

STUDIES IN AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE
THE SLAVE NARRATIVE:
PAST AND PRESENT
Prof. Laura Murphy

Course Description:

This course will explore several central works of African American literature through the lens of one of its most prominent genres: the slave narrative. Though very few people recognize it, 27 million people are still enslaved in the world today. Almost from the time of the earliest forms of slavery in the US to today, enslaved people have produced written documents which reflect on their experiences of forced labor. We will focus on the genre of the slave narrative as it has been produced and re-produced since the 18th century, discussing at first the early African American autobiographical tradition. We will read each early slave narrative in conversation with several short slave narratives from the 20th and 21st century slavery. In the second unit, we will discuss the contemporary African American novel and its reinvention of the slave narrative in fictional form. Towards the end of the course, we will read several lengthier contemporary slave narratives produced around the globe in the last fifteen years. In this final unit, we will read narratives by survivors of slavery in order to understand how rhetorical strategies, stylistic choices, formalistic qualities, and elements of narrative content resonate across the centuries of the slave narrative tradition. Students in this course will discuss the extent to which African American representations of forced labor, oppression, emancipation and escape persist in the U.S. and provide a model for more recent authors all over the world.

Experiential Learning Opportunities:

Students have the option of participating in several service/experiential learning opportunities associated with this course. Students in this course are encouraged to participate in or form a student group on the issue. Additionally, students are encouraged to participate in labor organizations around their university or to involve themselves in national or international abolitionist organizations and bring what they've learned in that work into the classroom as well.

Required texts will include:

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas, An American Slave*
Penguin Classics Edition, ISBN 9780140390124
<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/menu.html>

Kevin Bales and Zoe Trodd, *To Plead Our Own Cause*
Cornell University Press, ISBN 0801474388

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*
Dover Thrift Editions, ISBN 0486419312
<http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/menu.html>

Oludah Equiano/Wernder Sollors, Ed. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of...*
W. W. Norton & Company, ISBN 0393974944
<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/equiano1/menu.html>

Charles Johnson, *Middle Passage*
Scribner, ISBN 0684855887

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*
Vintage, ISBN 1400033411

Jean-Robert Cadet, *Restavec: From Haitian Slave Child to Middle-Class American*
University of Texas Press, ISBN 0292712030
On Ebrary at Ithaca Libraries

Francis Bok, *Escape from Slavery*
St. Martin's Griffin, 0312306245

And several selections to be handed out in class

Assignments and Grading:

Students will be required to write two essays during the semester as well as several short QHQs. There will also be a take home final paper which will be preceded by an annotated bibliography of the sources to be used in the final paper. Improvement is strongly rewarded; as a result, assignments are weighted more heavily as the semester proceeds to encourage steady improvement in writing and intellectual engagement.

Students will be required to give one presentation during the semester, leading the class in discussion for a portion of the class period. This is often the most rewarding part of the course for many students.

Student will periodically be required to write a short, 1-2 page "QHQ." QHQ stands for question-hypothesis-question. You will begin the paper by asking yourself an analytical question about the text which you have yet to be able to answer. The majority of the paper will be comprised of your attempt to formulate a hypothesis. Your short paper will end with another question that this thinking experiment has led you to. These papers very well may aid in the invention of a larger paper topic. QHQs will be due on blackboard by midnight on the night before the class date on which it will be discussed.

The grading breakdown is as follows:

QHQs 15%

Midterm Paper (5-7p) 20%

Annotated Bib 10%

Final Paper (8-10p) 30%

Participation 10%

Presentation 15%

CALENDAR

First session: INTRODUCTIONS

Second session: Bales, *Disposable People* 1-33 /Lecture: Modern day slavery

Third session: Olney “I Was Born” from *Callaloo* /Lecture: The Slave Narrative

Discovering Slavery and Freedom

Fourth session: Douglass, *Narrative*: 33-70

Fifth session: Douglass, *Narrative*: 71-100 **QHQ**

Sixth session: Douglass, *Narrative*: 100-151

Seventh session: Bales, *To Plead* Chapter 3: 137-174

Extraordinary Women and the Peculiar Institution

Eighth session: Jacobs, *Incidents*: 1-39

Ninth session: Jacobs, *Incidents*: 39-80

Tenth session: Jacobs, *Incidents*: 80-118

Eleventh session: Jacobs, *Incidents*: 118-164 **QHQ**

Twelfth session: Bales, *To Plead* Chapter 2: 83-136

Thirteenth session: WRITING WORKSHOP

The Struggle for Freedom

Fourteenth session: Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*: 19-55 **THESIS DUE**

Fifteenth session: Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*: 55-99

Sixteenth session: Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*: 100-121

Seventeenth session: Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*: 121-149

Eighteenth session: Equiano *The Interesting Narrative*: 150-178

Nineteenth session: Bales, *To Plead* Chapter 4: 175-218 **PAPER ONE DUE**

Speaking Out and Defining Slavery

Twentieth session: Brown, “Lecture” and “Narrative” from the Dover Edition of *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave*

Twenty-first session: Bales, *To Plead* Chapter 5: 219-250

The Neo-Slave Narrative and Re-membering Slavery

Twenty-second session: Johnson, *Middle Passage*: 1-43

Twenty-third session: Johnson, *Middle Passage*: 44-70

Twenty-fourth session: Johnson, *Middle Passage*: 70-119

Twenty-fifth session: Johnson, *Middle Passage*: 120-167 **QHQ**

Twenty-sixth session: Johnson, *Middle Passage*: 168-209

Twenty-seventh session: Morrison, *Beloved*: TBA

Twenty-eighth session: Morrison, *Beloved*: TBA

Twenty-ninth session: Morrison, *Beloved*: TBA

Thirtieth session: Morrison, *Beloved*: TBA

Thirty-first session: Morrison, *Beloved*: TBA **QHQ**

Thirty-second session: Morrison, *Beloved*: TBA

Thirty-third session: Morrison, *Beloved*: TBA / FILM TBA

Narrating New Slavery

Thirty-fourth session: Cadet, *Restavec*: 1-56

Thirty-fifth session: Cadet, *Restavec*: 56-108

Thirty-sixth session: Cadet, *Restavec*: 108-182 **QHQ**

Thirty-seventh session: Bok, *Escape from Slavery*: 1-46 **ANNOTATED BIB DUE**

Thirty-eighth session: Bok, *Escape from Slavery*: 47-96

Thirty-ninth session: Bok, *Escape from Slavery*: 97-150

Fortieth session: Bok, *Escape from Slavery*: 151-200

Forty-first session: Bok, *Escape from Slavery*: 200-263

Forty-second session: Bok, *Escape from Slavery*: 264-278/WINDUP