustavus. *Troubling Minds: The Cultural Politics of Genius in the United States, 1840-1890*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.
- Tamarkin, Elisa. *Anglophilia; Deference, Devotion, and Antebellum America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

- Trafton, Scott. *Egypt Land: Race and Nineteenth-Century American Egypomania*. Duke University Press, 2004.
- Vogel, Todd. *ReWriting White: Race, Class, and Cultural Capital in Nineteenth-Century America*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004.
- Waters, Kristin and Carol B. Conoway, eds. *Black Women's Intellectual Traditions: Speaking Their Minds*. Burlington, VT: University of Vermont Press, 2007.
- Weinstein, Cindy. *Family, Kinship, and Sympathy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
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- Williams, Heather Andrea. *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005.
- Wong, Edlie L. *Neither Fugitive nor Free: Atlantic Slavery, Freedom Suits, and the Legal Culture of Travel*. New York: New York University Press, 2009.
- Zackodnik, Teresa C. *The Mulatta and the Politics of Race*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004.
- Zboray, Ronald J., and Mary Saracino Zboray. *Everyday Ideas: Socioliterary Experience among Antebellum New Englanders*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006.
- Zboray, Ronald J. And Mary Saracino Zboray. *Literary Dollars and Social Sense: A People's History of the Mass Market Book*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Reading Assignments:

Note: Please read the editor's introductions to all texts.

- 1/12: 1. Introductions
2. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* in *The Oxford Frederick Douglass Reader*
- 1/19:
1. From *Lift Every Voice*
 - John Marrant, "You Stand on the Level with the Greatest Kings on Earth" (pp. 27-38)
 - Prince Hall, "Pay God Give Us the Strength to Bear Up Under All Our Troubles" (pp. 45-52)
 - David Walker, "The Necessity of a General Union Among Us"
 - Peter Williams, "Slavery and Colonization"
 - Sarah M. Douglass, "The Cause of the Slave Became My Own"
 2. David Walker, *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (Peter Hinks's edition)

1/26

Statement of interest for your seminar essay due

1. William Wells Brown, *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter*
2. From *African American Poetry*
 - A. Charles Lewis Reason, "The Spirit Voice" (pp. 42-44)
 - B. James Monroe Whitfield, "How Long" (pp. 72-78)

2/2

1. Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860*
2. From *Pamphlets of Protest*
 - A. Introduction (pp. 1-31)
 - B. Absolom Jones and Richard Allen, "A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia" (pp. 32-42)
 - B. Daniel Coker, "A Dialogue Between a Virginian and an African Minister" (pp. 52-65)
 - C. James Forten, "Series of Letters by a Man of Colour" (pp. 66-72)
 - D. Russell Parrott, "An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade" (pp. 74-79)
3. From *African American Poetry*
 - Alfred Gibbs Campbell, "Warning" (pp. 103-104)
 - Campbell, "Lines" (pp. 109-110)
 - Frances E. W. Harper, "Bury Me in a Free Land" (pp. 116-117)
 - Joseph Cephas Holly, "The Patriot's Lament" (pp. 149-150)

2/9

1. Martin Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*
2. From *The Oxford Frederick Douglass Reader* (pp. 98-130)
 - A. "The Rights of Women"
 - B. "Letter to His Old Master"
 - C. "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?"

Presentation: DeLombard, Jeannine Marie. *Slavery On Trial: Law, Abolitionism, and Print Culture*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

2/16

1. Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*

2. From *Pamphlets of Protest*

- A. William Hamilton, "Address to the National Convention of 1834"
- B. Elizabeth Wicks, "Address Delivered Before the African Female Benevolent Society of Troy"
- C. Maria W. Stewart, "Productions"
- D. Robert Purvis, "Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens, Threatened with Disfranchisement, to the People of Pennsylvania"
- E. Henry Highland Garnet, "Address to the Slaves of the United States of America"
- F. "Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored People" (1847)

Presentation: Rael, Patrick. *Black Identity & Black Protest in the Antebellum North*. University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

2/23

Brown, William Wells. *The Escape; Or, A Leap for Freedom*. University of Tennessee Press.
Craft, William. *Running A Thousand Miles for Freedom*. 1860. Acton, MA: Copley Publishing Group, 2000.

From *African American Poetry*

- Joshua McCarter Simpson, "Away to Canada" (pp. 57-60)
- Simpson, "No, Master, Never" (pp. 67-68)
- Simpson, "To the White People of America" (pp. 69-70)

Presentation: Nathans, Heather S. *Slavery and Sentiment on the American Stage, 1787-1861*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

3/2

1. From *Pamphlets of Protest*

- A. John W. Lewis, "Essay on the Character and Condition of the African Race"
- B. Mary Ann Shadd, "A Plea for Emigration, or Notes of Canada West"
- C. William Wells Brown, "The History of the Haitian Revolution"
- D. Mary Still, "An Appeal to the Females of the African Methodist Episcopal Church"
- E. J. Theodore Holly, "A Vindication of the Capacity of the Negro for Self-Government and Civilized Progress"

2. From *Lift Every Voice*

- A. Charles Lenox Remond, "For the Dissolution of the Union"
- B. Lewis Richardson, "I Am Free from American Slavery"
- C. William Wells Brown, "Under the Stars and Stripes"
- D. William Wells Brown, "I Have No Constitution, and No Country"
- E. Samuel Ringgold Ward, "The Fugitive Slave Bill"
- F. Reverend Jermain Wesley Loguen, "I Won't Obey the Fugitive Slave Law"

3. From *African American Poetry*

Elymas Payson Rogers, from *A Poem on the Fugitive Slave Law* (pp. 167-173)

Presentation: Gardner, Eric. *Unexpected Places: Relocating Nineteenth-Century African American Literature*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009.

3/9

1. Frederick Douglass, *The Heroic Slave* (in *The Oxford Frederick Douglass Reader*, pp. 131-163)
2. Delany, Martin. *Blake; or, The Huts of America*

Presentation: Levine, Robert S. *Dislocating Race & Nation: Episodes in Nineteenth-Century American Literary Nationalism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008.

3/16

1. Harriet E. Wilson, Harriet E. *Our Nig; or, Sketches in the Life of a Free Black*
2. From *Lift Every Voice*
 - A. Sojourner Truth, "Ar'n't I a Woman?"
 - B. John Mercer Langston, "There Is No Full Enjoyment of Freedom for Anyone in This Country"
 - C. William C. Nell, "The Triumph of Equal School Rights in Boston"
 - D. Sara G. Stanley, "What, to the Toiling Millions There, Is This Boasted Liberty?"

Presentation: Hall, Stephen G. *A Faithful Account of the Race: African American Historical Writing in Nineteenth-Century America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009.

3/23: Spring Break

3/30

1. George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*.
2. From *Pamphlets of Protest*
 - A. Alexander Crummell, "The English Language in Liberia"
 - B. T. Morris Chester, "Negro Self-Respect and Pride of Race"
3. From *Lift Every Voice*
 - A. B. K. Sampson, "To My White Fellow Citizens"
 - B. William H. Grey, "Justice Should Recognize No Color"
 - C. Reverend Henry McNeal Turner, "I Claim the Rights of a Man"
 - D. Isaac Myers, "Finish the Good Work of Uniting Colored and White Workingmen"
 - E. Frederick Douglass, "Composite Nation"
4. From *African American Poetry*
 - James Madison Bell, "Modern Moses, or 'My Policy' Man" (pp. 199-210)
 - Paul Laurence Dunbar, "Sympathy" (p. 388)
 - Dunbar, "We Wear the Mask" (p. 402)
 - George Marion McClellan, "The Feet of Judas" (p. 419)
 - McClellan, "Daybreak" (pp. 432-433)

Presentation: Ernest, John. *Chaotic Justice: Rethinking African American Literary History*.

Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.

4/6:

Jacobs, Harriet A. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*. Enlarged Edition. Harvard University Press.

4/13

Progress report on your seminar essays

Harper, Frances E. W. *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted*. 1892. The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth Century Black Women Writers. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

From *Lift Every Voice*

J. Stanley, "A Tribute to a Fallen Black Soldier"

Olivia A. Davidson, "How Shall We Make the Women of Our Race Stronger?"

Frances E. W. Harper, "We Are All Bound Up Together"

Frances E. W. Harper, "The Great Problem to Be Solved"

From *African American Poetry*

Frances E. W. Harper, "Learning to Read" (136-137)

Harper, "Songs for the People" (p. 143)

Harper, "A Double Standard" (pp. 144-145)

4/20

Hopkins, Pauline E. *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*. 1900. The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

From *African American Poetry*

Henrietta Cordelia Ray, "God's Ways, Not Our Ways" (p. 266)

George Clinton Rowe, "We Are Rising" (pp. 347-348)

Josephine Delphine Henderson Heard, "'They Are Coming?'" (pp. 362-363)

4/27

From *Lift Every Voice*

Peter H. Clark, "Socialism: The Remedy for the Evils of Society"

Alexander Crummell, "The Destined Superiority of the Negro"

T. Thomas Fortune, "The Present Relations of Labor and Capital"

Lucy E. Parsons, "I Am an Anarchist"

Ida B. Wells, "Lynch Law in All Its Phases"

Booker T. Washington, "Atlanta Exposition Address"

Victoria Earle Matthews, "The Awakening of the Afro-American Woman"

Mary Church Terrell, "In Union There Is Strength"

Booker T. Washington, "The Cancer of Race Prejudice"
Frederick Douglass, *The Lessons of the Hour*, from *The Oxford Frederick Douglass Reader*

From *African American Poetry* (continued on next page)

Henrietta Cordelia Ray, "In Memoriam" (pp. 275-277)

John Willis Menard, "The Negro's Lament" (pp. 283-284)

Timothy Thomas Fortune, "Bartow Black" (pp. 295-297)

Joseph Seamon Cotter, Sr., "Frederick Douglass" (pp. 326-327)

Cotter, "Dr. Booker T. Washington to the National Negro Business League" (p. 334)

Paul Lawrence Dunbar, "Douglass" (p. 414)

Mary Weston Fordham, "Atlanta Exposition Ode" (pp. 444-445)

Either Thursday, April 28, or Friday, April 29, depending on your schedules, I will host a workshop on the seminar essays at my apartment.

Seminar Essays Due on Monday, May 2.

Professor John Ernest's
Handy
GUIDE FOR PAPERS

Part 1: Evaluation

I will evaluate your performance in three basic categories of concern: structure, content, and presentation. Each category will count for approximately one third of your grade for the paper—though, of course, poor performance in one category inevitably will affect the success of the others. That is, don't assume that I can or will "just read for the ideas" in a poorly presented or illogically constructed essay. I am particularly dismayed when I see errors that are repeated from one draft to the next, so make a special effort to apply criticisms of earlier drafts to later writing assignments in the class. Please remember that I would love to talk with you about your paper at any and all stages of its development.

I've indicated throughout this Guide my standards for evaluation, but I will summarize a few points here, which I've adapted from similar summaries put together by friends and colleagues.

An "A" essay:

- (1) has a clearly indicated thesis (or working hypothesis) to which all elements of the essay are relevant;
- (2) has focused topic sentences that announce the central argument of each paragraph, connecting this new stage of the analysis to that of the previous paragraph;
- (3) supports its argumentative claim with evidence from the text, and avoids being simply mechanical in citing evidence;
- (4) attends to the implications of the central argument;
- (5) is thoughtful and deliberate in its use of language, essay structure, and evidence;
- (6) considers, if only implicitly, the evidence and arguments that might undermine or challenge the essay's argument, and doesn't ignore important evidence or complications;

- (7) is free of recurring surface errors or errors of fact;
- (8) is professional in its presentation—including the title of the essay, page numbers, works-cited format, and other issues of manuscript form;
- (9) makes no unsupported claims about history, and demonstrates that the essay’s author is aware of larger cultural and ideological concerns that might distort her or his judgment;
- (10) is equally attentive to detail and to the big picture;
- (11) is compelling in its intellectual and ethical commitment to the essay’s subject.

