English 266A:
Slavery and the American Imagination

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Class: T, 2-5 PM
Office Hours: W 1 PM, Th 1 PM and by appt.

This will be a graduate seminar in the English Department, but students in History are welcome. The course attempts to see slavery in both a historical and literary way, including some of the most important histories of slavery, a selection of classic slave narratives, some accounts by masters of slaves, a selection of some of the important political oratory about slavery in the antebellum era, and finally, fiction by those close to the historical experience of slavery. Don't feel obliged to read the “recommended readings” before each class; they are starting points for your research.

Readings by week

Week 1: (January 19) Slave Narratives I

Recommended (on reserve):

• Dickson J. Preston, Young Frederick Douglass: The Maryland Years (1980) E449.D75 P74

Week 2: (January 26) Slave Narratives II (All from Andrews and Gates)

• Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano
• Narrative of Sojourner Truth
• Confessions of Nat Turner (not the novel by William Styron, but its problematic source, dictated to Thomas R. Gray)
• Narrative of William Wells Brown
Recommended (on reserve):


**Week 3:** (February 2) *Slave Narratives III* (All from Andrews and Gates)

- Harriet Ann Jacobs: *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*
- Henry Bibb: *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*

Recommended (on reserve):


**Week 4:** (February 9) *Slave Narratives III*
Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave* Penguin 9780143125419
Be sure to check out the recent film

**Week 5:** (February 23) *Recent Historical Literature* (Beware: These are long books, so get a head start!)

  (Discussion will focus on these sections: Book 1 part 1, Book 3 part 1, Book 4)

Recommended (on reserve):


**Week 6:** (March 1) *Slaveholder Testimony*

• Theodore Rosengarten, *Tombee: Portrait of a Cotton Planter* (excerpts on Latte site)

• Mary Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War* ed. C. Vann Woodward, (excerpts on Latte site)

**Recommended (on reserve):**


• Robert Manson Myers, ed. *The Children of Pride: letters of the family of the Rev. Dr. Charles Colcock Jones from the years 1860–1868* E559.9 .C46 1984

**Week 7:** (March 8) **Political Argument I**

• George Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All! Or, Slaves without Masters* ISBN: 9780674094512


• John C. Calhoun: “Speech in the Senate on Compromise Resolutions” (Widmer)

• Alexander Stephens: “Corner Stone Speech” (Widmer)

• James Henry Hammond: “Cotton is King” (on Latte site)

**Recommended (on reserve):**


**Week 8:** (March 15) **Political Oratory II**

• Angelina Grimke Weld: “Antislavery speech at Pennsylvania Hall” (Widmer)

• Henry Highland Garnet: “Address to the slaves of the United States of America” (Widmer)

• Henry Clay: “Speech in the Senate on Compromise Resolutions” (Widmer)

• Daniel Webster: “Speech in the Senate on Compromise Resolutions” (Widmer)

• Frederick Douglass: “What to the Slave is the 4th of July?” (Widmer)
• Charles Sumner: “The Crime against Kansas” (Widmer)
• John Brown: “Speech to the Court” (Widmer)


• Speech on the Dred Scott Decision
• House Divided Speech
• Galesburg Debate (with Stephen Douglas)
• Cooper Union Speech (on Latte site)
• First Inaugural Address (on Latte site)
• Hodges Letter (on Latte site)
• Conkling Letter (on Latte site)
• Gettysburg Address (on Latte Site)
• Second Inaugural Address (on Latte site)

*Recommended (on reserve):*

• Don Fehrenbacher *The Dred Scott Case: Its Significance in American Law and Politics* (1978) KF4545.S5 F43

**Week 10:** (March 29) Harriet Beecher Stowe: *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* ISBN: 9780393963038


**Week 12:** (April 12)

• Martin Delany: *Blake, or the Huts of America* ISBN: 9780807064191

**Week 13:** (April 19) Mark Twain: *Pudd’n’head Wilson* ISBN: 9780393925357
Requirements

1. **Class Presentation** Everybody will be responsible for a 15 minute presentation in class on one of the texts of that week. I will pass around a sign up sheet for this at the first class.

2. **Short papers** There will be two short (6–8 pages or so) writing assignments, due **February 9** and **March 15**. These will be “close reading” exercises, in which you pick a passage which strikes you as rich and interesting and full of a significance that might not be already obvious to every reader of that text. In other words, I don’t want you to pick a passage that will enable you to repeat some point we have already made in class, but rather some passage which will enable you to bring a new reflection into our conversation, some passage that casts some new light upon the conversation we have already been having, some light that we might not have seen were it not for you. You will write a commentary on that passage, giving what you take its point to be, noting its context, and developing in cogent detail the claim it leads you to make about the text. Imagine that you are writing for someone who has some knowledge of the text but who does not know what precisely is your point of view about it—someone rather like the other members of this class, for instance. From this passage you should develop a reading of the larger text which brings the text as a whole into a novel focus.

3. **Seminar Paper** This will be a traditional graduate seminar paper 15–20 pp. in length, due one week after the last class, in which you engage the critical tradition about one of our texts and make some original contribution to the ongoing conversation about it.

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.

You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University’s policies on academic integrity (see http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai ). Faculty may refer any suspected instances of alleged dishonesty to the Office of Student Development and Conduct. Instances of academic dishonesty may result in sanctions including but not limited to, failing grades being issued, educational programs, and other consequences.

Other Matters:

1. Attendance is mandatory. If you miss a class, you must tell me in writing why.

2. Turn in your papers on time. I read late papers in a very grouchy mood.

3. If you have a disability which might affect your work in this course, get in touch with me about it right away, and I will make provisions for you.

4. Please feel free to come to my office hours.