

Department of English & Writing Studies

**ENG 9181 Representing Slavery in U.S. Literature
Fall 2019**

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Course Location: UC 4415
Course Time: Tuesdays 12:30-3:30
Antirequisites/Prerequisites: None

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

After his own escape from slavery, the anti-slavery activist and author William Wells Brown stated, “slavery has never been represented, slavery never can be represented.” This course will explore the different attempts made by U.S. authors to represent the “peculiar institution” of American slavery—even when they realized that the very endeavor of representing the physical and epistemological violence of U.S. slavery was bound to fail. We will begin the term by examining the strategies and effects of nineteenth-century writing in a variety of genres and modes, including autobiography (Harriet Jacobs), sentimental fiction (Harriet Beecher Stowe), and political polemic (Nat Turner’s *Confessions*). From there, we will explore the legacy of slavery through Faulkner’s nostalgic fantasies in *Absalom, Absalom!*, Morrison’s “re-memories” of African American history in *Beloved*, and Colson Whitehead’s phantasmagoric reconfiguration of slavery in *The Underground Railroad*. We will also conduct a field trip to the rare books room to create our own rare books display on the representation of slavery.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By the end of the course, successful students will be able to:

- Identify different qualities of American literary genres and situate individual works within wider debates about the genre
- Analyze cultural texts from the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries of U.S. literature and recognize how different works respond to their historical, political, and cultural context
- Summarize, synthesize, and respond to critical readings in multiple fields and disciplines, including trauma studies, African American studies, history, critical theory, women’s studies and rhetorical studies
- Work independently to analyze gaps in research and develop an original research question for assignments; locate, evaluate, and use material from multiple sources in the pursuit of a scholarly investigation
- Communicate effectively and respond constructively to peers in multiple contexts, including discussions, papers, and seminars.

COURSE MATERIALS:

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. Penguin Classics, 2014.
Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Ed. Frances Smith Foster, Norton Critical Ed. (2nd ed.), Norton, 2000. 978-0393976373
Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. Vintage, 2004. 978-1400033416
Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Ed. Elizabeth Ammons, Norton Critical Ed. (3rd ed.), Norton, 2017. ISBN: 978-0393283785.
Jacobs-Jenkins, Branden. *An Octoroon*. Dramatist’s Play Service, 2015. 978-0822232261
Boucicault, Dion. *The Octoroon*. Broadview Press, ed. Sarika Bose, Broadview, 2014. 978-1554812110

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Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!* Modern Library, 2012. 9780679600725.

Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Vintage, 1992. 978-0679745426

Colson Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad*. Anchor Books, 2016. 978-0345804327

METHODS OF EVALUATION:

The grade for the course will be arrived at as follows:

- Two reflection papers (2 pages, double-spaced) (10% x 2)
- 5-min rare books room presentation with 2-page report (10%)
- 20-min seminar presentation with questions for discussion and submitted notes (25%)
- Participation (5%)
- Final paper (18 pages, double-spaced) (40%)

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

Western University is situated on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapeewak and Attawandaron peoples, who have longstanding relationships to the land and region of southwestern Ontario and the City of London. The local First Nation communities of this area include Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region, there are eleven First Nation communities and a growing Indigenous urban population.

Western values the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island (North America).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Participation: As with all graduate seminars, all students are expected to attend every seminar (barring illness or other highly unusual circumstances that require accommodation). Furthermore, I encourage and expect regular and active participation: this involves work that must be completed prior to class (reading the course texts carefully before class, preparing questions and notes for class discussion) and in-class participation (listening actively, collaborating in discussions, and responding thoughtfully to other students). Undocumented absences and chronic lateness will negatively affect your participation mark. The process for requesting academic accommodation on medical or other grounds is described in the “Accommodations” section near the end of this syllabus.

In this class we will often be discussing difficult or sensitive topics, including descriptions of trauma and deliberately offensive and provocative material. Students will also be asked to think carefully about their own identities and their implication in world systems of racial categorization and racial dominance. Please make every effort to be sensitive, respectful, and collegial so we can build the best possible learning environment.

Reflection papers: There are two reflection papers due for this class; at least one of them must be submitted prior to Oct. 27. Reflection papers are due **by the beginning of class, on OWL and in hard copy**, on the day of the class in which your chosen text will be discussed. Reflection papers may focus on any of the assigned readings (literary or critical). They must reflect on the reading and establish a focused, critical argument that is designed to open up space for thought and further discussion. Focusing on a small detail of the text is just as acceptable as focusing on a larger claim, as long as the paper establishes the importance of this choice of focus. Late responses will not be accepted (n.b. if you anticipate an absence, you may submit your reflection in advance). **You may not submit a reflection paper on the same week as your seminar presentation.**

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Rare books room presentation: we will be conducting a mandatory class trip to the Rare Books room, where I have pulled a selection of texts on slavery from the rare books stacks. For this assignment, the class will be collectively creating an imaginary Rare Books Room display on the representation of slavery. We will collectively discuss some of the parameters we should be using in making our choices. Each student must choose a text, do some archival sleuthing on the particulars of this text (the author, the owner, or the edition, for example), and, on Oct. 22, give a 5-minute presentation (from notes) explaining why this text deserves our attention. Give us your pitch: what's interesting about this text in the history of representations of slavery? Why is it a significant text in Western's archives? How would you explain its importance to a lay audience? In addition to your presentation, please provide a 2-page written report summarizing the significance of your chosen text and highlighting its most noteworthy features.

