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English 741

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Actions**John Ernest, ENGL 741, Fall 2005**

Prof. John Ernest

Office Hours: Monday, 2:00-4:00; Thursday, 10:00-12:00

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In this seminar, we'll examine in some depth various modes of African American literary activism from the late eighteenth century to the Civil War. The theoretical framework for the seminar will be drawn from David Theo Goldberg's concept of "the racial state" and Charles W. Mills's concept of "the racial contract," and accordingly we will follow Goldberg in studying both "the state of the race" and "the race of the state." We will trace the rise and development of African American abolitionism and social activism as expressed in various genres and public forums. We'll read slave narratives, fiction, drama, and various forms of nonfiction. Our travels will take us to various sites of memory and cultural theaters of racial performance; we will explore domestic spaces, minstrel stages, and the complex spectacles of the antislavery movement. The seminar will include a basic introduction to African American literary and cultural theory as we work to determine an appropriate approach to the literature of this period.

Words of Wisdom to Guide Our Journey This Semester:

Academic institutions offer myriad ways to protect ourselves from the threat of a live encounter. To avoid a live encounter with teachers, students can hide behind their notebooks and their silence. To avoid a live encounter with students, teachers can hide behind their podiums, their credentials, their power. To avoid a live encounter with one another, faculty can hide behind their academic specialties.

To avoid a live encounter with subjects of study, teachers and students alike can hide behind the pretense of objectivity:

students can say, "Don't ask me to think about this stuff--just give me the facts," and faculty can say, "Here are the facts--don't think about them, just get them straight." To avoid a live encounter with ourselves, we can learn the art of self-alienation, of living a divided life.

This fear of the live encounter is actually a sequence of fears that begins in the fear of diversity. As long as we inhabit a universe made homogeneous by our refusal to admit otherness, we can maintain the illusion that we possess the truth about ourselves and the world--after all, there is no "other" to challenge us! But as soon as we admit pluralism, we are forced to admit that ours is not the only standpoint, the only experience, the only way, and the truths we have built our lives on begin to feel fragile.

If we embrace diversity, we find ourselves on the doorstep of our next fear: fear of the conflict that will ensue when divergent truths meet. Because academic culture knows only one form of conflict, the win-lose form called competition, we fear the live encounter as a contest from which one party emerges victorious while the other leaves defeated and ashamed. To evade public engagement over our dangerous differences, we privatize them, only to find them growing larger and more diverse.

If we peel back our fear of conflict, we find a third layer of fear, the fear of losing identity. Many of us are so deeply identified with our ideas that when we have a competitive encounter, we risk losing more than the debate: we risk losing our sense of self.

Of course, there are forms of conflict more creative than the win-lose form called competition, forms that are vital if the self is to grow. But academic culture knows little of these alternative forms--such as consensual decision making--in which all can win and **none** need lose, in which "winning" means emerging from the encounter with a larger sense of self than one brought into it, in which we learn that the self is not a scrap of turf to be defended but a capacity to be enlarged.

If we embrace the promise of diversity, of creative conflict, and of "losing" in order to "win," we still face one final fear--the fear that a live encounter with otherness will challenge or even compel us to change our lives. This is not paranoia: the world really is out to get us! Otherness, taken seriously, always invites transformation, calling us not only to new facts and theories and values but also to new ways of living our lives--and that is the most daunting threat of all.

--Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*

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 here 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--

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.

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 antiseptis 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*

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"

James Harvey Robinson has reminded us that "history books are a poor place to look for history." They are an even poorer place to search for African-American history and African-American women's history.

—Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "The Politics of 'Silence': Dual-Sex Political Systems and Women's Traditions of Conflict in African-American Religion"

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: It is important that you have the Bedford/St. Martin's edition of *Clotel* and the Penguin edition of *Our Nig*. If you wish to use a different edition of any of the other texts, please check with me first.

Andrews, William L., ed. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.

Brown, William Wells. *Clotel; Or, the President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States*. New York: Penguin Books, 2004.

Brown, William Wells. *The Escape; or, A Leap for Freedom*. Ed. John Ernest. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001.

Craft, William. *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; Or, The Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery*. Ed. John Ernest. Acton, MA: Copley Publishing Group, 2000.

Delany, Martin. *Blake; or, The Huts of America*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1982.

Jacobs, Harriet A. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*. Ed. Nell Irvin Painter. New York: Penguin, 2000.

Mills, Charles W. *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.

Newman, Richard, Patrick Rael, & Philip Lapsansky, eds. *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African-American Protest Literature, 1790-1860*. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Walker, David. *David Walker's Appeal: To the Coloured Citizens of the World*. Ed. Peter P. Hinks. Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000.

Wilson, Harriet E. *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, in a Two-Story White House, North. Showing that Slavery's Shadows Fall Even There*. By "Our Nig". New York: Penguin Classics, 2004.

Requirements:

1. An annotated bibliography and presentation on one of the course texts (10%) 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. 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, each day we will have a report on the publishing history and scholarly response to one of our course texts. 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. For this assignment, you will need to practice that fine academic art of "layered reading" or skim reading. You should also become familiar with useful reference books--for example, the annual publication *American Literary Scholarship*.

As part of your report, you should prepare a short handout for the class, an annotated bibliography of some recent or otherwise important scholarship on the text. Just note the author's main argument, along with brief comments about your impressions of the depth and breadth of the author's research. In other words, pay attention to the footnotes, endnotes, and/or bibliography of the scholarship you cover. It is acceptable to reprint someone else's judgment of the article or book (for example, from *American Literary Scholarship*), as long as you are careful to cite your source.

This report should last about 5-10 five minutes. Please keep it from being longer than that.

