



English 1200, The Interpretation of Literature: “Slavery, Diaspora, & Problems of Evil”

Instructor: Ph.D. Candidate, Ryan David Furlong

Office: English-Philosophy Building 309

Course Meeting Times: T, Th (12:30-1:45 pm)

Office Hours: (Wednesdays, 11:30 – 2:30 pm), by email appointment

Campus Mailbox: 308 EPB

Email Address: ryan-furlong@uiowa.edu

Department Main Office: 308 EPB

Department Chair (DEO): Dr. X

Course Overview:

Our *pain* dramatically shapes how we live. Our *suffering* burdens us to no end or transforms us into wholly new persons. Our encounters with “*evil*”—whatever one means by this term—indelibly scar, radically inspire, bind together, or render us absolutely powerless. In the context of the African diaspora, no body of work has tussled more explicitly with these issues than the corpus of enslaved (and liberated) African writers and their descendants, as the racial injustices and white violence of the circum-Atlantic slave trade and the institution of slavery (but even in the racial histories that have led up to the present day) naturally have led writers from around the Atlantic world, in the movements to end slavery for good, and within the minds of later black activists and artists, to explore the questions of pain, suffering, and evil. From the earliest of our extant records in the transatlantic antislavery literary tradition to post-colonial writers of all genres and all “faiths” (religious or secular), diasporic writers examined not only the moral-ethical problems of evil that haunted them surrounding the diaspora, but also how best to understand, negotiate, and overcome slavery’s radical sufferings and racist “evils.” Whether racial injustices originated from the hearts and minds of everyday human beings, or in the will of divine agency, but also from systemic, institutional, and historical forces, problems of how best to imagine and secure justice in political and spiritual terms became central affairs.

Classically defined, traditions of Western Christian theism have formulated the problem of evil as follows: 1) if God is omnipotent (i.e. all-powerful), and 2) if God is also omnibenevolent (i.e. all-good), then 3) why does God *allow* pain, suffering, and evil to exist? This is what is known, most broadly, as theodicy—the problem of evil and responses to it—and includes secular theodicies, as well. In this course, we will indeed attend to the overwhelmingly dense body of black religious responses to the problem of evil and suffering under slavery in the European colonies, the “Black

Atlantic,” and the U.S., but will always have our eye out for secular attempts to do likewise, inquiring of each what they might have to say about various cultural, political, religious, economic, and social issues. Ultimately, our course will trace the development of black theodicies, religious or secular, across a far-ranging, representative swath of slavery and antislavery literary texts in order to arrive at a consensus of how ideas of pain, suffering, and “evil”—central issues in the antislavery movement and slavery’s day-to-day existence—were viewed, addressed, mobilized, countered, experienced, and inscribed.

Cornel West’s career claim that “Christianity [and, especially Black Christianity] is...first and foremost a theodicy, a triumphant account of good over evil” (62) points to the problems of evil that were long familiar to African-American Christians, in particular, and black diasporic writers more broadly in the modern world, from the first slaves exposed to it under colonialism to the contemporary writers of Ta-Nehisi Coates’ *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* (2017) and Kendrick Lamar’s Grammy-winning album *To Pimp a Butterfly*. Our course digs into the very heart of this intellectual history and philosophical tradition, establishing a literary-historical genealogy in the process, not just in the U.S., but all over the Atlantic world scarred by the indelible legacies of slavery, colonialism, and racism. As a last note, we will address these issues from a wide swath of literary mediums: novels, novellas, memoirs, autobiographies, short stories, poetry, song, stage drama, photography, visual technologies, and film, as the breadth and diversity of antislavery texts span the generic spectrum. Course assignments, required texts, and class expectations are explained in greater detail below.

Required & Provided Course Texts: (at Prairie Lights, 15 S. Dubuque Street, Iowa City)

**Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe

**A Life Elsewhere*, Segun Afolabi

**Barracoon: The Story of the Last “Black Cargo,”* Zora Neale Hurston

**The Rienner Anthology of African Literature*

*Olaudah Equiano’s *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself*

**The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse*

**The African Travels*, Abu Bakr

**Mary Prince, The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave*

**A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince, as Related by Himself* (1770, 1772), James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw

**The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself, Vol. I & II*, Olaudah Equiano

**The Confessions of Nat Turner*, Nat Turner/Thomas Gray

**My Bondage, My Freedom*, Frederick Douglass

**American Antislavery Writings* (Library of America, edition)

*Other Readings, PDF Documents (ICON/CANVAS)

