

# The Black Subject in Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture

Professor Delia Steverson

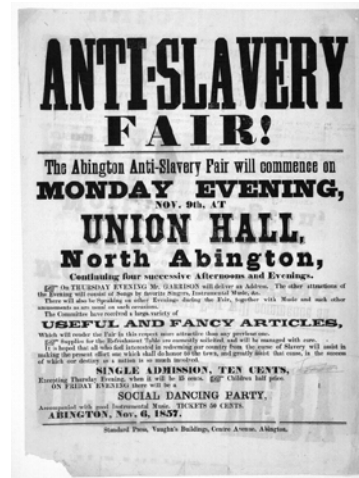
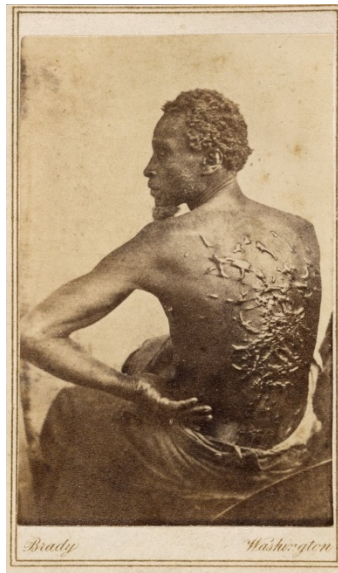
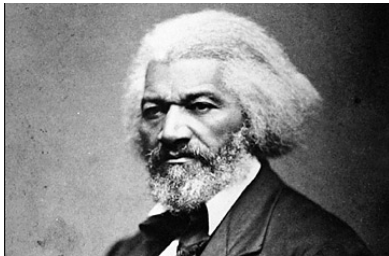
AML 4225-1116/ AFA 4931

Class times and location: T 2-3, R 3 AND 0013

Office Location: Turlington Hall 4354

Office Hours: T period 5 and by appt.

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In the nineteenth century, the debate surrounding the status of African American personhood foregrounded a point of contention amongst citizens in an America newly emancipated from the reigns of Britain. Prior to the Civil War, questions about enslaved subjectivity emerged that had not been asked before. The growing tension between citizens of the North and citizens of the South, and between proponents and opponents of slavery, foregrounded key debates in an America that sought to establish its citizens as fit or unfit for civic engagement. This course will investigate the complex and fluid definitions of black personhood in the nineteenth century. Some of the questions this course will address are: How were blackness and black subjectivity defined in the nineteenth-century? What were the key debates surrounding black citizenship? How did black authors themselves use different mediums—including autobiography, fiction, poetry, sermons, essays—to construct black subjectivity? How were both black and nonblack writers portraying the racial tensions of the century? We will form our discussions around issues of race during slavery, the Reconstruction, and post-Reconstruction, ending with W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington's debates concerning racial uplift and progress for African Americans.

Fall 2017

Additionally, this course will be largely focused on crafting literary criticism tailored to the style of *The Explicator* journal. Throughout the semester, students will read *Explicator* articles, and in turn, write three essays in the hopes of submitting one for possible publication in the journal.

### Course Outcomes:

- ✚ Students should be able to identify different genres of nineteenth century American literature
- ✚ Students should practice writing clearly and concisely
- ✚ Students should be able identify and discuss ideas of black subjectivity throughout the historical periods during slavery, Reconstruction, and post-Reconstruction

### Required Texts:

- ✚ Phillis Wheatley—*Poems on Various Subjects, Religious, and Moral* (1773)
- ✚ Olaudah Equiano—*The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789)
- ✚ Frederick Douglass—*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845)
- ✚ Herman Melville—*Benito Cereno* (1855)
  - *Buy the Dover Thrift Edition Bartleby and Benito Cereno*
- ✚ James Weldon Johnson—*The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1812)
- ✚ Booker T. Washington—*Up From Slavery* (1901)
- ✚ W.E.B. Du Bois—*The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)

### Grade Distribution

- ✚ **Essays (3 essays of 1100 words each) –60%**
  - You will write three essays tailored to the literary style of *The Explicator* journal. Each essay will focus on a different course text, based on your choosing. Each essay assignment will have its own assignment sheet. These assignments can be close-readings and/or research-based. We will workshop all three essays in class. The rough drafts are due in class. You must have either hard copy (typed) or electronically on your laptop (no tablets or phones).
  - Your responses are due **Friday by 5pm** on Canvas. Please do not place papers in my box as I do not accept hard copies. Follow MLA guidelines for your Critical responses. Papers that are turned in after the deadline will receive five points off for every day it is late.
- ✚ **Evaluations (2 evaluations 15% each)—30%**
  - There will be two evaluations throughout the semester that will test your knowledge of the material that we have learned. Don't sweat—we'll review beforehand. These evaluations can take the form of multiple choice, short answer, fill in the blank, and/or essay. If you stay up to date on the reading, you'll do fine!
- ✚ **Daily Quizzes, in-class assignments, participation, attendance—10%**
  - Be prepared to take a short reading comprehension quiz most days that I assign readings. For those who have read, it will be a piece of cake. In-class assignments will often serve as a place of departure for our discussion.
  - You are allowed **FOUR** absences at no penalty. Remember that quizzes cannot be made up. After your fourth absence, I will subtract **ONE** point from your final grade per absence.

