

ENGL 4663
Early African American Literature: Writing the Black Atlantic
Spring 2014

Professor Aljoe
Holmes 463
617-373-4543

n.aljoe@neu.edu
Office hours: T 12:00-1:30 and by appt.
Course Meets: TF 9:50-11:30

This course will focus on 18th and 19th century writing by members of the African Diaspora. Recent archival research and canon reconsideration has revealed the wealth and variety of texts written by black writers at this time. Drawing on this work, we will investigate the ways in which these early Black writers engaged with a range of issues such as the nature of the individual subject; human rights; gender and class; the rapid expansion of print culture; the development of the novel and other genres; notions of Africa; and of course, notions of freedom and enslavement. Through reading a variety of texts such as: poetry, speeches, essays, letters, fiction, slave narratives, biographies, and autobiographies—we will not only get a sense of the complexity of 18th and 19th century trans-Atlantic literary cultures but also appreciate how these writers created the foundations for various literary traditions across the African Diaspora.

Course Objectives: The general purpose of the course is two-fold. First, it is to introduce students to the critical questions and paradigms that are central to Early African American and Black Atlantic literatures; and second, to acquaint students with the classic texts, writers, and themes that have fundamentally shaped the foundations of African American, Black British, African, and Caribbean literary traditions. In addition, the course will enable students to:

- Explore the textual representations of 18th and early 19th century Black Atlantic societies across a range of literary forms;
- Understand the relevance of Early Black texts to 18th and early 19th century, as well as 21st century cultural and political debates;
- Write and think critically about literary texts.

Required Texts: Available at the Northeastern University Bookstore and on Reserve in the Snell Library

Unchained Voices eds. Carretta and Gould

The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl

Twelve Years A Slave

Course packet available online

Formal Assignments:

- **Reading Responses/Blackboard posts:** (2 @250-500 words each) For each class you will be responsible for posting a thoughtful academic response to the assigned readings before class meeting.
- **Class Discussion Facilitation (Group project)**
- **Short Essay (5-8 pages)**
- **Final project**

Grade Distribution:

- **20% Short Essay**
- **35% Final project**
- **15% Class Discussion Facilitation (Group project)**
- **15% Reading Responses/Blackboard posts**
- **15% Class Participation** (Includes attendance and class discussion)

COURSE EXPECTATIONS, REQUIREMENTS, & POLICIES

The extent to which this class is productive, educational, and interesting to you and your classmates is dependent upon the insights, questions, and responses **of all of us**—thus, **your presence** and **active participation** will be key. Additionally, in order to facilitate a respectful academic environment all engagements during class meetings and on the Blackboard Discussion Board are to be considerate and courteous.

GRADING POLICIES:

Grading scale:

A: 100-96	C+: 79-77
A-: 95-91	C: 76-73
B+: 90-87	C-: 72-70
B: 86-83	D: 69-66
B-: 82-80	F: 65-0

The general standards for letter grades for the course are:

A -- Surpassing course goals by demonstrating original and perceptive understanding of readings and course concepts; excellence and originality in compositions; superior scores on exams and other assigned work; active participation in class discussion and small groups; and meticulous fulfillment of attendance and assignment requirements.

B -- Meeting course goals by demonstrating mastery of subject and concepts; above average quality in compositions and exams; very good participation in class and small groups; and conscientious fulfillment of attendance and assignment requirements.

C -- Meeting course goals by demonstrating a satisfactory level of understanding of subject material and concepts; acceptable quality in compositions and exams; adequate participation in class and small groups; and compliance with attendance and assignment requirements.

D — Modest meeting of course goals; minimal knowledge of subject material and concepts; marginal quality in compositions (poor quality of development, support, or grammar); poor performance on exams; passivity in class and small groups; insufficient compliance with attendance and assignment requirements.

F -- Not meeting course goals; unsatisfactory progress in understanding and applying subject material and concepts; incomplete or unacceptable work in compositions (significant grammatical, developmental, and structural errors); failure of exams; non-compliance with attendance and assignment requirements.

BOOKS: YOU MUST BRING YOUR TEXT OR HARD COPIES OF THE READINGS TO CLASS.

If you do not have your text, you are unprepared for class and may be asked to leave.

BLACKBOARD: Syllabi, course calendar, and all assignments will be kept current on Blackboard. The site includes copies of or links to all readings not available in the textbook.

READINGS & CLASS PREPARATION: Like most literature classes, this course will be reading-intensive; so the most important factor in doing well in this course is doing a good job with the reading. I expect everyone to come to class having completed the assigned reading and prepared to participate fully in discussion and/or writing exercises. I will always expect you to be ready to bring specific references and passages to the attention of the class in order to focus and deepen our discussions. When I provide reading questions in advance these will serve as jumping-off points for class discussions and I will expect you to have given them serious thought. I strongly encourage you to take notes as you read the texts, marking passages in the texts that strike you as significant. In addition to marking passages, you also might sketch out rough responses or interpretations, or make note of references or similarities to other texts, literary allusions, or other literary techniques/strategies etc. You also might note the relevant social or historical connections of the passage.

CLASS MEETINGS: Although I will occasionally lecture, the majority of class-time will be engaged in discussion, group work, reading and writing exercises.

CLASS DISCUSSION: Class discussion and participation in class activities are very important (as reflected in the grade distribution). All comments during class are to be respectful in nature. Please keep in mind that part of my job is to facilitate participation by all students in the class, and to ensure that discussions are not monopolized by individuals.

ATTENDANCE: Attendance is **required** and will be taken every class meeting. You may miss **two** classes without penalty, no questions asked. **Three or more** absences will lower your overall class participation grade (10% of final course grade) by one half step for **each** absence beyond three (B⇒B-). If an absence is unavoidable or needs to be excused, please contact me as soon as possible so we can make appropriate arrangements. If you miss class or part of class, **it is your responsibility to find out what you have missed by asking a classmate.**

Tardiness: You must be present in the classroom at the precise starting time— if you arrive more than 5 minutes after class start time **THREE (3)** times during the semester, one unexcused absence will be allotted. If you have a situation that may result in constant tardiness, please let me know at your earliest convenience.

EXTRA CREDIT: Participation Plus. You may obtain extra credit to be applied **only to your class participation grade or to replace one absence** by engaging in one or more of the self-directed learning tasks listed below and writing a 2-page essay response. In the paper I will expect a **very brief** summary/ description (no more than one paragraph) of the text or event, as well as an analysis and critique of its value, or you may develop a central focus around what you found most new or disturbing or striking or useful in the material, or you may develop a parallel or comparison to an assigned reading selection. Your response as a whole should be an effort to make sense of, or to amplify the meaning of whatever aspect of the target material you choose to focus on, as well as to answer the question "How does this information/material/event/place enhance or challenge my analysis of Early Black Atlantic Literature and Culture?"

The tasks may include:

- (1) Attending a University sponsored or local event related to English Studies and/or Early African American Studies;
- (2) An analysis of certain outside sources such as films, music, visual arts, performances, television shows, or internet sites about Black Atlantic Cultures (*12 Years A Slave*, *Belle*, *Django*, etc.);
- (3) An analysis of a scholarly article on a text or author that we're examining;
- (4) Or you may propose your own.

If you are interested in completing one of these tasks, you must e-mail or meet with me first to discuss your plan.

Participation Plus assignments will not be accepted after Tuesday, April 1, 2014.

DUE DATES: Papers and assignments are due on the date listed on the calendar.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED UNLESS YOU HAVE REQUESTED AN EXTENSION BEFORE THE DUE DATE.

FORMAL ASSIGNMENTS: All formal assignments will be handed in through our Blackboard website. Before uploading your document, please make sure your name is included on the first page of the document. Blackboard assignments must be uploaded by 11:59pm on the due date. As with hard copies, papers must be double-spaced throughout, and have 1 inch maximum margins, page numbers, and 12-pt maximum font size. Information from elsewhere and quotations from texts must be cited using MLA documentation system. (See: <http://www.wiredprof.com/100/lectures/MLAdocumentation.htm>)

TECHNOLOGY: Please mute all cell phones, pagers, and other electronic devices during class. If you have a legitimate reason for needing your personal technology on, please let me know in advance. No email, chatting/IM-ing, Facebook-ing, texting, or other distracting use of technology is allowed. **If you use a laptop during class, please refrain from extracurricular internet use. Offenders will have 10 points deducted from their class participation grade.**

EMAIL: Email communications to the class will be sent through Blackboard. Therefore it is crucial that you provide an accessible email address to the Registrar/IT Office. Finally, when you email me, please be sure to identify yourself by first and last name somewhere in the email.

NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTER: Offers free and friendly help for any level writer, including help with reading complex texts, conceptualizing a writing project, refining your writing process (i.e., planning, researching, organization, drafting, revising, and editing), and using sources effectively. You can receive feedback face-to-face during regular hours or via email/online response.

Locations = 412 Holmes in the English Department 617-373-4549 and
Snell Library Satellite behind Argo Tea (136 Snell)

Current hours and online appointments = <http://www.northeastern.edu/english/writing-center/>

ADA: In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA 1990) Northeastern University seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services, and activities. If you will need accommodations in this class, please contact the Disability Resource Center (20 Dodge Hall X2675, TTY X2730) at your earliest convenience to ensure that arrangements will be made.

ACADEMIC HONESTY POLICY: A commitment to the principles of academic integrity is essential to the mission of Northeastern University. The promotion of independent and original scholarship ensures that students derive the most from their educational experience and their pursuit of knowledge. Academic dishonesty violates the most fundamental values of an intellectual community and undermines the achievements of the entire University. Details about the university's Policy on Academic Honesty can be found at <http://www.neu.edu/osccr/academichonesty.html>

Early African American Literature
Course Assignment and Reading Calendar
Spring 2014

(Subject to change, but always with advance notice)

Week 1: Introductions

T01.07: Introductions

F01.10: Africans and the Cultures of the Enlightenment

“Speech of Moses Bon Sa’am” (1735)**

Unchained Voices 142-144 “Belinda: Petition of an African Slave” (1782/1787)

Foster “A Narrative of the Interesting Origins and (Somewhat Surprising Developments of African American Print Culture”** (** = Online course reader)

Week 2: Black Puritans and the Captivity Narrative

T01.14: Unchained Voices 20-25 *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings and Surprising Deliverance of Britton Hammon...* (1760)

Zafar “Capturing the Captivity Narrative”**

Foucault excerpt from “What is an Author”**

F01.17: Unchained Voices 110-133 *A Narrative of the Lord’s Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black* (1785)

Week 3: The Aesthetics of Spiritual Narratives

T01.21: Lemuel Haynes “Liberty Extended; or, On the Illegality of Slave-keeping”(1776)**

Lemuel Haynes “Universal Salvation” (1805)**

Langley “18th Century Black Wor(l)d and Early Writers’ Biblical Literacy”**

F01.24: *The Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee and My Call to the Gospel* (1837)**

Week 4: The Talking Book

T01.28: Unchained Voices 32-58 *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Gronniosaw...* (1772)

Unchained Voices 77-109 Selections from *Letters of Ignatius Sancho, An African* (1782)

Gates Jr. Excerpts from *The Signifying Monkey***

F01.31: Unchained Voices 185-207 *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano, also known as Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789, abridged)

Due in class: Project proposal for Final Project

Week 5: A Self-made African Man

T02.04: Unchained Voices 207-289 *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano, also known as Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789, abridged)

F02.07: *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano, also known as Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789, abridged)

Baker from “Figurations for a New American Literary History”**

Davidson “Olaudah Equiano, Written By Himself”**

Week 6: Early Black Poetry

- T02.11:** Lucy Terry “Bars Fight” (1746)**
Lemuel Haynes “The Battle of Lexington” (1775)**
Anonymous poem “Written by a mulatto woman” (1794)**
“Early African American Poetry”**
- F02.14:** Unchained Voices 26-31 Jupiter Hammon (1760)
Unchained Voices 72-76 Francis Williams (1774)

Week 7: Early Black Poetry: Case Study on Phillis Wheatley

- T02.18:** Unchained Voices 59-71 Phillis Wheatley (“On the Death of the Rev. George Whitefield...” 59; “On Being Brought from Africa to America” 62; “A Farewell to America”**; “To the University of Cambridge in New England”**; “To S.M. a Young African Painter, on Seeing his Works” 66”)
- F02.21:** Unchained Voices 59-71 Phillis Wheatley (“An Hymn to the Morning” 62; “An Hymn to the Evening” 63; “On Imagination” 64; “To the Right Honourable William, Earl of Dartmouth...” 65; “To His Excellency General Washington” 67)

SUNDAY 2.23 DUE to Blackboard by 11:59pm Short Essay assignment

Week 8: The Discourse of Rights

- T02.25:** Unchained Voices 319-324 Benjamin Banneker “Copy of a Letter from Benjamin Banneker to the Secretary of State (Thomas Jefferson), With His Answer” (1792)
Excerpts from *Banneker’s Almanac* (1792-97)**
Toussaint L’Ouverture “Proclamations” (1793/96/97)**
- F02.28:** David Walker *David Walker’s Appeal* (1829)**
Maria Stewart *Religion and the Pure Principles of Mortality...* (1831)**

SPRING BREAK

Week 9: Fiction in the Early Black Atlantic

- T03.11:** Anonymous “Theresa, A Haytien Tale” (1828)**
Victor Sejour “The Mulatto” (1834/7)**
- F03.14:** Francis Ellen Watkins Harper “The Two Offers” (1858)**

Week 10: The Development of the Slave Narrative

- T03.18:** Unchained Voices 369-388 *A Narrative of the Life and Adventure of Venture, A Native of Africa* (1798)
Gould “The Rise, Development and Circulation of the Slave Narrative”**
- F03.21:** Douglass *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845)
Davis & Gates Jr. “The Language of Slavery”**

Week 11: The Slave Narrative

- T03.25:** Excerpts from Douglass *My Bondage & My Freedom* (1855)
Sekora “Mr. Editor, If you Please...”**
- F03.28:** Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (up to p.77, Ch.I-XVI)

Week 12: Gender and the Slave Narrative

T04.01: Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (77-158, complete narrative)

F04.03: Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

Foster “In Respect to Females...’: Differences in the Portrayals of Women by Male and Female Narrators”**

Sharpe “Something Akin’ to Freedom”**

Week 13: The Slave Narrative: Re-Thinking Genre

T4.08: Solomon Northrup *Twelve Years A Slave* (1-84, up to Ch. I-IX)

F4.11: Solomon Northrup *Twelve Years A Slave* (Complete narrative)

Worley “Solomon Northrup and the Sly Philosophy of the Slave Pen”**

Week 14: Last week of classes

T4.15: Final Thoughts

DUE Wednesday, April 23: Final Research Project