Other Required Materials: (KEEP EVERYTHING FROM THIS CLASS)

Failing to bring a physical copy of the assigned text(s) to class on the assigned day will result in a zero for the day’s participation grade. When I say zero, I mean zero. Additionally, this course requires a composition notebook. A highlighter and pencil will be needed (and sticky notes). You

will need digital and material folders to store course work. **You are responsible for printing out all ICON materials on the syllabus and bringing them to class on the day assigned. Failing to do so will also lead to a zero for the day.**

Student Learning Outcome (General):

Students will learn to see themselves **as critical, close readers**, recognizing the influence of individual differences and experiences on interpretation.

Students will analyze, internalize, and personalize a **base of literary knowledge** relevant to the literature of transatlantic slavery and anti-slavery.

Students will demonstrate higher order abilities in the five major areas of literary studies (or, English, more broadly): **close reading, clear writing, confident speaking, collected listening, and careful research**, refining these skills to respond thoughtfully to literary texts in-class discussions and in written composition.

Students will cultivate an appreciation of, and basic skill set in, **literary interpretation**, and apply these “modes of reading” to daily life and personal circumstances.

Students will articulate relationships between **primary text and broader historical and cultural contexts**.

Student Learning Outcome (Specific):

Students will be exposed to the **major issues, thematic preoccupations, tropological features, literary genres, and historio-cultural contexts** in the literature of antislavery and slavery.

Students will identify, develop, and compose **five close readings of literary and political texts** over the course of the semester marked on the course calendar in order to generate potential areas of research interest and topical issues.

Students will produce **two critical essay** (6-7 pages, double-spaced) that posits a sustained, evidence-based argument on one of our course readings. This will be an original contribution that students will submit to me and present to their peers in the final class meeting.

Students will trace out the lineage of, and formally present on, **one tropological feature or generic device** in the literature of antislavery and slavery, from our course texts (or others, at the student’s discretion). This assignment should open students up to the recurrent motifs, symbols, character types, appeals, etc. that antislavery writers employed and allow us a format to compile a deep archive of this literary canon.

Students will **lead one class discussion on a particular text or several texts**. Each student will select three questions and come up with ten notable talking points that help to direct

class discussion. Each student will serve as a co-moderator with myself to orient class discussion to fruitful, meaningful ends.

An **exploratory essay and final class symposium** will conclude the class, and we will discuss these at a later date in the context of our semester-long portfolio assignment

Course Assignments & Descriptions:

“Attendance & Participation”

To be an engaged participant in our classroom requires you to be present, on time and engaged in the fullest sense. This may include listening actively and respectfully, asking questions and making helpful, substantive contributions to workshops, peer review in-class activities and discussions. You are evaluated on your ability to consistently contribute to the conversation in ways that *raise the level of discourse*. Thus, talking frequently is not the same thing as A-level participation. Rather, actively listening to your classmates, respond incisively to others’ comments in the room and reflecting and building classmates’ ideas leads to a strong participation grade. Participation can take a number of forms. The most common form is verbal participation. However, I am very aware that cultural and power differences may empower some students to speak more comfortably and more often than others. This is another reason why more participation is not necessarily better participation. I encourage you to help balance our classroom airtime by drawing out others, holding back if you are dominating the conversation and challenging yourself if you are reticent or reluctant to speak.

In addition to verbal participation, I welcome written discussion questions (emailed to me before class) or written reflections (written after class that demonstrate active listening and record what you might add to the conversation). You might also consider verbally expanding on your written annotations, or bringing in a relevant article or video for discussion. Please contact me if there are other ways that I can help you become a successful and active participant in our classroom. Also key to class participation is doing your part to foster a community of respect. We will often be reading and discussing controversial issues and content that many of us have strong opinions about given our unique experiences and belief systems. Our classroom is a place where all can share their opinions and perspectives, safely. On a final note, please be advised that you must attend class in order to earn a participation grade. Your participation grade is a holistic grade (A-F scale) that takes into account attendance, quality of verbal and group participation, in class work, and preparation for class.