2. A presentation on an historical event, cultural movement, or activist forum (10%) We are looking at a body of writing that was part of a culture devoted to African American community building and social reform. Accordingly, we will want to know something about some of the newspapers and magazines published during this period, and we will want to know something as well about certain significant events, governmental policies, and people. Again, we will share the labor on this.

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, 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. These presentations will provide us with an opportunity to address not only events and community forums but also misrepresentations of American history.

I'm open to a wide range of topics for this. You might report on the a specific example of the antislavery press (The Liberator or The North Star, for example); you might report on connections between the women's movement and the antislavery movement; you might report on important organizations (the Black national convention movement, for example, or African American literary societies); you might report on important events (Nat Turner's insurrection, the Compromise of 1850, which included the Fugitive Slave Law, or the Dred Scott Supreme Court decision); you might report on one or more prominent white abolitionists (William Lloyd Garrison, Theodore Parker, John Brown) or black activists (James McCune Smith, William C. Nell, David Ruggles); or you might report on a scholarly text on this subject. The examples I offer above are only a few of the many examples I could offer, so let me know if you'd like some help coming up with a topic. The multivolume Dictionary of Literary Biography might be a useful source for some of the publishers and literary figures. Again, you should prepare a one-page handout for the class with basic information--and, again, this report should last about 5-10 minutes

3. Three "Occasional Responses" (due as the occasions present themselves to you) This can be a complex field of study, so 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 political correctness 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, scholars new to this field 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 seminar essay--that is, to know the kind of information you need to question, the kinds of questions you need to ask, and the kind 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 seminar 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 let's try to make it at least one page. Don't be worried about writing too much. I love

to hand in three by the end of the semester.

4. 20-page (minimum) Seminar Essay, including prospectus and rough draft (80% of final grade) This is the standard analytical/research essay. I recommend that you devote the essay to a single text, but I'm open to all possibilities.

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. Most of what you will need for this assignment can be found in the introductions to our texts and in specialized reference sources in the library--for example, the *Encyclopedia of African American Culture and History* (always a good place to start). However, if you are interested in writing an essay that might lead to a published article, then you should be more ambitious in your research. In thinking about the issues raised by the literature we are studying, you should also look at African American and antislavery newspapers and magazines: *Freedom's Journal*, *The Colored American*, *The Liberator*, *The North Star*, *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, and the *Anglo-African Magazine*. For some essays, it would be useful as well to look at the *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1864* (edited by Howard Holman Bell). Obviously, regardless of your approach, you should demonstrate a strong familiarity with the scholarship on the author(s) and text(s) you study.

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. In my own work, I run into trouble whenever I stray from the guidelines I've put together in this document. Although this essay isn't due until the end of the semester, please start your work on it as soon as possible. You should use the informal responses to prepare for this essay, which means that you should identify your topic for this assignment as soon as possible. Much of our early reading will focus on nonfictional works: essays, orations, and autobiographical narratives. If you think you would like to write your seminar essay on a work of fiction, you should consider reading ahead. Also, since our readings are arranged chronologically, Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* comes rather late in the semester. This important work--one of the few major slave narratives by a woman--often proves to be a text of particular interest to feminist scholars in the field (and, as you will see, feminist perspectives are essential in this field, as in others). Accordingly, you might want to read ahead if this is work that interests you.

Reading Assignments

Note on background reading

Because most of us have received an inadequate education on American history generally and African American history specifically, I expect you to look into a fair amount of historical and literary scholarship beyond the assigned readings. Naturally, I cannot expect you to read all of this material thoroughly. Indeed, layered reading, or focused skim reading, is an essential scholarly skill, and one that I expect you to develop over the semester. In layered reading, one uses the conventions of academic writing to get a basic sense of a scholar's argument. Attend to introductory paragraphs, topic sentences, subheadings within chapters, and the like to determine the basic argument being presented. Don't lose yourself in the details, for they will come in time as you become familiar with the basic arguments and conceptual frameworks of the field.

Think of scholarship as an approach to a subject by way of concentric circles of focus. You begin by skimming the standard secondary texts (the scholarship) of the field to get a sense of the issues or the general cultural terrain that you will need (eventually) to know. Then, as you engage in the primary texts (the literature itself), you are in the position to raise questions which will take you back to the secondary texts. This process continues as you develop your understanding and sharpen your focus on the field. It is important, though, to recognize the complexity of the cultures and lives we are studying. Skimming through the scholarship can give you a sense of that complexity--but, equally important, skimming can keep you in a constant state of awareness (discomforting but necessary) of the limitations of knowledge. The past is not a body of knowledge to be mastered, and is not simply a story to be told. View this initial experience in the field as the beginning of a long relationship, one in which initial questions are more important than a rushed understanding.

Naturally, I expect you to read our primary, assigned texts very carefully.

Note: The quotation that precedes each reading assignment is intended to initiate discussion by suggesting a theoretical or cultural framework for approaching the text.

8/22: Introductions; lecture & discussion on race and the study of literature

If you want to know how somebody feels or thinks, ask him. If he can't tell you in words you understand, ask someone else. Not anybody else, but someone else. A relative of the man. A close friend. Somebody who seems to you very similar. And when you resort to these sources of information, qualify the value of your data: call it secondhand or worse.

This may strike you as elementary. And yet, there is a man who exists as one of the most popular objects of leadership, legislation, and quasi-literature in the history of all men. There lives a man who is spoken for, imagined, feared, criticized, pitied, misrepresented, fought against, reviled, and loved, primarily on the basis of secondhand information, or much worse.

This man, that object of attention, attack, and vast activity, cannot make himself be heard, let alone be understood. He has never been listened to. He has almost never been asked: What do you want? What do you think? Coverage of a man screaming in crisis is not the way to hear him think.

