

Eng 63.009 American Literatures

(3 credits; prerequisite: Eng 16)

Fall 2012 Wed. 6:00-8:30 p.m. H216

Prof. Leah Dilworth

Office: H463; office hours MWF 11:00-12:00; Wed. 2:00-5:00; and by appointment.

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Course Theme: Slavery and American Literature

The language of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution may insist that the United States was founded on beautiful ideals like “liberty” and “equality,” but when those documents were written, the nation’s economy depended on the slave labor of people from Africa and their descendants. From the very beginning, slavery informed every aspect of American politics, economy, and culture, and the conflicts over that system eventually brought about the Civil War, which settled only some of the problems. Today, the racism and injustice that are the legacy of American slavery persist at every level of our social and cultural life.

In this course, we will consider how these conflicts have been reflected in and addressed by the literature written by Americans enslaved and free. We will pinpoint two important historical moments: the period of rising abolitionism before the Civil War (1840-1860) and the period between the two World Wars (1920-40), a time of rapid cultural change, when modernism and experimentation in the arts gave rise to a multitude of new voices and aesthetic forms.

Course Goals

Our goals in English 63 reflect the broader aims of a liberal arts education. The skills we will practice include close reading, analytical and critical thinking, and clear, effective expository writing. You will read closely, alone and in groups, and learn to analyze the texts’ formal qualities and themes. Writing for the course will include weekly online responses posted to the course discussion board, occasional in-class writing, and essays in which you explore and interpret texts we have read. More specifically, you will learn to:

- Develop familiarity with and reading proficiency in literary texts from the United States from about 1800 to 1945.
- Identify literary conventions that shape our understanding of texts, including genre, voice, implied audience, setting, characterization, and figurative language.
- Use historical texts to expand and deepen our understanding of the literature we are reading.
- Articulate and critique the work’s approach to ethical, political, and social issues.
- Develop critical insights and use them to formulate an interpretation of the texts.
- Express these interpretations proficiently in class discussion and in writing. This means forming a coherent thesis that gives us an interpretation of a text and supporting it with evidence and discussion of evidence – in clear and coherent prose.
- Accurately quote, summarize, and paraphrase, using appropriate documentation following MLA style.

Students and Faculty in the Archive (SAFA)

In Fall 2011 LIU (along with St. Francis College and City Tech) began a three-year partnership with the Brooklyn Historical Society (BHS). This project, “Students and Faculty in the Archives” (SAFA), was initiated by the BHS and is supported with a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. SAFA aims to enable undergraduate students to use documents and books in the BHS archives as part of their regular course curriculum.

We will visit the BHS on Oct. 17, during our usual class time, to work with a number of historical publications relating to the abolition of slavery in the U.S. You will work in small groups to observe and read selected publications from the 1840s and ‘50s. Based on your observations and discussion, you will write a response paper, which you will post to the SAFA blog. You will receive more detailed instructions prior to the visit.

Attendance at this visit is MANDATORY.

Required Texts:

Please buy the required editions. They are available in the LIU Bookstore. You will have trouble following the discussion if you use a different translation or edition.

- *Norton Anthology of American Literature, Vol. B 1820-1865*. Eighth edition. Ed. Patricia Wallace, et al. (New York: Norton, 2011).
- *Norton Anthology of American Literature, Vol. D 1914-1945*. Eighth edition. Ed. Patricia Wallace, et al. (New York: Norton, 2011).
- A dictionary, *American Heritage* or *Webster’s Collegiate*, or equivalent.
- You will also need a grammar and documentation handbook or web-site with up-to-date MLA guidelines. For example: Diane Hacker, *A Writer’s Reference, The Little Brown Handbook*, or OWL: Online Writers Lab (Purdue University).
- *Sophomore Literature Handbook*, published by the LIU Brooklyn English Department, to be distributed in class.

Other Requirements:

Blackboard Website:

This course is mounted on LIU’s Blackboard site and we will be using it throughout the semester. Please log on immediately. If you have any problems with access go to the CSI, LLC 3rd floor (opposite the library entrance). Let me know if problems persist. I will be posting announcements and assignments on Blackboard. In addition, you will be submitting weekly responses to readings on the website discussion board. Log on at *Blackboard.liu.edu* or through your MyLIU account.

LIU Email:

I use LIU email addresses for all class communications. Please activate and check your University email. Non-LIU email often lands in Junk mail, which I do not check.

Grading:

Class participation and attendance (20%): you will receive a grade on your participation, preparedness, and attendance. Being prepared means coming to every class on time, having done all the reading and completed the day's writing assignment. *Remember to bring the assigned texts to every class meeting.* I will run the class like a seminar: sometimes I will give brief lectures, but most of the time we will discuss the texts together and in small groups. In addition, every week 3-4 students will be responsible for sharing their responses to that week's reading and engaging the class in a discussion about it. Therefore, the success of the course will depend on how committed each of us is to it. If everyone contributes by being prepared and by participating fully, this should be a fruitful, rewarding experience.