“Short Response Papers” (practicing close-readings & analysis)

Students will identify, develop, and compose five close readings of slave-authored and antislavery texts over the course of the semester marked on the course calendar in order to practice our skills of close-reading, evidence-based argumentation, and creative and compelling analysis. These close reading response papers will be 1 page, single-spaced compositions. Students will have their personal choice on the five texts, but must fall within the prescribed due dates listed on the course schedule. These will not be graded or assessed on grammar or organization, necessarily, but instead will be evaluated on the content of student thinking on various subjects they will explore. The main objective is get students working toward a potential idea to write on for the critical essays or

exploratory essay due at the end of the term. I expect meaningful engagement with the chosen text by citing textual evidence, explicating critical analysis, and offering personal, culturally-responsive, and affective responses. Moreover, I expect to see forms of critical inquiry emerging, along with lines of questioning that take students into new intellectual pathways, wherever they take you.

“Critical Essays”

For this course, two papers will give you the opportunity to show off your development in terms of close reading, critical analysis, and creative style in a 6-7 page format (double spaced, 12” Times New Roman) on a topic and text of your choice. Ideally, this essay will grow out of the set of questions from one of your reading response papers, as noted above, or from class discussions or your own thoughts. This essay will require you to offer your thoughtfully-crafted thesis and write with a confident, authoritative voice. Furthermore, it will garner substantial textual evidence, supply critical analysis, and offer some sort of original contribution to our readings of the text at hand. A detailed assignment sheet will be distributed early in the term.

“Portfolio & Presentation (Exploratory Essay, Writer’s Journal, Symposium)”

Students will formally present on one enslaved-authored text from our course texts (or others, at the student’s discretion, drawn from *Slavery & Antislavery: A Transnational Archive* or *North American Slave Narratives*). You can also ask me for other databases and archives to consult. This assignment should open students up to the recurrent motifs, symbols, character types, appeals, writerly styles, etc. that such writers employed and allow us to compile a deep and diverse archive of this literary canon. As you conduct your research, your writer’s journals and reflections should help guide you toward particular intellectual, personal, and political questions that most interest you. These reflections will contribute to your exploratory essay and lead to a multimodal presentation in our end-of-class symposium on the writing of slavery, in past and present circumstances. Students notes, findings, datum, and texts will also be compiled in the portfolio folder itself, and the presentation will be delivered before the class during our final meeting time in a PowerPoint, Prezi, or other multi-modal format. Presentations should be roughly five minutes. A detailed assignment sheet will be distributed early in the term.

“In-Class Discussion Moderator”

Each student will generate three relatively broad, yet meaningful and thought-provoking questions to lead class discussion on particular text. Students will be allowed to sign-up for a day of their choice at the very beginning of the term. Students will also prepare ten notable talking points they can use in their own individual readings of the text so they can further class discussion, when or if needed. Students will be expected to keep the conversation “going,” while, myself as co-moderator, will chime in to assist in the discussion as well, but I leave much of it to the student moderator. Students will be evaluated on their quality of questions, clear communication, close readings, and ability to incorporate all students into the discussion. Creativity is encouraged.

Grade Composition (and Requirements)

Attendance & Participation (20%)	<p><u>Pre-Requisites:</u> <i>Attendance is expected.</i> <i>Meet with me once this semester (office hours, writing assistance)</i></p> <p><u>Participation</u> (20%): <i>This includes verbal participation, active listening, quality of verbal and group participation, group discussion, preparedness for class, attendance.</i></p> <p><i>Two or three times per week.</i> (In-Class Discussion Comments)</p>
Short Response Papers: (20%)	<p><i>Five written responses</i>, single-spaced page: critical, thoughtful, interpretive, and engaged commentary/analysis on texts of your choosing for the specified due dates on the course schedule. (Details in assignment description above)</p>
Critical Essays (30%)	<p><i>Two 6-7 page essays that demonstrate advanced interpretive and analytic skills. Specific details will be provided in class and grade will include in-class workshops and workshop materials.</i></p>
Portfolio & Presentation (20%)	<p><i>Additionally, you will compile a final portfolio at the end of the semester which will be factored into your course grade. (Details in assignment description above)</i></p>

<p>In-Class Discussion Moderator (10%)</p>	<p>Each student will generate three relatively broad, yet meaningful and thought-provoking questions to lead class discussion on particular text. Students will also prepare ten notable talking points they notice in their own individual readings of the text they can use to further class discussion.</p>
--	--

Our readings, essays, assignments, and discussions will both call upon and hone critical analysis skills you'll need for future courses and other important tasks once you earn your degree. I hope that our conversations will encourage you to enjoy (or continue enjoying) reading and writing for pleasure; I also hope that the class will highlight the relevance of interpretative thinking for every area of life.