That man is Black and alive in white America where the media of communication do not allow the delivery of his own voice, his own desires, his own rage. In fact, the definitely preferred form of communication, Black to white, is through a white intermediary--be he sociologist or William Styron.

--June Jordan, "On Listening: A Good Way to Hear"

Having already argued that literature might be considered a form of technology disguised as an attack upon it, I am additionally saying that it is a form of cultural and imaginative imperialism . . . To create an ingenious plot, to control the action, to dispatch a character who gets too big for his role in the play or the novel, all this deserves the highest literary commendation, and while I cannot be supposed to applaud the same activities in historical life, I am suggesting that there is an intriguing if limited equivalence, and that this may be a clue to the kinds of human energy excited by the prospect in life of any efficient form or system.

--Richard Poirier, *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections*

8/29: But the centripetal forces of the life of language, embodied in a "unitary language," operate in the midst of heteroglossia. At any given moment of its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word (according to formal linguistic markers, especially phonetic), but also--and for us this is the essential point--into languages that are socio-ideological: languages of social groups, "professional" and "generic" languages, languages of generations and so forth. From this point of view, literary language itself is only one of these heteroglot languages--and in its turn is also stratified into languages (generic, period-bound and others). And this stratification and heteroglossia, once realized, is not only a static invariant of linguistic life, but also what insures its dynamics: stratification and heteroglossia widen and deepen as long as language is alive and developing. Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward.

Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The processes of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance; the utterance not only answers the requirements of its own language as an individualized embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well; it is in fact an active participant in such speech diversity.

Every utterance participates in the "unitary language" (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces).

--Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel"

Reading Assignments:

1. Introduction to Pamphlets of Protest, pp. 1-31
2. Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, "A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia," in *Pamphlets of Protest*, pp. 32-42
3. Prince Hall "A Charge" (*Pamphlets*, pp. 46-50)
4. Daniel Coker, "A Dialogue Between a Virginian and an African Minister" (*Pamphlets*, pp. 52-65)
5. James Forten, "Series of Letters by a Man of Colour" (*Pamphlets*, pp. 66-72)
6. Russell Parrott, "An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade" (*Pamphlets*, pp. 74-79)
7. Prince Saunders, "An Address before the Pennsylvania Augustine Society" (*Pamphlets*, pp. 80-83)

8. Robert Alexander Young, "Ethiopian Manifesto" (*Pamphlets*, pp. 84-89)

9. Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, Introduction (pp. 1-8)

9/5: Labor Day recess

9/12: The way in which the word conceptualizes its object is a complex act--all objects, open to dispute and overlain as they are with qualifications, are from one side highlighted while from the other side dimmed by heteroglot social opinion, by an alien word about them. And into this complex play of light and shadow the word enters--it becomes saturated with this play, and must determine within it the boundaries of its own semantic and stylistic contours. The way in which the word conceives its object is complicated by a dialogic interaction within the object between various aspects of its socio-verbal intelligibility. And an artistic representation, an "image" of the object, may be penetrated by this dialogic play of verbal intentions that meet and are interwoven in it; such an image need not stifle these forces, but on the contrary may activate and organize them.

The word, breaking through to its own meaning and its own expression across an environment full of alien words and variously evaluating accents, harmonizing with some of the elements in this environment and striking a dissonance with others, is able, in this dialogized process, to shape its own stylistic profile and tone.

Along with the internal contradictions inside the object itself, the prose writer witnesses as well the unfolding of social heteroglossia surrounding the object, the Tower-of-Babel mixing of languages that goes on around any object; the dialectics of the object are interwoven with the social dialogue surrounding it.

But as we have already said, every extra-artistic prose discourse--in any of its forms, quotidian, rhetorical, scholarly--cannot fail to be oriented toward the "already uttered," the "already known," the "common opinion" and so forth.

The word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it; the word is shaped in dialogic interaction with an alien word that is already in the object. A word forms a concept of its own object in a dialogic way.

But this does not exhaust the internal dialogism of the word. It encounters an alien word not only in the object itself: every word is directed toward an answer and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates.

The linguistic significance of a given utterance is understood against the background of language, while its actual meaning

is understood against the background of other concrete utterances on the same theme, a background made up of contradictory opinions, points of view and value judgments--that is, precisely that background that, as we see, complicates the path of any word toward its object. Only now this contradictory environment of alien words is present to the speaker not in the object, but rather in the consciousness of the listener, as his apperceptive background, pregnant with responses and objections.

To some extent, primacy belongs to the response, as the activating principle: it creates the ground for understanding, it prepares the ground for an active and engaged understanding. Understanding comes to fruition only in the response. Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other.

Thus an active understanding, one that assimilates the word under consideration into a new conceptual system, that of the one striving to understand, establishes a series of complex interrelationships, consonances and dissonances with the word and enriches it with new elements. It is precisely such an understanding that the speaker counts on. Therefore his orientation toward the listener is an orientation toward a specific conceptual horizon, toward the specific world of the listener; it introduces totally new elements into his discourse; it is in this way, after all, that various different points of view, conceptual horizons, systems for providing expressive accents, various social "languages" come to interact with one another. The speaker strives to get a reading on his own word, and on his own conceptual system of the understanding receiver; he enters into dialogical relationships with certain aspects of this system. The speaker breaks through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener, constructs his own utterance on alien territory, against his, the listener's, apperceptive background.

--Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel"

The question of whether such a linguistically grounded nation is best figured as written or spoken is not, for many writers of the period, a foregone conclusion but, on the contrary, a live issue of some consequence. To anticipate a bit: since the United States, by all accounts, manifestly lacked the kind of legitimacy and stability that might be expected of a nation that was grounded in blood loyalty or immemorial facticity--since its legitimacy was explicitly grounded in appeal to rational interest, not visceral passion--voice embodied a certain legitimating charisma that print could not.

What the figure of a nation "spoken into existence" did, in short, was to create an analogy between, on the one hand, the relation of a social group to its past, and, on the other hand, the relation of an individual speaker or a linguistic community to the inherited language system that makes utterances possible. Each of these relations is, crucially, one of both freedom and necessity, agency and determination, limitation and enablement. Thus the figure of speech—"spoken into existence"--while it traded upon the illusion that spoken language was the medium of unconstrained willful subjectivity, an instrument wholly subservient to the intentional expressive control of the speaker, nevertheless also implicitly conceded that subjectivity, agency, and intentionality were in some measure the controlled effects of a prior impersonal linguistic system.

The historical world into which, as subjects, we are thrown, is always already represented in the speech of the community. . . .
And when we think to change that world, our innovations must operate upon the ready-made linguistic and intersubjective structure which is the form in which we encounter the world the past has prepared for us.

--Christopher Looby, *Voicing America: Language, Literary Form, and the Origins of the United States**.

Reading Assignments:

1. David Walker's Appeal, Hinks's introduction and complete text
2. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, "The Racial Contract is political, moral, and epistemological" (pp. 9-19)

9/19: Truly we are a great people! Whatsoever we do is right. We have a high notion of ourselves. We can do anything. We can make wrong right, and can right wrongs. We take special interest in toleration, if in that toleration a wrong is involved. Wrongs smartly executed or inflicted please us far more than right doing. Of course, in all this we speak nationally, and not Anglo-Africanwise. We Americans are, so we think, singularly fortunate in having instructors and instruction that lead to these results, and that make us in these days conquer our prejudices, and throw aside old-fashioned notions of right and wrong.

--"Whither Are We Tending?" *The Weekly Anglo-African*, October 1, 1859

Reading Assignments:

1. Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, Baker's introduction and complete text
2. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, "The Racial Contract is a historical actuality" (pp. 19-30)

9/26: The art of oratory is consequent upon the introduction of sin. Had there been no disturbing force, all men would have been poets.

Had there been no disturbing force, there would have been thought, but no reflection; no casting of the mind backward, but ever forward, onward and upward.

Since, then, the art of oratory is consequent upon the introduction of sin; and since the sin of sins is the oppression of the weak by the strong, it follows that no other subject can beget the highest efforts of oratory than that of personal or political liberty.

Liberty is the first condition of human progress.

It follows, also, that orators worthy the name must originate in the nation that is a transition state, either from slavery to freedom, or freedom to slavery. I was about to say, that orators worthy the name, must originate among the oppressed races, but in turning to the pages of history, I was reminded of the fact, that all races, with scarcely an exception, had, at some period of their existence, been in a state of thralldom.

You live in a great country. So far as energy, intellect, and activity constitute greatness, the sun has never seen its equal. You not only live in a great country, but a country most remarkable for its spirit of compromise--for calling that which is bitter, sweet, and that which is bad, good. You live in a country where the combat deepens, and still deepens, between the spirit of freedom and the spirit of the pit.--Now, which side will ye choose?

Remember, also, that as with individuals, so with nations; both can become effectual teachers of the democratic idea, only by exemplifying in their lives the principles they profess.

--William G. Allen. "Orators and Oratory" (Dialectian Society of New York Central College, June 22, 1852)

Reading Assignments:

1. Maria W. Stewart, "Productions" (*Pamphlets*, pp. 122-130)
2. William Hamilton, "Address to the National Convention of 1834" (*Pamphlets*, pp. 110-113)
3. Robert Purvis, "Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens, Threatened with Disfranchisement, to the People of Pennsylvania" (*Pamphlets*, pp. 132-142)
4. David Ruggles, "New York Committee of Vigilance for the Year 1837, together with Important Facts Relative to Their Proceedings" (*Pamphlets*, 144-155)
5. Henry Highland Garnet, "Address to the Slaves of the United States of America" (*Pamphlets*, pp. 156-164)
6. Garnet, "Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored People" (*Pamphlets*, pp. 166-177)
7. Garnet, "Report of the Proceedings of the Colored National Convention . . . held in Cleveland" (*Pamphlets*, pp. 178-189)
8. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, "The Racial Contract is an exploitation contract that creates global European economic domination and national white racial privilege" (pp. 31-40)

10/3: When we speak of America, we do it with those feelings of respect that are due to it as our country--not as the land of our adoption, not with the alienated breath of foreigners, but with the instinctive love of native-born citizens. We look upon her as favored by Providence above all other for the geniality of her climate and fruitfulness of her soil and, in the language of Dr.

Rush, as possessing "a compound of most climates of the world"--a country said to be the "freest on the globe," where not only the liberty of the press is guaranteed, but the Christian and the infidel, the Mohammedan and pagan, the deist and the atheist, the Jew and Gentile are not only protected in their faith, but may propagate their doctrines unmolested--a country where the oppressed of all nations and castes seek shelter from oppression and become incorporated into the spirit of her laws and rally round her standard of liberty, except those of African origin.

--William Whipper, "Eulogy on William Wilberforce" (December 6, 1833)

Men are made to be their own masters.--The great concerns of the active world are intended to be carried on by men; and among bodies of men who have no agency in them, human nature is not developed. The human being is not complete. He does not fulfil his capabilities. A man is intended by nature, to be not only the lord of his own household, but a part of the governing body of society. Take from a man his country--take from him all concern in the conduct of public affairs; make him the absolute slave to the will of another, and the subject to insult and oppression whenever he goes abroad--and you strip him of all his virtues. The dignity of human nature is lost. Hence political liberty is the parent of all the social blessings, and patriotism is the mother of all the manly virtues.

The nature of women, on the contrary, may be perfectly developed within the domestic circle alone. Her character is not incomplete because she has no voice in public affairs. In times of tranquility and enjoyment, the duties of public life and the various excellencies which are called into play for dispensing happiness within the social circle, abroad, afford ample scope for every amiable and elegant accomplishment. When the frown of fortune is upon us--the convulsions and reverses that attend the private history of every family; poverty--sickness--danger and difficulty--give opportunity to those attributes of fortitude, energy, tenderness, and moral heroism, which elevate the character of woman to that of a ministering angel.--Enough is left to her, therefore, even where political liberty is unknown, for the display of private excellence.

--"A Fragment," *The Colored American*, August 17, 1839

Reading Assignments:

1. Andrews's introduction to *Sisters of the Spirit*
2. Zilpha Elaw, *Memoirs*
3. *The Life and Religious Experience of Jerena Lee*
4. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, "The Racial Contract norms (and races) space, demarcating civil and wild spaces" (pp. 41-53)

10/10: The novel as a whole is a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice. In it the investigator is confronted with several heterogeneous stylistic unities, often located on different linguistic levels and subject to different stylistic controls.

We list below the basic types of compositional-stylistic unities into which the novelistic whole usually breaks down:

1. Direct authorial literary-artistic narration (in all its diverse variants);
2. Stylization of the various forms of oral everyday narration;
3. Stylization of the various forms of semiliterary (written) everyday narration (the letter, the diary, etc.);
4. Various forms of literary but extra-artistic authorial speech (moral, philosophical or scientific statements, oratory, ethnographic descriptions, memoranda and so forth);
5. The stylistically individualized speech of characters.

These heterogeneous stylistic unities, upon entering the novel, combine to form a structured artistic system, and are subordinated to the higher stylistic unity of the work as a whole, a unity that cannot be identified with any single one of the unities subordinated to it.

The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases)--this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre.

Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized).

These distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages, this movement of the theme through different languages and speech types, its dispersion into the rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia, its dialogization--this is the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel.

--Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel"

Reading Assignments:

1. Levine's Introduction: Cultural and Historical Background," in *Clotel*; or, *The President's Daughter*, pp. 3-27

2. William Wells Brown, *Clotel*; or, *The President's Daughter* (complete)
3. Introductions to Part Two of Levine's edition of *Clotel*: "Sources and Revisions," "Race, Slavery, Prejudice," and "Resistance and Reform," (*Clotel* pp. 231-237)
- Note: Please feel free to skim-read the following readings for today:**
4. Thomas Jefferson, *A Declaration by the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress Assembled*, (*Clotel*, pp. 238-244)
5. Thomas Jefferson, from *Notes on the State of Virginia* (*Clotel*, pp. 335-343)
6. Thomas R. Dew, from *Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature* (*Clotel*, pp. 365-371)
7. John C. Calhoun, from *Reception of Abolition Petitions* (*Clotel*, pp. 371-374)
8. Frances Trollope, from *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (*Clotel*, pp. 245-246)
9. William Goodell, "Sale of a Daughter of Tho's Jefferson" (*Clotel*, pp. 246-250)
10. "Jefferson's Daughter" (*Clotel*, pp. 250-251)
11. James McCune Smith, from *Letter to Frederick Douglass' Paper (*Clotel**, pp. 252-253)
12. Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" (*Clotel*, pp. 253-258)
13. Thomas Bacon, from *Sermons Addressed to Masters and Servants* (*Clotel*, pp. 258-262)
14. William Wells Brown, from *Original Panoramic Views* (*Clotel*, pp. 306-308)
15. Albert Barnes, from *An Inquiry into the Scriptural Views of Slavery* (*Clotel*, pp. 374-379)
16. George Fitzhugh, from *Sociology for the South* (*Clotel*, pp. 397-403)
17. Walt Whitman, "Prohibition of Colored Persons" (*Clotel*, pp. 417-419)
18. Andrew Jackson, *Two Proclamations* (*Clotel*, pp. 262-265)
19. Theodore Dwight Weld, from *American Slavery As It Is* (*Clotel*, pp. 265-270)
20. William Wells Brown, "Singular Escape" (*Clotel*, pp. 271-273)
21. Lydia Maria Child, "The Quadroons" (*Clotel*, pp. 274-284)
22. Grace Greenwood, "The Leap from the Long Bridge. An Incident at Washington" (*Clotel*, pp. 297-298)
23. Josephine Brown, from *Biography of an American Bondman* (*Clotel*, pp. 302-306)

24. William Lloyd Garrison, "To the Public" (*Clotel*, pp. 444-446)

25. Angelina E. Grimké, from *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South* (*Clotel*, pp. 451-456)

10/17: I argue in what follows that historical consciousness finds expression in different forms of dramatic unity, that these forms have different conventionalities, that they make the past meaningful both in the conventionality of their textual nature and the conventionality with which they are received and heard. The past is constitutive of the present in the entertainment that histories give. Histories are the theatre of this entertainment. Rather, histories are the varied theatres of this entertainment. That is, histories are not just the content of a story or an interpretation of the past. Histories are not just a message. Histories are the mode of the story's expression, the public occasion of its telling.

One has to understand that "scientific history" or "academic history" is as cultural and as social as a dinner-table story or scripture or a political parable. The rhetoric about these logical systems of "academic histories" and the declaratory definition of what they are and are not sometimes hide what disciplines share with everyday cultural phenomena. Indeed the vested interest in making them seem different and above culture is the very quality that makes them the same.

One almost needs an ethnoscience to see the categories of the world as "scientific man" sees it. The begetting of science by science produces as many kinship and residence rules and boundary-maintaining mechanisms as any clan or moiety.

The transformation of the past in "academic history" is set in different social circumstances and performs different functions from other sorts of transformations of the past.

Scientific history was admirably suited for government, law, education, bureaucracy--everywhere where the transformation of the past had to be seen to be reliable, measured by the same criteria, true. The rub, of course, was in being true.

Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that being accurate became equated with being true and that history became equated with historical facts.

Roy Wagner has offered us the disturbing notion that culture belongs to the stranger's eye--to the professional stranger, if he or she be an anthropological observer, say, or to the person who is distanced by reflection or role from what happened around him or her. Culture is a stranger's invention: it is the sense of wholeness and integration an outsider-outsider or an inside-

outsider develops.

In a poetic for histories, one has to describe this same invention of the past. Whatever the different social expressions of historical consciousness, they are all born of the irony that things are never what they seem. Irony is history's trope. In the space between the meaninglessness of the present and the unknowable past is the entertainment of history. The artifice of history's words is to give historians, whoever they are--gossips, priests, academics--control over the past in a way participants could never control their present. Historians, again, whoever they are, are outsiders. They always make a drama out of what the participants experienced as one damn thing after another. Historians always see the past from a perspective the past could never have had. They are like meteorologists predicting yesterday's weather today. They get their certainties from consequences.

In all of its varied expressions narrating is, in Roy Wagner's word, an impersonation--the clustering of signifying actions into recognizable roles, such as bard, novelist, prophet, historian.

Narrating both makes a now of the past and delivers the past in some dramatic display.

"Theory" and "theatre" come to us out of the same Greek origin--*thea*, sight, viewing; *theoros*, spectator. Theory--a mind-set for viewing; theatre--a space-set for spectating; theatrical--a convention-set for mimesis. "The theater," wrote Roland Barthes, "is precisely the practice which calculates the place of things, as they are observed. If I set the spectacle here, the spectator will see this; if I put it elsewhere, he will not, and I can avail myself of this masking effect and play on the illusions it provides"

The "theatricality of history-making" involves the notion of viewing in a space so closed around with convention that the audience and actors enter into the conspiracy of their own illusions. The paradox is that self-awareness, performance consciousness, does not disturb the realisms of their understanding.

--Greg Dening, *Performances*

Reading Assignments:

1. John W. Lewis, "Essay on the Character and Condition of the African Race" (*Pamphlets of Protest*, pp. 190-196)
2. Mary Ann Shadd, "A Plea for Emigration, or Notes of Canada West" (*Pamphlets*, pp. 198-212)
3. Frederick Douglass, et al., "Address to the People of the United States" (*Pamphlets*, pp. 214-225)

4. Martin Delany, "Political Destiny of the Colored Race on the American Continent" (*Pamphlets*, pp. 226-239)
5. William Wells Brown, "The History of the Haitian Revolution" (*Pamphlets*, pp. 240-253)
6. Mary Still, "An Appeal to the Females of the African Methodist Episcopal Church" (*Pamphlets of Protest*, pp. 254-261)
7. J. Theodore Holly, "A Vindication of the Capacity of the Negro for Self-Government and Civilized Progress" (*Pamphlets*, pp. 262-280)
8. Alexander Crummell, "The English Language in Liberia" (*Pamphlets*, pp. 282-303)
9. T. Morris Chester, "Negro Self-Respect and Pride of Race" (*Pamphlets*, pp. 304-310)
10. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, "The Racial Contract norms (and races) the individual, establishing personhood and subpersonhood" (pp. 53-62)

10/24: Although I have been using the arguments of philosophers such as Locke and Hegel to examine the logic whereby the subject appears to be naturally autonomous and self-possessed, I do not want to leave the impression that it is the "Idea" (of property or the subject) itself, in some abstract universal sense, that accounts for the history of violence and domination institutionalized in slavery. Rather, the framework of slavery in which the relation between property and the subject becomes socially meaningful demands that we recognize that this subject is always a historically and materially situated subject, emerging out of and in terms given by the social relations it appears to precede. The cultural context of slavery is "already there as the disarticulated process of that subject's production, one that is concealed by the frame that would situate a ready-made subject in an external web of cultural relations." The appearance of the fugitive, however precarious, breaks open this frame, exposing slavery and its attendant racialization to their own outside, even as the policing mechanisms of slavery bring pressure to bear on the fugitive to return to the proper position of property. Outside of slavery, neither self-possessed nor simply property, the fugitive cannot be recognized as a political subject and therefore can never be free so long as he or she remains fugitive. But the existence of the fugitive as something else, a kind of singularity, reveals that the freedom of the politically recognized subject is a freedom conditioned and determined to be in some accordance with the being of such a subject. If this subject is not simply given (by "God" or by "Nature") but is a socially achieved effect, then the freedom of this subject cannot be the only possible freedom. And insofar as the figure of the fugitive points to a space beyond or outside this subject, it is in fugitivity that we may find the glimmerings of another thought of freedom.

--Samira Kawash, *Dislocating the Color Line: Identity, Hybridity, and Singularity in African-American Literature*

Reading Assignments:

1. William Wells Brown, *The Escape*, Ernest's introduction and complete text
2. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, "The Racial Contract underwrites the modern social contract and is continually being rewritten" (pp. 62-81)

10/31: The domestic circle in which Tocqueville locates American individualism emerged as a sphere of individuality in tandem with market economy expansion. Domestic ideology with its discourse of personal life proliferates alongside this

economic development which removed women from the public realm of production and redirected men to work arenas increasingly subject to market contingencies. To counter "this perpetually fluctuating state of society," Catherine Beecher exhorted women to "sustain a prosperous domestic state." The domestic doctrine Beecher helped to define held women and the home as the embodiment and the environment of stable value. Maintaining a site of permanent value, the domestic cult of true womanhood facilitated the transition to a life increasingly subject to the caprices of the market. The confidence of encomiums to the virtues of womanhood and home simultaneously sublimated and denied anxieties about unfamiliar and precarious socioeconomic conditions and about the place of the individual within those conditions. In the midst of change the domestic sphere provided an always identifiable place and refuge for the individual: it signified the private domain of individuality apart from the marketplace.

Nowhere is the tradition of self-proprietorship more live than in Stanton's belief that "to deny the rights of property is like cutting off the hands." The faculties of hands, which dictionary definitions list as those of grasping, producing, possessing, controlling, and authorizing, recapitulate the proprietary character of individualism.

Since domesticity secures this character for the individual, its selective allotment of rights and places in society is the real target of the feminist domestic critique. This means that women in the nineteenth century are in the peculiar position of wanting to be in a sphere they already both do and do not inhabit. For if the individual rights Stanton wants for women--"the rights of property," "political equality," "credit in the marketplace," recompense in the world of work," "a voice in choosing those who make and administer the law"--by definition reside in domesticity, the domestic sphere seems, then, to be the best place for women. The domestic confinement feminists protest should guarantee the democratic rights they want. This is precisely the logical maneuver by which opponents of woman suffrage were able to argue that women's rights existed in their domestic sphere, rationalizing the illogic of women's disenfranchisement by appealing to the entitling function of domesticity.

What the feminist movement for women's political and economic autonomy highlights, therefore, is the sexual division of individualism within domesticity. This domain is at once the separate sphere of women and the correlative to, as well as the basis of, men's individuality. It is thus the case that the nineteenth century advanced and delimited individualism by identifying selfhood with the feminine but denying it to women. What women wanted was, quite literally, themselves. This paradoxical feminization of self that excludes as it encompasses women shapes the well-worn gender distinctions deeded to us by the nineteenth century. The measure of its success sa a model of the subject can be indicted by the persistence with which the domestic and the individualistic have figured in American literary tradition as antinomies, despite Tocqueville's recognition of their alignment.

Feminist reinterpretations of the domestic dispute this scenario by reversing its terms, making the domestic figure herself

a runaway, a rebel. According to the new feminist literary history, women figured in the American imagination not as shrews to be dreamed away, but as producers and embodiments of the American dream of personal happiness. In the feminist exegesis of American cultural archetypes, the housewife, whom the prototypical canonical literature (and criticism) would evade, signifies a reformist rather than a conformist ethos. As the Angel in the House, the woman at home exemplified ideal values and presided over a superior, moral economy. In sentimental literature, as Nina Baym puts it, "Domesticity is set forth as a value scheme for ordering all of life, in competition with the ethos of money and exploitation that is perceived to prevail in American society." Dedicated to "overturning the male money system as the law of American life," domesticity constitutes an alternative to, and escape from, the masculine economic order.

--Gillian Brown, *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America*

Reading Assignments: 1. Harriet E. Wilson, *Our Nig*, Foreman and Pitts's introduction and complete text

1. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, "The Racial Contract has to be enforced through violence and ideological conditioning" (pp. 81-90)

11/7: The festivities of this day serve but to impress upon the minds of reflecting men of color a deeper sense of the cruelty, the injustice, and oppression, of which they have been the victims.

Alas, they are slaves in the midst of freedom; they are slaves to those who boast that freedom is the unalienable right of all; and the clanking of their fetters, and the voice of their wrongs, make a horrid discord in the songs of freedom which resound through the land.

No people in the world profess so high a respect for liberty and equality as the people of the United States, and yet no people hold so many slaves, or make such great distinctions between man and man.

The State we live in, since the 4th of July, 1827, has been able to boast that she has no slaves, and other states where there still are slaves appear disposed to follow her example.

But, alas! the freedom to which we have attained is defective. Freedom and equality have been "put asunder." The rights of men are decided by the colour of their skin; and there is as much difference made between the rights of a free white man and a free coloured man as there is between a free coloured man and a slave.

Though delivered from the fetters of slavery, we are oppressed by an unreasonable, unrighteous, and cruel prejudice, which aims

at nothing less than the forcing away of all the free coloured people of the United States to the distant shores of Africa.

--Rev. Peter Williams, Jr., "Slavery and Colonization" (July 4, 1830)

Reading Assignments:

1. *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, Ernest's introduction and complete text
2. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, "The Racial Contract historically tracks the actual moral/political consciousness of (most) white moral agents" (pp. 91-109)

11/14: The parameters of the ideological discourse of true womanhood were bound by a shared social understanding that external physical appearance reflected internal qualities of character and therefore provided an easily discernible indicator of the function of a female of the human species: men associated "the idea of female softness and delicacy with a correspondent delicacy of constitution" and recoiled if a woman spoke of "her great strength, her extraordinary appetite," or "her ability to bear excessive fatigue." While fragility was valorized as the ideal state of woman, heavy labor required other physical attributes. Strength and ability to bear fatigue, argued to be so distasteful a presence in a white woman, were positive features to be emphasized in the promotion and selling of a black female field hand at a slave auction. It is worth considering that a delicate constitution was an indicator of class as well as racial position; woman as ornament was a social sign of achieved wealth, while physical strength was necessary for the survival of women in the cotton fields, in the factories, or on the frontier.

--Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*

To a degree astonishing to our pluralistic and secular way of thinking about social change, middle- and upper-middle-class women of the antebellum era shared a language that described their benevolent work as Christian, their means as fundamentally moral, and their mandate as uniquely female.

We still know little about why the ideology of "woman's sphere" emerged when it did and what large cultural implications it had, but we do know that many middle-class Protestant women incorporated its tenets into their own self image, that they used it to justify a wide range of social activities, and that it provided at least some basis for a consciousness based on the shared experience of being women.

I frame the words "woman's sphere" in quotation marks intentionally. The concept of "spheres" is, after all, ideological, although it has too often come to represent historians' understanding of the actual experience of at least white middle-class Protestant women. What I have found in my work is that the reality of women's lives was quite different from the ideology which they themselves used and that, furthermore, the acceptance of the tenets of woman's sphere by historians has too often served to obscure that distinction, unwittingly preventing women from leaving the sphere itself.

--Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States*

Reading Assignments:

1. Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Painter's introduction and complete text
2. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, "The Racial Contract has always been recognized by nonwhites as the real determinant of (most) white moral/political practice and thus as the real moral/political agreement to be challenged" (pp. 109-120)

11/21: Thanksgiving Break

11/28: Perhaps it is not generally known that in the United States of America--that land of freedom and equality--the laws are so exceedingly liberal that they give to man the liberty of purchasing as many negroes as he can find means to pay for, and also the liberty to sell them again. In consequence of this, a regular system of merchandise is established in the souls and bodies of our fellow creatures.

--Nathaniel Paul, "Let Us Alone" (London's Exeter Hall, July 13, 1833)

Reading Assignments:

1. Martin R. Delany, *Blake; or, The Huts of America*, Miller's introduction and complete text
2. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, "The 'Racial Contract' as a theory is explanatorily superior to the raceless social contract in accounting for the political and moral realities of the world and in helping to guide normative theory" (pp. 120-134)

12/5: Final Reflections

It will probably interest most of your readers to know that the "chattel personal" generally called Rev. Dr. Pennington, is in a fair way of becoming a man. Dr. P. was born the slave of Frisbie Tilgham, of Hagerstown, Md., by whom he was educated a blacksmith, though an important branch of his education was forgotten--that of teaching him his letters. At the age of twenty-one, he was regularly graduated in the "peculiar institution," and his late master certified to me in writing, which I now have in my possession, and which we may regard as his diploma, that at this time, "Jim was a first-rate blacksmith, and well worth a thousand dollars."

The money was remitted, and I have today received the bill of sale, making over James Pembroke to me as my own property, to all intents and purposes whatsoever. I remarked at the opening of my letter, that Dr. P. was "in a fair way of becoming a man." He is not yet completely one. The title to him still rests with me, and it remains for me, by deed, under my hand and seal, to "create him a Peer of the Realm." I shall, however, defer the execution of this instrument for half an hour, till I have walked up and down the whole length of Main street, to see how it seems to be a slaveholder--especially to own a Doctor of Divinity. Possibly during the walk I may change my mind and think it best to send him to a sugar plantation.

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1. S.--I have returned from my walk. The deed is executed. John Pembroke is merged into Rev. Pennington. The slave is free--
the chattel is a man.

--"Rev. Dr. Pennington," Frederick Douglass' Paper, June 26, 1851

Professor John Ernest's Handy GUIDE FOR PAPERS

Part 1: Manuscript Form (and other important details)

I prefer that you use the 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. If you are using continuous-feed computer paper, you should of course separate the sheets.
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. If you are using ellipsis points, leave a space between the points:

Bad, very bad: ...

Good, very good: . . .

1. Use two hyphens to form a dash, and leave no space between the end of the previous word and the beginning of the dash—so that it will look like this one when you print it.
2. 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 2: Content

Remember that your assignment is literary, cultural, and historical analysis, not plot summary, and not simply general historical commentary. Since these are “meditations” essays, you will not have all the answers, and I do not expect you to present and defend a specific thesis. Still, I expect you to identify a clear issue that forces you to think carefully and to look for the information and the lines of thought that you will need to follow to make sense of a difficult social concern.

In part, you will want to draw from literature to think about how authors have tried to help us understand our world. Accordingly, your task is to look for and think about 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 texts that you will discuss in your paper, and therefore does not need to be reminded of the plots. Do not simply summarize the plot.

In part, you will want to present focused historical commentary. 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, for example, that “nineteenth-century African Americans thought that . . .”. Even more important, if you make assertions about history--that is, assertions of fact--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 main concerns and make sure that you establish why those elements are important for understanding the work or the larger issues that you are exploring. 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.

In the early part of your paper, explain carefully the interpretive problem you intend to explore, and then build on that opening carefully and 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, use quotations from the texts to show the basis for your speculations and questions.

Part 3: 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. Since this paper is speculative, you might not have any solid conclusions that you can support--but you can still show that the questions you are asking make sense, and that they come from specific concerns presented in our readings and our discussions. If you can answer a question simply by looking something up in a reference book, then you should look it up--and this should lead you to a different, related, but more specific question. It is best to avoid making claims about how readers respond to a certain text or issue, for you cannot support such claims. For example, don’t say anything about how most people feel about Affirmative Action unless you are able to support your claim.

Part 4: Using Quotations

To present an engaging meditation, you will need to quote from the texts that inspired your questions, and you must explain carefully how text raises these questions (intentionally or otherwise) This is not to say that you should be blatant about this; that is, you shouldn't lead into a quotation by saying, "My views are 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. That is, don't just quote. Prepare your reader for the quotation, present that quotation briefly (avoid long quotations); and then explicate, analyze, or otherwise explain the significance of that quotation. 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 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 quotation and in-text quotation 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 5: Presentation

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 is available at the Reference department of Dimond Library. If you are an English major 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 suggests your care as an 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, while also speaking with an individual voice—can be a very creative process.

Part 6: 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.

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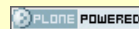
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