Here is another way to think about these concerns—this time with greater emphasis on your responsibilities as a scholar:

1. Focus. You should narrow down your concerns to a reasonably focused set of questions and/or concerns, and then use the essay to explore those concerns.

2. Specificity. You should be as specific as you can about the questions you have. If you have questions about religion, for example, you should focus on specific historical periods, specific situations, and perhaps even specific denominations or manifestations of religion. If you have questions about the system of slavery, push yourself to look beyond the abstract level and at specific issues within the system.

3. Literary Skill. You should include in your paper a discussion of at least one (and, depending on the length and complexity of the work, perhaps more) work of literature. We are reading literature as part of our effort to “read” U.S. history and culture. Present examples of literature that pertain to questions you raise about history and culture, and think about how the author’s handling of the work of literature provides insights into, for example, how to interpret the workings of culture.

4. Use of Information. The various texts we are reading provide a great deal of useful information. I expect you to make use of this information in your papers. Moreover, when you raise questions that can be answered by a quick look at an encyclopedia (especially specialized ones—for example, the *Encyclopedia of African American Culture and History*), I expect you to look at that encyclopedia. In other words, I expect you to do basic research on matters of simple information (people and events in history, for example)

5. Complexity. These papers should be challenging, for we are reading about and discussing challenging issues. I expect to encounter a certain intensity of thought in your essays, and I will be critical of any tendency to simplify the issues.

6. Grammar and Style. Your writing should be clear and correct, and I should be able to follow your line of thought without using a map.

7. Presentation. Remember to cite your sources, both in the body of the essay and in the bibliography or “works cited” page. For essays on literature, scholars generally use the Modern Language Association (MLA) or the Chicago format for citing sources.

Part 2: Manuscript Form and Presentation (and other important details)

Your paper *must* meet the grammatical and formal standards of academic prose. Leave yourself time to revise, and revise with a grammar handbook close by. Type carefully, and

double-space the lines. For conventions concerning the proper handling of quotations, the presentation of titles of works, and the documentation of sources, see the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. A copy should be available in the library, or you could borrow mine. If you are an English major (or planning to be one) and do not yet own a copy of this book, buy one.

Remember also that academic conventions of clarity and formality are important. Avoid hazy generalizations and other forms of vagueness. A good way to check for this problem is to look at the main verbs and nouns in your sentences: do they tend to be abstract and general, or specific? If the former, change the noun or verb to something more specific rather than adding adjectives or adverbs. One source of ambiguity can be pronouns: make sure that your reader clearly knows what “this” and “that” refer to or, better yet, include clarifying nouns along with the pronouns (“this idea,” “that action”). “This” or “that” should not be the subject of any sentence in your essay.

Avoid also clichés, jargon, reductive expressions, and hollow modifiers like “interesting,” “positive,” “negative,” or “successful.” Please use gender-neutral language: he or she, hers or his, etc. Remember that there is nothing that warms a professor’s heart so much as the carefully, memorably turned phrase or well-written passage. Good writing simply gives your argument more authority and weight and demonstrates your care as a scholar (as well as stylist). All the elements that make for good creative writing also make for good academic writing, so show some creativity and care in your prose. Working within the formal conventions of academic writing does not need to be restrictive; working with and against those conventions—fulfilling them, following the rules (and knowing when, how, and why to break the rules at times), while also speaking with an individual voice—can be a very creative process.

You are required to follow MLA format for citing your sources. I have used this format in this guide so that you will have a model to follow. At the end of this guide is a sample “Works Cited” page.