Seminar: This 20-minute presentation should establish a research problem and provide a response to that problem by way of an engaging interpretation of the text that we will be reading that day. Your presentation must have an overarching thesis. Please speak from detailed notes (do not read a formal paper). Provide a handout for the class with a few discussion questions that we can consider after your seminar, and a copy of your speaking notes for me following your presentation. The seminar presentation will offer you an opportunity to lead a discussion and receive feedback, suggestions, and ideas from your classmates on the thesis of your seminar.

Research paper: This 18-page research paper is your chance to offer an original, provocative literary inquiry into a text, drawing from multiple secondary sources. This paper may focus on the same topic that you chose for your seminar presentation. However, you may change your topic as long as you discuss your research paper topic with me in advance, prior to Nov. 19.

Try to use a range of secondary sources to build a complex argument (not only criticism of the literary work in question but also theoretical sources, historical sources, etc.). Papers should be written in MLA format.

Research paper deadline: The research paper is due prior to 11:55 pm, Dec. 16. Please submit a hard copy of your paper in my mailbox as well as the OWL version. The penalty for late research papers is 2% per day (see above for the deadline).

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following website:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

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Accommodation

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed assignments should consult with the graduate chair, a faculty supervisor, a member of the English department administrative team, or myself.

Information regarding health- and wellness-related services available to students may be found at

<http://www.health.uwo.ca/>. Campus mental health resources may be found at

http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/resources.html. If you anticipate an absence for a major religious holiday, please notify me in writing as soon as possible.

Student Accessibility Services

Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program.

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Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are encouraged to register with Student Accessibility Services, a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both SAS and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.

Timetable:

Please note that we may, as a class, decide to make small changes to the schedule. If such changes occur, they will not significantly impact the number of pages assigned for each day. Students are expected to have completed the assigned reading prior to the first class in which a work is being discussed.

Tues. Sept 10:	Douglass, <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i>
Tues. Sept. 17 : Pressures of representation	Douglass (con't) Morrison, <i>Playing in the Dark</i> p. 1-17, 31-69 Saidiya Hartman, from <i>Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America</i> (posted on OWL) Gray, Thomas, and Nat Turner. "The Confessions of Nat Turner, the Leader of the Late Insurrection in Southampton, VA" (link posted on OWL)
Sept 16-21	Rare books room visit this week (outside of class hours); texts will be set up for the class's perusal during the regular opening hours of the Rare Books Room until Oct 1.
Tues. Sept. 24: The abolitionist newspaper	Habermas, Jürgen. "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)" (pdf on OWL) Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy" (pdf on OWL) Selections from <i>The Liberator</i> and <i>The North Star</i> TBA SEMINAR 1
Tues. Oct 1: The slave narrative	Jacobs, <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> Whitsitt, "Reading Between the Lines: The Black Cultural Tradition of Masking in Harriet Jacobs's <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> " SEMINAR 2, 3
Tues, Oct. 8: Sentimental fiction	Stowe, <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> George Frederickson, "Romantic Racialism in the North" (in our edition of <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i>) Sophia Cantave, "Who Gets to Create the Lasting Images? The Problem of Black Representation in <i>UTC</i> " (in <i>UTC</i>) SEMINAR 4, 5, 6 (divided between Oct 1 and 8)

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Tues, Oct. 15:	Uncle Tom's Cabin (con't) Jane Tompkins, "Sentimental Power: <i>UTC</i> and the Politics of Literary History" (in <i>UTC</i>)
Tues, Oct. 22: The Myth of the Underground Railroad	Rare book presentations (2 hours, class location TBA) Nancy Kang, "As If I Had Entered a Paradise: Fugitive Slave Narratives and Cross-Border Literary History" (read this in preparation of your rare books room assignment, especially if you're reading a crossborder text) Turning to 20 th and 21 st -century texts: La Capra, from <i>Writing History</i> , <i>Writing Trauma</i>
Tues, Oct. 27: Melodrama and racial play	Boucicault, <i>The Octoroon</i> Foreman, P. Gabrielle. "Who's Your Mama? 'White' Mulatta Genealogies, Early Photography, and Anti-Passing Narratives of Slavery and Freedom." <i>American Literary History</i> , vol. 14, no. 3, 2002, pp. 505–539. Jacobs-Jenkins, <i>An Octoroon</i> Preston, Carrie J. "Hissing, Bidding, and Lynching: Participation in Branden Jacobs-Jenkins's <i>An Octoroon</i> and the Melodramatics of American Racism." <i>TDR: The Drama Review</i> , vol. 62, no. 4, 2018, pp. 64-80. SEMINAR 7, 8 N.B. at least one of your reflection papers must be submitted on or prior to this date
Nov 4-10	Reading Week
Tues, Nov. 12: The Old South and the Lost Cause	Faulkner, <i>Absalom, Absalom</i> Philip Weinstein, from <i>What Else But Love? The Ordeal of Race in Faulkner and Morrison</i> SEMINAR 9, 10, 11 (divided between Nov 12 and 19)
Tues, Nov. 19:	<i>Absalom, Absalom!</i> (con't) Please touch base with me this week if you intend to focus your research paper on a topic other than your seminar topic
Tues Nov. 26: Postmodernism and rememory	Morrison, <i>Beloved</i> James Berger, from <i>After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse</i> SEMINAR 12, 13
Tues, Dec. 3:	Whitehead, <i>The Underground Railroad</i> Critical reading TBA SEMINAR 14, 15
Final paper due by Dec. 16.	