Attendance policy: If you miss three class meetings, you will receive an F in class participation. Being late to class counts ½ absence. If you are absent, it is your responsibility to get missed assignments and notes from Blackboard, me, or another student.

Weekly online responses (20%): Every week, unless there is an essay or draft of an essay due, you will post an informal *response* of at least 300 words in length to the Blackboard discussion page. When you log on, you will see my starting post for each text. Simply hit "reply" and tell us what you thought of the story, build in a quotation and discuss the quote. In addition, please read your classmates' posts and respond to them as you feel inspired. Please include a quotation in every response, proofread and edit carefully. You will receive a letter grade for each response; the grades will be averaged; the two lowest response grades will be dropped.

Responses are due by the beginning of class. NO LATE RESPONSES WILL BE ACCEPTED.

Your responses will form the basis of class discussions. Every week 3-4 students will present their responses to the class for discussion. You will sign up in advance for the day you want to present.

Essays (40%): Two revised essays, one draft each (5-6 pages; 1250-1500 words). I will hand out a list of paper topics, but I encourage students to develop topics from their weekly responses. I will give written comments on the draft and encourage students to meet with me to discuss revision. The second draft will receive a letter grade. I'll be looking for essays with a clear, persuasive argument supported by detailed evidence from the text, as well as correctly cited sources following MLA style. (The Works Cited page does not count as one of the required 5-6 pages.) You may continue to revise the essays, and I will re-grade them. (N. B.: revision is no guarantee of a higher grade.) I will accept revised essays until the last day of class.

Final Exam (20%): in-class, given during the end-of-semester exam period; identification, short answer, essay question.

Format for essay assignments: Papers should be typed in 12 pt. Times Roman typeface, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins all around. Pages should be numbered, and the heading of the first page should include your name, the date, the course, and a title for the essay.

Plagiarism

The Council of Writing Program Administrators defines plagiarism thus: "In an instructional setting, plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately uses someone else's language, ideas, or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source" (www.wpacouncil.org). *If the idea and/or the writing is not your own, you need to document it; if you are not sure, document to be safe.*

Plagiarism is theft and can lead to failing the class and even to suspension. If I find that you have plagiarized writing in this course, the plagiarized paper will be graded F. If you do it again, you will fail the course, and I will submit a report to the Chair of the English Department, who will report your name to the Dean.

Student Support Services

If you have a documented disability or impairment and require accommodations, please provide me with an Accommodation Letter from Student Support Services (SSS). The office is located on the ground floor of the Pharmacy Building, Room B-04, (718) 488-1044.

Hours of operation: Monday - Thursday 9-6, & Friday 9-5.

Email address: studentsupportservices@brooklyn.liu.edu

Please note: Turn OFF cell phones and all other electronic devices while in class. There is no texting allowed in class. Please do not eat in class. Drinks are fine.

Schedule of Assignments

Date	In Class	Reading due	Writing due
Sept. 5	Introductions; go over syllabus and student handbook	Phillis Wheatley, "On Being Brought to America..."	
Sept.12		Thomas Jefferson, The Declaration of Independence*; "Notes on the State of Virginia" (788)** Lydia H. H. Sigourney, "To the First Slave Ship" (109)**; "Slavery" (113)** Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Slave Singing at Midnight" (596-98, 599)** John Greenleaf Whittier, "The Hunters of Men" (608-611)**	Online response
Sept.19		Selections from Frederick Douglass, "Narrative..." (1170-1239)**	Online response
Sept.26	Plagiarism lesson; discuss paper topics	Harriet Jacobs, <i>Incidents...</i> " (920-942)**	Online response
Oct. 3		Harriet Beecher Stowe, <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> (805-857)**	Essay 1, draft 1
Oct.10		Stowe, <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> , (857-904)**	Online response
Oct. 17	Class meets at the Brooklyn Historical Society	Walt Whitman, selected poems TBA**	Essay1, draft 2
Oct. 24		Emily Dickinson, selected poems**	Online response to SAFA blog
Oct. 31		Selections from "Modernist Manifestos" and modernist poetry***	Online response
Nov. 7	Discuss paper topics	Selections from poetry of the Harlem Renaissance****	Online response
Nov.14		Jean Toomer, selections from <i>Cane</i> ****	Essay 2, draft 1
Nov.21	NO CLASS. HAPPY THANKSGIVING!		
Nov.28		Zora Neale Hurston, "Eatonville Anthology" and "The Gilded Sixbits" ***	Online response
Dec. 5		William Faulkner, "Barn Burning" and "A Rose for Emily"****	Essay 2, draft 2
Dec.12		TBA	Online response

*Text will be posted to Blackboard. **Norton Anthology, vol. B ***Norton Anthology, vol. D