A few words about grading: Grades will reflect your ability to think critically and move beyond previous modes of analytic processing. Part of your obligation is to apply yourself wholly and be willing to take risks and learn new things. Expectations for this course are set high and your job is to reach out to (re)discover yourself as a reader, writer, speaker, and thinker.

Interpretation of Literature is a 3-hour course. The University of Iowa expects a 3-hour credit course to entail at least 6 hours of outside preparation per week by students.

Your final grade will be determined using the university's A-F grade scale, with plus/minus grading. A+ is only used in the case of rare and extraordinary academic achievement, as outlined by the CLAS.

Students sometimes assume that they start with 100% for an assignment, or for the course, and lose points for doing things wrong. On the contrary, you must work toward your grade. Aligning with the College of Liberal Arts and Science's expectations, I consider a grade of C to be competent work that meets all of the requirements of the assignment and the class. My grading policy is as follows:

A grade of D: You can earn a D by not fulfilling your responsibilities outlined under "Grade of C" criteria, and/or failing to show respect for or interest in your fellow students' presentations of ideas. A D student is a student who has many excuses but few completed assignments. For example, D students often fail to turn in reading responses or other informal work. D students are generally disinterested students who refuse to take an active role in making the class energetic and productive.

A grade of C: You can earn a C by attending class regularly and punctually, completing with competence all of the work assigned and participating regularly in class activities. This requires 1) adequately meeting all criteria for assignments, and 2) completing reading assignments on time and being prepared to share your opinions on the texts in class and during discussions.

A grade of B: You can earn a B by fulfilling all of the C requirements while demonstrating a significantly higher level of effort and competence on all work assigned for the class. To earn a B

you must show an interest in energetically, creatively, and critically engaging with the material and assignments. B work typically reflects independent thinking. The B student is self-reflexive and often asks questions such as “How can I make my work better? How can I revise this? How can I make my work unique and interesting? How can I help the class have productive and energetic discussions?”

A grade of A: To receive an A in the course, you must surpass the requirements for B work as well as demonstrate high-level critical thinking and original analysis. A students interrogate all sides of issues enthusiastically in order to clarify their own opinions. A students don’t skip class, fail to honor deadlines for any reason, or show up unprepared to discuss the reading. A student will, instead, be willing to make intellectual discoveries and demonstrate an effort to inquire further into commonly understood issues.

The CLAS guidelines for grade distribution are in **bold** below. The grade distribution for this class may not be exactly the same as the CLAS guidelines, but students should be aware that *the grade most frequently given may be a B or C*. Meeting course requirements and completing course assignments will not guarantee a high grade. Only work of exceptional quality will earn an A. At midterm, only grades of D or F will be reported.

24/7 Policy for Discussing Graded Work: With regard to any assignment at any point in the semester, I am happy to speak with you about what you did well, how you could improve, and what you can work on for future assignments. In order to keep conversations relevant, constructive, and useful to you, please discuss graded assignments with me **no sooner than 24 hours** after the assignment is returned and **no later than 7 days** after return. I will gladly email with you to set aside office hour time or set up an appointment to talk in person. A grading rubric will be provided for individual assignments. All grades are determined using the following grading scale:

A: 93-100%	B: 83-86%	C: 73-76%	D: 63-66%
A-: 90-92%	B-: 80-82%	C-: 70-72%	D-: 60-62%
B+: 87-89%	C+: 77-79%	D+: 67-69%	F: 59% (or below)

Submitting Written Work:

All outside written work—major papers—must be uploaded to the designated ICON/Canvas dropbox by the date and time stated on the reading schedule (below). Technical difficulties are not an excuse for late work. It is your responsibility to make sure you see a confirmation screen—ICON/Canvas has this feature built-in, so you will know if something doesn’t upload. For work that is submitted electronically, make sure you use a **Word document** and that it uploads successfully. **I will only accept assignments in Word (.doc or .docx) format.** I do not accept assignments via email. Late major essays will be docked 1 letter grade for every day late up to three days after the due date. Late major essays submitted over three days after the due date will not be accepted. If you are having trouble with an assignment, please talk to me well before the due date. I am willing to work with students in terms of due dates, but you must be committed to ensuring how I can best help you as well.

Attendance Policy:

You need to be in class and on time every day. Absences cause you to miss out on instruction, learning time, and thinking opportunities. Assignments, directions, homework, and due dates will be updated in class and posted to ICON. It is your responsibility to know what these are, even if you miss a class. You are responsible for knowing the material and preparing any assigned work.

I take attendance daily. Your participation grade will suffer directly if you do not attend class; additionally, your other grades may also suffer due to missing discussions, explanations of assignments, etc. Please keep the following in mind:

Students missing class due to another University obligation (game, competition, etc.), religious holiday, or because of illness must provide documentation in order to be allowed to make up a graded activity. You will not be able to make up a quiz or other graded in class activity if you fail to provide documentation.

Students are responsible for getting notes, handouts, etc. from a classmate when absent.

If an assignment is due on the date of your absence, you are required to submit the assignment by the deadline.

In addition, if you have more than 2 total absences, your overall participation grade will be docked one letter grade increment for each absence over the initial two. For example, on the third unexcused absence, a participation grade of B becomes a B-. If you miss fewer than two classes, no automatic penalty will be applied—but do keep in mind that you will not be able to make up daily assignments and opportunities to participate. **Please note that missing class is not an excuse for failing to submit an assignment on time.**

You are responsible for submitting assignments on time and in the correct format.

Communication:

My goal is to create a classroom atmosphere where both teacher and students embody considerateness, kindness, and understanding. I believe that effective learning is, in part, a result of these values lived out, engendering a productive learning environment where all participants are welcomed, included, and valued. I want to avoid anything that causes a breakdown of good dialogue, and have, therefore, learned to be wary of email. Please feel free to email me questions that need quick answers or to set up appointments. Please plan on face to face conversations when anything of issue is at stake; that is what my office hours are for, and I'd love for you to stop by. If those times are impossible for you, then we can arrange for another mutually convenient time. If you have a question that requires a response via email, I do my best to get back to you as soon as possible. Hence, it is in your best interest to email questions in advance.

In your emails, *please practice good email etiquette*: open by addressing me (Hello/Dear Mr. Furlong), write in complete sentences with correct capitalization and punctuation, and close with your signature. Writing emails with the proper format and tone is crucial in the digital age; remember that this is not a text message or Tweet, or any other social media expression, but a formal

University document of which the University reserves the right to record. When you write me, consider if the question requires more than just a few sentences in email. If so, I would rather you come talk to me in office hours or schedule an appointment with me.

Plagiarism:

All CLAS students have, in essence, agreed to the College's Code of Academic Honesty: "I pledge to do my own academic work and to excel to the best of my abilities, upholding the IOWA Challenge. I promise not to lie about my academic work, to cheat, or to steal the words or ideas of others, nor will I help fellow students to violate the Code of Academic Honesty." Any student committing academic misconduct is reported to the College and placed on disciplinary probation or may be suspended or expelled. To find the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Code of Academic Honesty go to the website:<http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/academic-fraud-honor-code>

Grade Concerns or Complaints:

Students should always first bring such concerns to their instructor. If no satisfactory resolution is gained from discussing the problem with the instructor, students should contact the General Education Literature Director, Professor Barbara Eckstein, by e-mail to schedule an appointment to discuss the grading concern or complaint. This e-mail should specify the student's section and instructor and should briefly outline the nature of the concern or complaint.

Electronic Device Policy:

Unless specified, you will not need any electronic devices during class. Please keep all cell phones, iPods, and laptops put away. Thank you for being courteous toward our learning environment. **Inappropriate use of electronics during class time will negatively affect your participation grade.**

Accommodations:

A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet with the course instructor privately in the instructor's office to make particular arrangements. See <http://www.uiowa.edu/~sds/> for more information.

Controlling Policies for Students from Other Colleges:

This course is given by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. This means that class policies on matters such as requirements, grading, and sanctions for academic dishonesty are governed by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Students wishing to add or drop this course after the official deadline must receive the approval of the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Details of the University policy of cross enrollments may be found at <http://www.uiowa.edu/~provost/deos/crossenroll.doc>

Sexual Harassment:

Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community have a responsibility to uphold this mission and to contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment should be reported immediately. Visit the sexual harassment awareness site at <http://www.sexualharassment.uiowa.edu/> for assistance, definitions, and the full University policy.

Sexual Misconduct and Dating Violence:

All of you in this classroom and all of your classmates, professors, and staff are part of an inclusive community. We intend to provide a safe and nurturing environment for each of you and for us. This community is home to straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students, faculty, and staff, and it is home to every race and many nationalities. But sexual violence strikes at the heart of this community. In collaboration with the University of Iowa Rape Victim Advocacy Program, we faculty wish specifically to repudiate the often-unstated premise that sexual violence of some kind is simply part of the societal *status quo*.

Sexual assault, dating violence, stalking, and other forms of sexual misconduct, including catcalling and other verbal abuse, are serious issues and subvert the mission of the University of Iowa. The only person responsible for sexual misconduct is the perpetrator. It is a violation of university policy to engage in sexual activities without clear consent from your partner. Someone incapacitated due to alcohol or drugs cannot consent to sexual activity.

Perpetrators face consequences that may include expulsion from the university and incarceration.

If you have been the victim of a sexual assault or domestic violence on or off campus or you know someone who has been assaulted and you want to find out more about available resources, please contact the Rape Victim Advocacy Program (RVAP), the Domestic Violence Intervention Program (DVIP), or the UI Campus Police. The RVAP will also provide further guidance and information to any interested member of the community.

Resources: RVAP: (319)335-6000 rvap.uiowa.edu; DVIP: (319)351-1043; Campus Police: (319)335-5022 <http://police.uiowa.edu/be-proactive/reporting-sexual-assault/>; Office of the Sexual Misconduct Response Coordinator (OSMRC): <http://osmrc.uiowa.edu/report-problem>; University of Iowa Sexual Misconduct Policies: <http://osmrc.uiowa.edu/policy>; University of Iowa Threat Assessment Team: uitat@uiowa.edu; 319-384-2955.

****Title IX of the 1972 Educational Amendments to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits gender discrimination in all programs and activities of the university. It applies to admissions, financial aid, academic matters, career services, counseling and medical services, employment, and all other programs, events, and activities available at the university. It states: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."** Title IX makes it clear that violence and discrimination based on sex and/or gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, or if you want to become better educated about your rights, you can find resources here:

<http://diversity.uiowa.edu/policies/title-ix>

Title IX Coordinator [Georgina Dodge](#) phone: (319)-335-3565 email: georgina-dodge@uiowa.edu

Mental Health Resources for Students

<http://counseling.studentlife.uiowa.edu>

<http://studenthealth.uiowa.edu/services/psychiatry>

<https://www.uihealthcare.org/behavioral-health-services/>

<http://jccrisiscenter.org/pages/what-we-do/24-hour-crisis-line.php>

24-Hour Crisis Line via The Johnson County Crisis Center

Hours: Available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year

Phone: (319) 351-0140

Tornado:

The University of Iowa Operations Manual, Part V Chapter 16, outlines appropriate responses to a tornado or to a similar crisis. If a tornado or other severe weather is indicated by the UI outdoor warning system, members of the class should seek shelter in rooms and corridors in the innermost part of a building at the lowest level, staying clear of windows, corridors with windows, or large freestanding expanses such as auditoriums and cafeterias. The class will resume, if possible, after the UI outdoor warning system announces that the severe weather threat has ended. For more information on Hawk Alert and the siren warning system, visit the Department of Public Safety website at <http://police.uiowa.edu/stay-informed/emergency-communication/>

Course Calendar

This is a tentative calendar and is subject to change. Updates will be posted to ICON and/or shared in class. Students are responsible for tracking course activities, readings, and assignments.

Week I

Thinking About Pain, Suffering, and Evil in the Writings of the African Diaspora

Tuesday, August 20th

EQ: “Why study pain, suffering, and evil in the literature of slavery?”

R: Short Selection, Susan Neimann’s *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Modern Philosophy* (2002), (PDF)

R: Short Selection, Anthony Pinn’s *Moral Evil and Redemptive Suffering: A History of Theodicy in African-American Thought* (2002), (PDF)

R: Short Selection, Cornel West's "American Africans in Conflict: Alienation in an Insecure Culture, from *The Cornell West Reader* (PDF)

Introductions ("Diversity Autobiographies," "Meet, Greet, & Tweet"), Course Expectations, Syllabus, & Readings

Thursday, August 22nd

EQ: "What evils are confessed and sung of black 'criminality'?"

Historical Context: The Black Atlantic & Diaspora

Genre: Criminal Confessional, Dying Confessional Narratives, Slave Songs of the Caribbean

R: Arthur, *The Life, and Dying Speech of Arthur, a Negro Man; Who Was Executed at Worcester, October 20, 1768. For a Rape Committed on the Body of One Deborah Metcalfe* (1768)

R: *Caribbean Slave Songs* (PDF)

Week II

Early Slave Narratives, the Black Atlantic, and Spiritual Suffering

Tuesday, August 27th

EQ: "Whose evil is redeemed in Hammon's and Kilekwa captivity?"

Genre: Indian Captivity Narrative, Catholic Conversion Tale

R: *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, a Negro Man* (1760), Briton Hammon

R: *Slave Boy to Priest*, Petro Kilekwa (pp. 221 – 230, Chapters 1 & 2, PDF)

Thursday, August 29th

EQ: "What sufferings of the soul are converted (or not) in Gronniosaw?"

Genre: Spiritual Autobiography, Conversion Narrative

R: *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince, as Related by Himself* (1770), James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw

Assignment Due: *Response Paper #1 – Close Reading & Analysis*

Week III

Olaudah Equiano's "Murmurings" on God and on Slavery,

Tuesday, September 4th

EQ: "Why the religious resistance in Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*?"

Historical Context: The 'Talking Book' and Transatlantic Abolition

R: Selections, Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself, Vol. I* (1789)

Thursday, September 6th

EQ: "How does Equiano (or, God) redeem black suffering in Vol. II?"

Genre: Rastafarian Chant

R: Selections, Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself, Vol. II* (1789)

R: "Rastafarian Chant – Zion Me Wan Go Home" (PDF)

Week IV

Poetic Justice: Human and Divine Injustice in Black Antislavery Poetry

Tuesday, September 11th

EQ: "How did the enslaved break their chains, lyrically?"

Genre: Black Antislavery Poetry, Slave Spirituals

R: *Antislavery Writings* (Library of America), Phyllis Wheatley (pp. 54-56), Jupiter Hammon (pp. 89-93), George Moses Horton (pp. 253-255)

R: Slave Spirituals (PDF), James Cone's *The Spirituals & The Blues*

Thursday, September 13th

EQ: How do diasporic poets break their chains today?"

Genre: Contemporary African Poetry

Noémia de Sousa, "Let My People Go" (PDF)
Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin, "Home-Coming Son" (PDF)

Assignment Due: *Response Paper #2 – Close Reading & Analysis*

Week V:

Revolting Against Suffering and Slavery: Nat Turner & African Poets Today

Tuesday, September 18th

EQ: “What kind of suffering is worth killing for?” (Part I)

R: *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1831), Thomas R. Gray

R: “It is Easy to Forget,” Ezenwa Ohaeto (PDF)

Thursday, September 20th

EQ: “What kind of suffering is worth killing for?” (Part II)

R: *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1831), Thomas R. Gray

R: “African in Louisiana,” Kojo Gynayeye Kyei (PDF)

Week VI:

Black Abolitionism & its “Subjects” of Evil

Tuesday, September 25th

EQ: “Why is Walker’s God a ‘God of Justice’ (or not)?”

Genre: Pamphlet, Polemic

R: David Walker’s *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (1829)

Thursday, September 27th

EQ: “How do the enslaved piece together suffering and pain?”

Genre: Fragments of Enslaved Life, Travel Autobiography

R: Abu Bakr al-Siddiq’s *The African Travels*

R: Mary Prince’s *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* (Short Selections)

Assignment Due: *Response Paper #3 – Close Reading & Analysis*

Week VII

Liberating the Self from Patriarchal Trauma and Pain

Tuesday, October 1st

EQ: “How different is patriarchy, from Nigeria to the U.S.?”

Genre: Poetry, Short Story

R: “Songs of Sorrow,” Kofi Awoonor – Ghana-Born Poet

R: “Saltless Ash,” Zaynab Alkali (PDF) – Nigerian Writer

Thursday, October 3rd

EQ: “How is slavery compounded by gender & sexuality?”

R: *The Bondwoman’s Narrative*, Hannah Crafts
(Select Chapters on the trope of the Tragic Mulatta)

R: Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*
“The Loophole of Retreat” (PDF, short selection)

Week VIII:

Performing Suffering in Diasporic Song, Narrative, and Drama

Tuesday, October 8th

EQ: “How long is too long in the slave song?”

Genre: Black Transatlantic Autobiography, Antislavery Song

R: Ignatius Sancho, *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, An African* (1782), Short Selections/Letters (PDF)

R: William Wells Brown, *The Antislavery Harp* (PDF)

Thursday, October 10th

EQ: “How was the slave trade lived, and performed, in Cuba?”

Genre: Anticolonial Drama (Cuban)

R: Juan Francisco Manzano, “Slave-Trade Merchant” (poem)

R: Juan Francisco Manzano, *Zafra* (play)

Assignment Due: *Response Paper #4 – Close Reading & Analysis*

Week IX:

“Is there a just God?”: Infidelity and Impiety in Douglass’s Narrative

Tuesday, October 15th

EQ: “Why the evils of policing slave bodies exist?”

Genre: Memoir

R: Frederick Douglass’s *My Bondage, My Freedom*

Thursday, October 17th

EQ: “A god of justice in Douglass’s writings?”

Genre: Memoir

R: Frederick Douglass’s *My Bondage, My Freedom*

Week X:

Visualizing Suffering and Evil in the Diaspora, Past and Present

Tuesday, October 22th

EQ: “What suffering can (or can’t) be ‘visualized’ under slavery?”

R: *The Illustrated Slave: Empathy, Graphic Narrative, and the Visual Culture of the Transatlantic Movement, 1800-1852*, Short Selections (PDF)

R: *Antislavery Writings*, pp. 566-567 (13 pages of abolitionist visual culture & images of the enslaved)

Thursday, October 24nd

EQ: “How do images make us ‘see’ slavery’s evils?”

Genre: Visual Culture in the Literature of Slavery (Past & Present)

R: Contemporary Visuals of Diasporic Slavery, Globally and Locally (PDF, and three images from your own research)

R: *The Walking Dead: Haunting Resurrections of Slavery & Haitian Voodoo* (“Sophia’s Return”)

Week XI:

Things Fall Apart: God, Colonialism, and the Suffering of Africa (Part I)

Tuesday, October 29th

EQ: “How does Achebe address colonialist suffering?”

Genre: Postcolonial Novel

R: Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (1958) (pp. 1-109)

Thursday, October 31st

EQ: “What is falling apart in Okonkwo’s world?”

R: Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (1958)

(pp. 110-147)

Assignment Due: *Response Paper #5 –Close Reading & Analysis*

Week XII:

Things Fall Apart: God, Colonialism, and the Suffering of Africa (Part II)

Monday, November 5th

EQ: “How does Achebe (re-)write and (re-)interpret colonialism?”

R: Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (1958)
(pp. 148-209)

R: Roger McTair, “Politics Kaiso” – Trinidad-born Poet

Wednesday, November 7th

EQ: “Are things falling apart today after Achebe?”

Revisiting *Things Fall Apart* in Our Neoliberal Age
[Discussion]

Week XIII:

Living Lives Elsewhere in the African Diaspora

Tuesday, November 12th

EQ: “How is life lived “elsewhere” in the diaspora?”

R: George Campbell, “History Makers,” “In the Slums,”
“Holy” – Panama-born Poet

R: Segun Afolabi, *A Life Elsewhere* – Nigerian-born (select stories)

Thursday, November 14th

EQ: “How is life lived ‘elsewhere’ in the diaspora?”

R: Mutabaruka, “Free Up de Lan, White Man,”
“Revolutionary Poets,” “The Change” – Jamaican-born Poet

R: Segun Afolabi, *A Life Elsewhere* – Nigerian-born (select stories)

Week XIV:

Thanksgiving Break (No Class)

Week XV:

Diasporic Cargo: Suffering as Commodity, Criminal, & Captive under Slavery

Monday, November 26th

EQ: “What evils are found in the African Barracoons?”

R: Zora Neale Hurston, *Barracoon: The Story of the Last “Black Cargo”*

R: Amina Said, “The Africa of the Statue” – Tunisia-born Poet

Wednesday, November 28th

EQ: “What evils terrorize Southern hellscapes?”

R: Zora Neale Hurston, *Barracoon: The Story of the Last “Black Cargo”*

R: Wayne Brown, “Noah” – Trinidad-born Poet

Week XVI:

Viewing Suffering and Evil in the Literatures of Diasporic Slavery

Monday, December 3rd

EQ: “Slavery & Diaspora in the Contemporary Imagination?”

R: Steve McQueen’s *Twelve Years a Slave* (viewing)

Thursday, December 5th

EQ: “Slavery & Diaspora in the Contemporary Imagination?”

R: Steve McQueen’s *Twelve Years a Slave* (viewing)

Week XVII:

End-of-Class Symposium & Final Portfolio Submissions

TBD

Steve McQueen’s *Twelve Years A Slave* (discussion)
Portfolios - Exploratory Essays, Writer’s Journals
Symposium Presentations
Closing Remarks, & Goodbyes