The following are special instructions or reminders—which means that ignoring them might have a special effect on your grade. **If you do not follow these guidelines concerning spacing, citation, and/or page numbering, then the best grade you can get on your paper is an “A-”.**

1. Your essay must be typed, and double-spaced. You should have standard 1-inch margins on the top, bottom, and sides.
2. Note the proper form of parenthetical citation demonstrated in this guide. Remember to indent long quotations. Remember also to provide page numbers for all quotations.
3. Your essay should have a title. An intriguing title can actually add to the power of an argument.
4. Number the pages of your paper (upper right-hand corner; include your last name).
5. Please do not present your paper in a plastic cover. Simply staple the pages once, on the upper left-hand corner.
6. Keep a copy of your paper. I’ve never lost a paper, but you are required keep a copy just in case. Even if I lose your paper, you are still responsible for it.
7. **Proofread your paper before you submit it.** Correct errors before you hand in the paper. If you spot some at the last minute, when it is too late to print a new copy of the paper, please correct the errors neatly with a pen. Spelling and grammar count.

8. Use brackets when you insert something into or change something in a quotation.

example: At first, Douglass seems optimistic, for his “new mistress [proves] to be all she appeared when [he] first met her at the door . . .” (77). In this case, I use brackets to indicate changes I have made to fit the quotation to the grammatical structure of *my* sentence.

Part 3: Assignment

You are required to write an analytical essay, not an informal discussion of or response to literature. An analytical essay presents an argument about how and why an author does certain things in his or her work; it examines the work’s thematic, conceptual, or rhetorical infrastructure (infrastructure means “the basic, underlying framework or features of a system”). Textual analysis is not limited to discovering “what the author intended”; often, the purpose of textual analysis is to explore the cultural, historical, and/or philosophical implications of the text’s apparent or implicit design—the patterns of ideas, images, language, and/or themes in the text, and the gaps or breaks in those patterns. In this way, reading a text is a way to learn how to be a better reader of one’s world, of the cultural forces that shape one’s thinking, one’s personality, even one’s adopted role in life. Textual analysis can make one conscious of all those things that one sees and does unconsciously on a daily basis; it can help us defamiliarize and thereby *see* and think about our familiar customs and surroundings.

I expect you to write a formal analytical essay even if you have not done so before. If you have never written this kind of paper, and if you have no experience reading texts analytically, I recommend that you look at Mortimer J. Adler’s and Charles Van Doren’s *How to Read a Book*, an excellent book (and not as simplistic as its title suggests). If you are an experienced analytical reader, and if you would like to develop your skills by thinking about theoretical approaches to literary criticism, I recommend that you look at *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. Finally, if you would like to increase your critical vocabulary, develop your understanding of terms that I mention in class, familiarize yourself with literary genres and periods, and read introductions to various critical theories, look through M. H. Abrams’s *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (especially the sixth edition). All of these books are listed in the Works Cited at the end of this guide, and all should be available at our library, or you could order your own copies.

Remember that textual analysis is a formal academic discipline and that every paper you write will test your mastery of its principles. Let me stress that point: the papers *are* tests. When you write, then, your task is to demonstrate your ability to present a persuasive analysis, as well as to present your analysis in a coherent and grammatically correct format.

If you are not sure that you know how to write the kind of paper I am requiring, please don’t hesitate to ask for advice or help. I will be happy to help you with each stage of the writing process.

Part 4: The Introduction

Your introductory paragraph should have three stages (three stages but only one paragraph). In a longer essay (20 pages or more), you would cover these same stages but in three or more paragraphs. The three stages are as follows:

- 1) **Subject.** In the first stage, you introduce your subject—the text itself. In a few (2-4) sentences, you should present the author and title of the work, along with a general

overview of the work's plot, outstanding themes, or general achievement. The shorter the paper, the shorter this introductory passage should be; and in a very long essay (25-30 pages), the first few pages might well be devoted to this introductory passage.

- 2) **Topic.** In the next stage, you present your topic—the interpretive issue to which your paper is devoted. In a sense, you need to show that there is cause for confusion and misunderstanding, or that there is a dimension of the work that is not clear unless one looks at it a certain way (for example, by viewing it within its historical context). You might establish the interpretive problem or issue in a number of ways:
 - * explain the problem or issue for the reader.
 - * open with a question which you develop in the opening paragraph.
 - * use a passage from the work to illustrate the problem or issue.
- 3) In the third stage, you present your thesis—your answer to the questions or issues you raise in stage 2. Your thesis should be explicit and specific. Consider carefully the following discussion of the thesis.

Do not begin your essay from the beginning of time. Postpone your comments about your personal feelings or response to the work, and postpone also your comments on the twentieth century when writing on literature from previous centuries. Usually, you can present material like this in your concluding paragraph, as you indicate the implications of the argument you have just presented. Get to the point elegantly, gracefully, directly, and quickly.

Part 5: The Thesis

An argument demonstrates the justice, value, and logical coherence of a *thesis*. Remember that a thesis is different from a subject or topic. The subject is the text you are analyzing. The topic is the interpretive issue you are trying to address. **The thesis is the stand you take on that issue.** A subject is what you are talking about; a topic is why you are talking about it; a thesis is what you are trying to say about that topic. A thesis is debatable; a topic is not, for a topic simply identifies—notes the existence of—grounds for debate or cause for confusion. A topic is something you can mention to a professor without feeling nervous; a thesis keeps you up at night.

This is not a thesis: “Melville uses symbolism in *Moby-Dick*.” What kind of symbolism? How does he use it? To what purpose? Will you examine *all* examples of symbolism in the novel? Again, this is not a thesis: “Hawthorne examines history in *The Marble Faun*.” You might develop this observation into a thesis by establishing the specific issue and taking a clear stand. Consider, for example, this statement from a published essay:

When Hawthorne says that those who object to the unresolved mysteries of *The Marble Faun*'s ending do “not know how to read a Romance,” he means, as his work itself shows, that insofar as they expect definite answers to their questions or an unambiguous moral to the story, they do not know how to read history either.
(Michael 150)

True, this is a *long* thesis; and, true, it makes the idea behind it sound more complicated than it actually is. Still, this scholar's purpose is clear, and one can anticipate what he will argue in the rest of the essay, and why.

* If you present your topic in the form of a question, your topic and thesis might look like this:
What are we to make of Melville’s emphasis on “The Whiteness of the Whale” in *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*? Although it is tempting to assert that this “whiteness” has nothing to do the complex and contested racial landscape of the nineteenth-century United States, the novel offers significant evidence that race is indeed the issue to which all other concerns in this novel must be related.

* If you present your topic by quoting a sentence from the text, your topic and thesis might look like this:

In his appendix to *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, Douglass seems to worry about the implications of his comments on religion throughout the body of this text. “I have,” he notes, “in several instances, spoken in such a tone and manner, respecting religion, as may possibly lead those unacquainted with my religious views to suppose me an opponent of all religion.” But as he explains his distinction between “the Christianity of this land” and “the Christianity of Christ,” Douglass reapplies his concerns and suggests that the white Christian reader is actually the one who should worry about being considered an opponent of all religion.

Part 6: Structure

Academic writing is very basic and straightforward. It is designed to allow one to read subtle arguments quickly. Accordingly, the structure of your argument is very important. Each paragraph should present a unified block of thought, a clear and significant stage of your argument. You should therefore avoid paragraphs that are too long (in a short essay, page-long paragraphs are too long, often a sign of unfocused thinking) or too short. As a general rule, each paragraph should have at least five sentences. Paragraphs with fewer sentences often indicate undeveloped or unsubstantiated thought. Each paragraph should build on what you have done in the previous paragraph, and should prepare your reader for what you will argue in the next paragraph. If you can move your paragraphs around without disturbing the nature of your argument, then you have not paid sufficient attention to the structure of your argument or have simply repeated yourself in the course of your paper.

My term for the structure of an academic essay is the “intellectual matrix” of the essay. The “intellectual matrix” is what you get when you read only the thesis statement and the topic sentence of each of your paragraphs (normally the first sentence of the paragraph). Just as your thesis indicates clearly the argumentative purpose of your paper, so should the first sentence of each paragraph, the topic sentence, indicate the argumentative purpose of that paragraph. I should be able to read only these sentences to determine the logical design of your argument. In other words, I should be able to summarize your argument from those sentences alone. Roughly one third of your grade will be based on the extent to which the “intellectual matrix” of your paper provides me with an accurate overview of your argument, and also on your ability to construct a systematic, unified argument that builds from one stage (one paragraph) to the next.

Part 7: Content

Remember that your assignment is textual, historical, and/or cultural analysis, not plot summary, and not simply general or subjective historical commentary. In textual analysis, your

task is to show the connections between *what* the author says and *how* she or he says it—in other words, to identify and examine the implications of the author’s strategies (style, themes, images, patterns of thought and of argument, etc.).

Remember that your reader has read and thought about the text to which your paper is devoted, and therefore does not need to be reminded of the plot. **Do not simply summarize the plot.**

Historical commentary is useful, usually even necessary (in small doses), but use it wisely, make sure you know what you are talking about, and do not allow it to distract you from your main task: informed analysis. Typically, the more general and abstract the historical context, the less useful it will be. Keep in mind that all people in a given time period did not think the same way, even if there are issues and ideas that did preoccupy many. Be attentive, in other words, to conflicts, differences, and changes among groups within a period, and never claim that “nineteenth-century Americans believed that . . .”. Even more important, if you introduce historical commentary, you must take care that you provide some evidence for your historical claims and that you establish your historical context efficiently and succinctly. If you are using elements from an author’s biography, for example, choose those elements that are relevant to your thesis and make sure that you establish why those elements are important *for understanding the work*.

Grades for papers based primarily on plot summary or on general historical commentary will begin somewhere in the area of a “C”—and they will go down from there.

You must present your argument carefully, methodically. In the early part of your paper, explain carefully the interpretive problem you intend to solve, and then proceed to solve it in stages. At each point of your paper, think about what your reader needs to know if he or she is to understand what is coming up in the next stage of your paper. At each stage, quote from your sources or from your primary text to show the basis for your interpretation. Show your reader that you are analyzing your topic or text and not just talking about it.

Focus is the key to success. You cannot hope to analyze an entire book, an entire century, or an entire social movement in a short paper. Therefore, you must isolate a representative portion of your topic. If you are writing about a literary text, for example, you might focus on a character, a scene, a rhetorical or ideological pattern, a pattern of allusions, or some other aspect of the author’s techniques and strategies. Find something you can examine in detail and explain your interpretation carefully. Justify your choice at the beginning of your essay; at the end of your essay, indicate how your conclusions can enable readers to understand other aspects of the work.

Part 8: Research and Support—A Reminder

It is important to remember that you must support your claims, and that you must not make any claims that you are unable or unwilling to support. When you present an interpretation of a sentence or passage or episode in a text, you must explain carefully how the text supports that interpretation. If you make a point about history, then you must do the necessary historical research, and you must refer to that research in your essay (see me on how to do this if you have not done this before). If you say something about an author, then you must support that point with biographical research. If you say something about how critics have viewed a certain text, then you must support that with research. Avoid making claims about how readers respond to a certain text, for you cannot support such claims.

Part 9: Using Quotations

To present a persuasive argument, you must quote from the text you are analyzing, and you must explain carefully how the evidence you present leads to and supports your interpretation of the work. This is not to say that you should be blatant about this. That is, you shouldn't lead into a quotation by saying, "This interpretation is supported by the following quotation." Consider the following guidelines:

1. I should be convinced of the significance of the textual evidence (quotations from and allusions to the works) you present. In other words, don't just quote. Prepare your reader for the textual evidence you will present; present that evidence briefly (avoid long quotations); and then explicate, analyze, or otherwise explain the significance of that evidence. Never assume that a passage is self-explanatory.

2. Don't just present a quotation without introduction. I shouldn't suddenly encounter a quotation at the beginning of a new sentence, and you should never present a free-standing quotation (that is, a sentence that contains nothing but a quotation); always lead into the quotation in your own words, and then follow it with commentary.

3. Never end a paragraph with a quotation. Always follow with commentary, so that you conclude each of *your* paragraphs with *your* own words.

4. Avoid long quotations. Whenever possible, integrate (with quotation marks) significant phrases from the text in your own sentences as you present and explain your interpretation.

5. Whenever you use a significant word or phrase from the text, use quotation marks to indicate that you are in fact using someone else's words.

The following is taken from one of my essays, "From Mysteries to Histories: Cultural Pedagogy in Frances E. W. Harper's *Iola Leroy*." I present this so that you can have a model for using quotations, but I do not expect you to simply imitate my style. Indeed, I wish you the good fortune of avoiding my overly complex style. Still, I hope you will find it useful to examine (and, perhaps, question) my use of textual evidence.

From the essay:

Harper establishes the terms of this argument, and begins the novel, by confronting her white readers with their inability to interpret culturally-familiar discourse. In the first pages of the first chapter, Harper draws readers into a "shadow" culture—that of the slaves—and introduces her readers to the discursive network of that culture, the "mystery of market speech." Her depiction of slaves talking enthusiastically about "splendid" fish, and about butter "just as fresh, as fresh can be" (7-8) invokes images of the stereotypical Black characters who inhabited the pages of white supremacist fiction gaining popularity at the time. On the novel's second page, though, the narrator wonders at this "unusual interest manifested by these men in the state of the produce market," and raises the question that many readers might well have forgotten to

ask: “What did it mean?” (8). The answer is that, during the war, “when the bondman was turning his eyes to the American flag,” “some of the shrewder slaves . . . invented a phraseology to convey in the most unsuspected manner news to each other from the battle-field” (8-9). The “mystery of market speech” is thus solved by learning this phraseology, this cultural discourse that appropriates authorized, and in that sense, legal language for illegal but moral ends.

The primary point here is not that this particular mystery is now clear, nor is it merely that the slaves had to formulate their own language to circumvent the will of the dominant race; rather, the point lies in the discursive nature of the mystery itself, the extent to which one’s ability to understand is controlled by one’s cultural training. As one reads, one encounters other such mysteries, each of which reveals the cognitive and moral limitations inherent in and enforced by the dominant cultural system. Consider, for example, Dr. Gresham, whom the reader first meets in a field hospital, and who is clearly attracted to Iola Leroy, whom he believes to be a white lady generously lowering herself to serve the needs of the Northern soldiers. Initially, Dr. Gresham cannot understand how Iola can bring herself to kiss a black patient; and as he explains this to Col. Robinson, the reader discovers the terms of his confusion:

I cannot understand how a Southern lady, whose education and manners stamp her as a woman of fine culture and good breeding, could consent to occupy the position she so faithfully holds. It is a mystery I cannot solve. (57)

This description is essentially a circular equation of cultural identity. If one is a Southern lady, then one must have the advantages of education and good breeding which provide the manners and fine culture that are, by definition, the qualities of a Southern lady. The perfect circle of definition represents the cognitive closure that is the *raison d’être* of any culture system. When this closure leads to culturally exotic behavior, those within the cultural circle are faced with a mystery they cannot solve. When Col. Robinson provides the essential information, that “Miss Leroy was a slave,” Dr. Gresham can relocate her in the cultural formula, and he says revealingly, “What you tell me changes the whole complexion of affairs” (58). Dr. Gresham, in other words, is able to relocate Iola according to existing cultural categories and stereotypes.

Note on using quotations: In the example from my own writing, note how the material from the work is integrated with my own words, and how I combine both block quotations and in-text quotations to incorporate the evidence into the prose. The idea is to make sure that yours is the dominant voice in your writing, that you prepare your reader for the quotations, and that your essay is as smooth as possible. Try these techniques in your own work.

Part 10: A Sample Works Cited Page (MLA format)

Note: Different academic disciplines (Literature, History, etc.) require different approaches to documentation; most do not use the MLA format. Always check your syllabus, or check with your professor, to determine what form you should use.

Works Cited

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