Fall 2017

If you are on time and have perfect attendance, you will be rewarded with **FIVE** extra points on the essay of your choosing.

- Make sure you let your voice be heard in class. Your opinions are important and we need them to help forward the discussion. Questions are also welcomed and expected, and count toward participating. The more you participate, the more lively our discussions can be!

**For further information regarding UF grading policies, see:**

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

### **Use of laptops, Cell phones, other technology in the classroom**

While I encourage you to bring your laptops and/or tablets in order to take notes and/or view readings, it is of the utmost importance that you refrain from using technology in any other way that is not conducive to our class—this includes browsing social media sites and simply surfing the web. I am also particularly stern about cell phone use. Please **refrain** from using your cell phones as it is rude, distracting, and disrespectful. Make sure that before class starts, your cell phone is in the **off or vibrate position**.

### **Accommodations**

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

### **Evaluations**

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.

### **Tentative Schedule of Reading**

Week 1 8/22	Introduction, Syllabus, Explicator articles
8/24	Phillis Wheatley—Various Poems (1773) “On Being brought from Africa to America,” “To the University of Cambridge, in New England” Explicator Articles—Susan Martin “Diabolic Dye, Commodities, and Refinement in Phillis Wheatley’s ‘On being brought from Africa to America’” and Antonio Bly “Wheatley’s to the University of Cambridge, in New England”

Week 2 8/29	Olaudah Equiano— <i>The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African</i> Dedication, Preface, Chapters 1-3
8/31	Equiano--Chapters 4-6 Yael Ben-zvi—"Jacob in Olaudah Equiano's <i>The Interesting Narrative</i> "
Week 3 9/5	Equiano--Chapters 7-9
9/7	Equiano--Chapters 10-12
Week 4 9/12	Frederick Douglass— <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave</i> Preface, Letter from Wendell Phillips, Chapters 1-6
9/14	Frederick Douglass—Chapter 7-10 Melinda Hollis—"A Change of Persona or a Change of Heart: Frederick Douglass's 'Brothers'"
Week 5 9/19	Frederick Douglass—Chapter 11 and the appendix Thomas Peyser—"The Attack on Christianity in <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave</i> "
9/21	<b>Rough draft of Essay 1 due in class</b> Peer Review
Week 6 9/26	Herman Melville— <i>Benito Cereno</i> Pages 37-82
9/28	Herman Melville—pages 82-104 Dan Manheim—"Melville's <i>Benito Cereno</i> " <b>Final Draft Essay 1 due Friday 5pm</b>
Week 7 10/3	Kate Chopin—"Désirée's Baby" Lydia Marie Child—"The Quadroons" Roslyn Reso Foy—"Chopin's 'Désirée's Baby'"
10/5	Charles Chesnutt—"The Wife of His Youth"; "Dave's Neckliss" Wendy Ryden—"The 'Problem' of Liza Jane in Charles Chesnutt's 'The Wife of His Youth'"
Week 8 10/10	Charles Chesnutt—"The Goophered Grapevine"; "The Passing of Grandison" Edward Bodie—"Chesnutt's 'The Goophered Grapevine'" Jean Smith Filetti—"Chesnutt's 'The Goophered Grapevine'"
10/12	Evaluation 1 Review

Fall 2017

Week 9 10/17	<b>Evaluation 1</b>
10/19	James Weldon Johnson— <i>The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man</i> Preface, Chapters 1-9
Week 10 10/24	<i>Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man</i> Chapters 10-11 Susan Marren & Robert Cochran—“Johnson’s the Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man”
10/26	<b>Rough Draft of Essay 2 due</b> Peer Review
Week 11 10/31	Booker T. Washington— <i>Up from Slavery</i> Preface, Chapters 1-5
11/2	<i>Up From Slavery</i> —Chapters 6-10 <b>Final Draft Essay 2 due by Friday 5pm</b>
Week 12 11/7	<i>Up From Slavery</i> —Chapters 11-15
11/9	<i>Up From Slavery</i> —Chapters 16 and 17
Week 13 11/14	W.E.B. Du Bois— <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> “Of our Spiritual Strivings,” “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others” Robert Grotjohn—“‘Contempt’ in W.E.B. Du Bois’s ‘Of our Spiritual Strivings’”
11/16	W.E.B Du Bois—“The Talented Tenth” essay in <i>The Negro Problem</i> (1903)
Week 14 (Thanksgiving!) 11/21	<i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> —“Of the Passing of the First-Born,” “Of the Meaning of Progress” Lina Geriguis—“W.E.B. Du Bois’s <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> , Chapter 11”
Week 15 11/28	<b>Rough Draft Essay 3 due in class</b> Submitting an essay to <i>The Explicator</i>
11/30	Evaluation 2 Review
Week 16 12/5	<b>Evaluation 2</b>

**Essay 3 Final Draft Due 12/12 by 8:30am**