

Block 4: Making Meaning in Suffering: Religion and 19th-century African American Literature Boscaljon
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Room: College Hall 313 Time: Monday-Friday, 12-3 (**with exceptions**)

Course Topic:

Humans are meaning makers, and the main way we make our suffering and our triumph meaningful is by casting it in terms of a narrative structure. Meaning generally occurs in reference to some larger possibility “beyond” the present, and interpreting present misfortune in light of this “beyond” provides motivation to endure the hardship of any one time. This course will look at the ways that African American religious culture influenced the narrative construction of slave experiences, and post-emancipation understandings of what “freedom” or a meaningful life might mean.

Major Course Outcomes:

Students will:

- **understand the relationship connecting suffering and storytelling as a way of making meaning out of despair (knowledge, inquiry, well-being).
- **construct cohesive paragraphs based on argumentative claims that are independently substantiated (inquiry, reasoning, communication).
- ** learn how to fuse conceptual knowledge with historical information (knowledge, intercultural literacy).
- ** become aware how religion influenced the development of 19th-century African-American literature and also how it applies to our contemporary culture (knowledge, intercultural literacy).
- **understand how historical, philosophical and theological ideas are presented in literary formats, how to extract these ideas from literature, and how to articulate this process in conversation and writing (inquiry, knowledge, reasoning, communication, intercultural literacy).

Expectations:

I provide materials to read and assignments to complete that I believe are worth spending time thinking through and doing well, and I work diligently to construct courses and work that will be challenging to each and every student in the course. Much of the material is difficult: I therefore do **not expect that you bring an understanding of the material to class**. My preference with all texts—literary and philosophical—is that you engage your reading informed by a sense of curiosity for what you enjoy, what you understand, and what remains unresolved. The best course discussions focus on what remains uncertain and unknowable and how it affects humans and the communities they live in—including the community of the classroom. I hope that none of the texts I assign have only one meaning or truth or thing to “get.” I do certainly hope that you **read the assignments** so as to understand the discussion. Because we are immersed in the unknown, I **expect all students to treat each other with civility and respect**. Finally, I appreciate that you have other interests and obligations in your life and that you won’t always have the time to devote to the class that it deserves. Nonetheless, I will grade assignments and the final exam with the assumption that you, in taking this course, have completed the work for it. Your time commitment will vary from day to day, but expect to have at least 2-4 hours of work (sometimes far more, sometimes a bit less) for each class session. **As you may have understood, your willingness to work diligently and consistently is necessary to doing well in the class.**

Required Texts:

Berger, Peter. *The Sacred Canopy*.

http://www.medina502.com/classes/faithandculture_la/lecturas/Berger_Religion_World.pdf

Raboteau, Albert J. *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African-Americans* (ISBN: 9780195145854)

Sernett, Milton C. *African-American Religious History: A Documentary Approach* (ISBN 978-0822324492)

Greenburg, Kenneth S. *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (ISBN: 0312112076)

Bibb, Henry. *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave* (ISBN 0299168948)

Olaudah Equiano: *The Interesting Narrative* (ISBN: 978-0142437162)

Jacobs, Harriet: *Incidents in the life of a slave girl*:

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/jacobs/hj-site-index.htm>

- Douglass, Frederick: *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (9780143107309)
- Dubois, W. E. B., *The Souls of Black Folk* (9780140189988)

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Week 1: Engagement

28 November 9 a.m.:: Berger (link), Cone (pdf), Miller (pdf), Raboteau, Chapter 1, Sernett, 20-60.

****Report 1 Due**

29 November :: Equiano 1-112

****Report 2 Due**

30 November :: Equiano 113-236

01 December :: Sernett, Part II (7, 8, 10, 13), Raboteau Chapters 2-3

02 December :: The Confessions of Nat Turner, 1-37

****Discuss Group Paper**

Week 2: Enslavement

05 December :: The Confessions of Nat Turner 38-137

06 December :: Bibb, v-100

07 December :: Bibb, 100-200

****Group Paper Due (6 paragraphs) by 9:00 p.m.**

08 December :: Jacobs, Incidents in the life of a slave girl (link) Chapters 1-20

09 December :: Jacobs Chapters 21-41

****Inception Paper 1 Due**

Week 3: Emancipation

12 December :: Douglass 1-115

13 December :: Douglass 116-190

14 December :: Raboteau Chapters 4-5, Sernett III

****CWDII Outline Paper 1 Due**

15 December :: Raboteau Chapters 6-7, Sernett, Part IV

16 December :: DuBois (1-73)

Week 4: Exodus

19 December :: DuBois (74-153)

****Individual Paper Due (10-14 paragraphs) by 7:00 a.m.**

20 December :: DuBois (154-218)

****Participation grades due by 7:00 a.m.**

21 December 9 a.m. :: Final Examination

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Grading:

My assumption is that students should learn throughout the semester, and that the best time to assess skills is with the final effort, not with preliminary attempts to acquire skills. I value learning as a process and do not wish to punish any attempt to learn new ways of thinking and writing. As such, I grade on **course competencies** that involve different discrete skills that come with thinking and writing. Relative to your writing, I will “grade” initial assignments relative to these competencies as a way to signal how you are doing, but your grade will be determined solely on the basis of my assessment of your final paper. Relative to quizzes, I will take the highest score for each of the associated competencies that you earn throughout the block. Your final examination will build on the skills you’ve developed both in class discussion and through the quizzes. **Five points will be deducted for each assignment that you do not turn in**, but the larger penalty will be incurred through your loss of practice and feedback. I also grade based on the assumption of a **50% C** (instead of a 70% C): in other words, my assumption as a grader is that you earn points relative to half of the available points. Work that is better than average can earn more than 50%, work that is worse than average will earn less. This allows for a broader range of grade distribution and prevents people from being only a point or two away from the next highest grade. I distribute final grades based on a loose curve governed by the scores earned during the class (rather than the number of total points possible), defining letter grades relative to gaps in the points. Put otherwise, as much as possible I grade based on skills you learn, not points that you earn, throughout the semester.

Course Competencies: At the end of the block, you should have the ability to (rated on a scale of 0-10):

Reports/Paper:

- ☐ use a *claim* to frame a paragraph
- ☐ use *warrants* to support one’s claim
- ☐ supply reader with appropriate *data* to concretize your claim
- ☐ support warrants with appropriate *interpretations* of data (data is necessary: points earned through *interpreting* data).
- ☐ persuade through the use of hypotests (in key paragraphs, perhaps as a penultimate paragraph)
- ☐ use an *impact* that shows the relevance of one’s claim to a broader context (i.e. thesis)
- ☐ use vibrant prose and varied grammar to produce enticing sentences
- ☐ accurately proofread and edit one’s thinking

Paper:

- ☐ use an introduction to set up the context for a long, developed argument
- ☐ use a conclusion to show the importance of an argument into a larger framework
- ☐ prove and defend a thesis
- ☐ persuade through offering an appropriate scope of analysis
- ☐ write an internally coherent argument that does not require the reader to make assumptions
- ☐ develop an argument in a logical progression

Quizzes: Given randomly throughout the block.

- ☐ argue an answer as more likely than competing options
- ☐ define a key term within a sentence so as to eliminate other options

Discussion (self-graded based on a 50% C average participation):

- ☐ attended class having read and thought about assigned reading
- ☐ remained attentive and thoughtful throughout the class discussion
- ☐ asked thought provoking questions that helped to clarify texts or themes
- ☐ provided active and focused insights relevant to the conversation

Although up to 250 points are possible, because I grade on a 50% C and curve down from there, the lowest passing grades are often around 100 points. My grading standards per competency is as follows:

- 10 points: Work is submitted that leaves no room for improvement.
- 8 points: Work is polished, with minimal room for improvement.
- 6 points: An attempt to think and write is present, but incomplete.
- 4 points: Little evidence of thinking or editing is demonstrated relative to guidelines.
- 2 points: Work was submitted that disregards the assignment and core competencies.

The Explanation of Graded Assignments:

AT THE END OF THE SEMESTER, the following grades will be added together. The total number of points will be put into a loose curve based on gaps in the final number of points: 15% As, 30%Bs, 40% Cs, 10% D/F.

- 1: The final examination (50 points possible): one point is given for defining each question, one point for each answer.
- 2: The two highest quiz scores (for arguing answer/defining key term) (20 points possible)
- 3: The amount you earn for discussion (40 points possible)
- 4: The combined grade on your final paper (which replaces points earned for “report” and “paper” categories): (140 pts.)

Final Exam: 50 points

There will be 10 questions—open note, open book. You will get 1 point for defining the question, one for justifying why one answer is correct and up to three points for explaining why the wrong answers fail.

Quizzes: 20 points

These take the form of multiple choice questions. You will select one answer and provide a warrant for why the answer that you selected is true. Not only will these provide you with a way to practice the critical thinking necessary for the final (defining a key term to eliminate rival answer possibilities), but it will also allow you to practice writing concise sentences.

Reports: 1 paragraph

Reports are small essays, intended to be one paragraph s in length. Each report makes an argument about a meaning of the text, supported with warrants and data from the text. These are intended to help work on the writing of paragraphs: thus, I will pay strict attention to the way each sentence fits/does not fit within each paragraph. As a whole, I will look for a clear **claim** sentence, supported with solid **warrants**, using relevant **data** from the texts and a possible **hypotest**, and making an **impact** that will tell me why your paragraph is important. Each **category error** will negatively impact the proofreading category.

Paper:

In some ways, this is easier to write than reports because a developed argument allows for clearer impacts. You should look at the first paper as a way to get feedback on your skills in preparation for the second paper. In general, I will be looking for clarity of argumentation and a consistent formal structure. **Note: students who focus on developing a CWDII outline before moving to the draft stage often find that it results in a paper with a far stronger and clearer argument.** I expect that you make an effort to hone your paper, going beyond a level of checking the grammar and spelling: look at your word choice, think of how to be more clear or more concise, attempt to strengthen the logic of your argument. I encourage you to come to office hours or utilize the writing lab, especially if you are not doing well on the reports. **Students who desire at least a B on the paper are encouraged to visit me frequently for help in outlining the argument and/or with reading rough drafts.**

HOW TO WRITE PAPERS AND PARAGRAPHS:

I teach writing with the assumption that each sentence in a paragraph plays a particular role in helping to make an argument. An argumentative **claim** is an assertion that connects a **concept** and a **percept** (or an idea with a concrete example). The **warrant** provides readers with a definition of the concept that helps define when something is include or excluded from the term. The **data** provides readers with objective information about the percept or concrete example. The **interpretation** shows the reader why the data meets or fits the definition provided by the warrant, and why the relationship asserted in the claim is therefore true. A **hypotest** offers either a counterargument to the claim or a rival interpretation: a reason is given as to why this alternative perspective is less adequate than the one initially provided in the paragraph. The **impact** shows with the **claim** is important to a context beyond the scope of the claim: these are relatively general in reports, but should show the paragraph's importance relative to the thesis in the context of a paper. **Sentences written in this format should be between 25 and 40 words in length—able to give readers enough information and fulfill their function without becoming so long as to cause readers to forget what was at the beginning. Paragraphs should be 5-7 sentences in length.**

Sentences in a Paragraph:

Claims: A frame around your paragraph, which introduces the reader to the argument that this paragraph intends to make. This makes a judgment that connects two different kinds of terms. This should be your first sentence. Beware of claims embedded in the middle of a paragraph—every claim needs a warrant. An argumentative claim (assertion that relates a concept and percept) and NOT a descriptive claim should begin each paragraph. **Hint:** state claims in terms of what the author is saying/doing and NOT what a character says/does.

Claim Types: Identity (x is y), Difference (x is unlike y), Evaluative (x is good/bad), