

African-American Literature I
ENGL 215-01, Fall, 2008
<http://www.timtrask.com>

Syllabus

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Office hours: 10:00 MW
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Required textbook (available in the college bookstore):

Gates, et al., eds. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, 2nd edition. Norton, 2003.
(1st edition may also be used.)

Course description (from college bulletin): "This course examines the works of African-American writers and performers from the periods of colonization and slavery through the Harlem Renaissance. Works will be studied in political, historical, and cultural contexts with particular focus on contributions and challenges to Euro-American culture and to simultaneous developments internationally among peoples of African descent."

Prerequisite: English Composition II.

Goals:

1. To study representative selections from the African-American literature of the United States from the beginning to the Harlem Renaissance.
2. To get a view of the topics and issues that have concerned these writers from the Colonial Period to the early 20th century.
3. To improve skills in reading and critiquing imaginative and narrative writing.
4. To put research skills to use.

Objectives:

1. To read assignments.
2. To participate in class discussions.
3. To pass quizzes on assigned reading.
4. To write a research paper using approved techniques for research and writing.
5. To pass three examinations, including the Final Exam.

Teaching Method, Class Attendance, and Participation. I expect you to be in class on time, to remain in class for the duration, and to participate in discussions. This class is an interactive discussion group in which we will examine passages from the readings and discuss the implications of the writing from a critical perspective. It will not work unless you are there and willing to participate. You will be expected to have read all assignments before the class during which they will be discussed. I may give frequent pop quizzes on the assigned reading, and they will be graded. Attendance and participation count toward your grade. You may on occasion find some of the reading difficult. In these cases, prepare questions to bring to the class discussion. If you miss more than five hours of class, you will be in jeopardy of being dropped from the class. Please shut off cell phones and beepers before entering class.

Examinations. There will be three major examinations. Each will cover assignments given before the date of the exam. I will go over the material to be covered and the form of each examination during the class before the examination date. The last examination will be part of the Final Examination. The Final Examination will be in two parts. Part I will cover the last third of the course, and Part II will cover the entire course with a single essay.

Research Paper. There is a sequence of steps for completing the research paper on a separate handout. I will be going over each step in class well before the assignments are due. Late papers will lose a step-grade for each class that they are late. I will give you a list of suggested topics later in the semester. If you think you have a paper topic that is more to your liking, please see me for prior approval.

It is suggested that you follow the MLA style for documentation. However, if you are in a program that requires another style (i.e., APA), you are free to follow that style. If you are not following the MLA style, please indicate the style you are following. Instructions for using the MLA style are included in the handbook that you used for Comp I and Comp II.

Grading. Grades for the course will be weighted as follows:

Attendance/Participation	20% (full credit for perfect attendance)
Examination I	15%
Examination II	15%
Final Exam	30% (15 for Part I, and 15 for Part II)
Research Paper	20%

A, A-	90 - 100
B+, B, B-	80 - 89
C+, C, C-	70 - 79
D	60 - 69
F	below 60

If at any time you feel that the grade you receive for any part of this class or that your final grade is inappropriate, please talk to me about it.

Academic Resource Center. Tutoring and assistance in writing is available in the ARC. I may suggest that you seek assistance in some particular area of writing. You pay for this assistance with your tuition and fees, so make use of it.

Library resources. The library at Massasoit is staffed by competent professionals. They can provide access to Internet and assistance in doing research. Books on American literature are shelved primarily in the PR and PS sections of the stacks. Other colleges in the area have excellent research materials as well.

Web resources: My web page at Massasoit is <http://faculty.massasoit.mass.edu/ttrask>. During this semester, I will be adding materials to that site and will welcome suggestions for making the site richer and more useful. If you find that a particular link does not work, please let me know about it. Also, if you find sites that should be added to my links, please tell me about them, too.

Computer usage: I strongly recommend that every student make frequent use of the computer facilities of the college during the semester. I encourage email and will make every effort to respond to questions in a timely manner.

Disability Statement: Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in the classroom are encouraged to contact a disability counselor as soon as possible. Students with learning disabilities should contact Andrea Henry, at extension 1805. Students with physical disabilities should contact Mary Berg, at extension 1425. Students at the Canton Campus should contact Stan Oliver, at extension 2468.

Tentative Calendar:

Boldface numbers are or first edition.

September

- 2 Introduction; Background of class and anthology.
 4 Lucy Terry (186-187) (**137-138**); Phillis Wheatley (213-226)(**164-177**)
 9 Olaudah Equiano (187-213)(**138-164**)
 11 David Walker (227-238)(**178-190**); Maria Stewart (249-255)(**201-207**)
 16 Harriet Jacobs (279-315)(**207-245**)
 18 Frederick Douglass, Chapters I - IX (385-421)(**299-336**)
 23 Frederick Douglass, Chapters X - XI (421-448)(**336-369**)
 25 **EXAMINATION I**
 30 William Wells Brown (315-345)(**245-276**)

October

- 2 Sojourner Truth (245-249)(**196-201**)
 George Moses Horton (239-244)(**190-196**)
 7 James M. Whitfield (483-490)(**401-408**)
 Frances W. Harper (491-505)(**408-423**)
 9 Harriet E. Wilson (521-540)(**439-459**)
 14 Booker T. Washington (570-602)(**488-521**)
 16 Charles W. Chesnutt (602-624)(**522-544**)
 21 Anna Julia Cooper (635-650)(**553-569**)
 Pauline E. Hopkins (650-662)(**569-581**)
 23 Charlotte Grimke (554-569)(**472-488**)
 W. E. B. DuBois (686-689; 692-720)(**606-609; 613-655**)
 28 W. E. B. DuBois (720-742)(**655-665; 703-715**)
 30 **EXAMINATION II**

November

- 4 James Weldon Johnson (791-821)(**766-797**)
 6 James Weldon Johnson (822-858)(**797-835**)
 11 **Veterans' Day (no classes)**
 13 James Weldon Johnson (858-883)(**835-861**)
 18 James D. Corrothers (786-791)(**760-765**)
 Paul Laurence Dunbar (905-917)(**884-896**)
 20 Paul Laurence Dunbar (918-928)(**896-906**)
 25 **RESEARCH PAPER DUE**
 Alice Moore Dunbar Nelson (936-941)(**914-919**)
 27 **Thanksgiving Recess (no classes)**

December

- 2 William Stanley Braithwaite (942-946)(**919-923**)
- 4 Fenton Johnson (946-951)(**924-928**)
- 9 Presentations
- 11 Presentations
- 16 Harlem Renaissance introduction (953-962)(**929-936**)
LAST CLASS; Preview of final exam.

Other reading will be assigned in class.

Assignments are subject to change.

Final Examinations: December 17 - 22

Research Project

African-American Literature I

Length: minimum of five typewritten pages (1250 words).

Number of sources: minimum of three outside sources not including your text, encyclopedia articles, or other general reference sources (these may be used as additional sources of information).

Format: Typed, double spaced, with 1" margins on all four sides. Please use one side of the page only. Use the checklist (last page in syllabus package) as your cover sheet. Do not use binders other than a single staple in the upper left corner.

Essay: Your essay should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. It should be your own work. Outside sources should be used either to corroborate or to clarify your point of view.

Documentation style: MLA recommended. If you are planning to study a discipline that requires another form (i.e., APA), then you are free to use that form. Please identify the form you are using. Instructions for using the MLA style are in most English handbooks. Links to MLA style documentation guides are available on my website at

<http://www.timtrask.com>

I would prefer that you come up with your own research topic, but here are a few suggested topics:

1. Compare a theme in the work of two or more authors from the course.
2. Explore a question that has come up in class discussion. For example, What were some of the differences between slavery in different regions of the United States?
3. Some continuing effects of slavery on our culture.
4. A comparison of Jacobs's and/or Douglass's *Narratives*. (Pick a point for making your comparison. For example, you could compare the conditions of life for women and for men)
6. The role of African-Americans in exploring, settling, or building the New World.

Dates: Topic due, third week of October
List of sources, last week of October
Tentative outline, second week of November
Paper due, 25 November

Trask's Ten Tips for Using the World Wide Web in Research

1. **Be skeptical.** Anyone can post material on The Web. That is both its beauty and its danger. Skepticism is the key to all these tips. Websites come with many email accounts, these days, so the variety is nearly infinite. (NOTE on Wikipedia: Use it carefully, and double check with other sources.)
2. **Look for verification.** Can you verify the information you got from your web source by some other source? Does it fit with or contradict everything else you've seen on the subject?
3. **Consider the source.** Who is the author of the information? Who maintains the site? Why do they do it? A professor providing course materials may be more reliable than a private person with an agenda.
4. **Look for documentation.** Does the author of the information on the website provide sources? Is there a bibliography? Are there notes?
5. **Check the documentation where possible.** Spot check the sources cited by the author. Do they check out? Are they used accurately and fairly?
6. **In general, rely more on books and articles.** It is much more difficult to publish a book or an article in a journal than it is to place material on The Web. Although there are privately published books, they are not usually easy to find. Most books in a college library have been bought at the request of a faculty member or after a check by a librarian. Most journals are subject to editorial and peer review. There are no such controls on most websites. On the other hand, websites can be updated much more rapidly than can either books or journals, so the information may be more current.
7. **Is what you're looking at an original document?** One of the most exciting features of The Web is the availability of original documents that have been scanned or typed in and posted in electronic form. As with any other publishing medium, however, unless the provider of documents is extremely careful, mistakes will be introduced in the electronic form of the document.
8. **Personal anecdotes versus hard research.** Some personal anecdotes are very compelling. However, without verification or replication, they are not to be taken with, say, the importance of hard research that is based on many such sources. A personal account of an event should be considered, but it should not by itself be taken as refutation of broader based studies.
9. **Avoid propaganda sites.** Why does this site exist? Some sites on the Internet exist primarily to promote a particular point of view, to spread a religion, to support a political party, or to grind a private axe. These sites are usually easy to spot because they announce themselves in many ways, but a few of them are more sophisticated, making it harder to see that they have a stake in what they're promoting. That doesn't mean that they are entirely useless, but it does mean that they are not to be relied upon as sources without other verification.
10. **Document the site using MLA style (or the appropriate style for your subject area) documentation.** If you properly document the site, readers will be able to check it easily. Follow a current handbook or style sheet (perhaps the MLA Style Citations for Electronic Sources). Make sure that you include the date that you visited the site. Most sites change on a regular basis, and many of them include the date of the most recent change. Also, sites come and go. For example, if the Internet Service Provider is not paid on time, it may delete a site without notice. The Web is a volatile, rich, dangerous, rewarding, wonderful resource. Use it with caution.

Tim Trask

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Checklist for Research Paper
(to be filled out and handed in with the research paper)

MY NAME:

_____ 1. My paper has a title. (Don't underline your own title unless it's also the title of a book. Don't use quotation marks around the title unless it's an actual quotation. Either capitalize each important word in your title, or capitalize the entire title.)

_____ 2. My **name** and **date** appear in the upper left hand corner of the first page, and my **title is centered** a few lines below that.

_____ 3. I have used one-inch margins on all four sides.

_____ 4. I have bound my paper with either a single staple or paper clip in the upper left hand corner.

_____ 5. I have cited all information that I got from other people, articles, websites, or books. (See the section on plagiarism in the Brief Research Paper Guide.)

_____ 6. My Works Cited page is done using MLA format (or APA format, if you prefer).

_____ 7. I have numbered each page.

_____ 8. My paper is double spaced. Each paragraph is indented. (There should be no extra space (line) between paragraphs unless you want to indicate another section of your paper by doing so.)

_____ 9. I have used a 12-point font--Times Roman, Courier, or Ariel. (Stay away from fancy or script-like fonts.)

_____ 10. I have explained any particular qualities that the instructor should take into consideration in the space below (optional).

EXPLANATION: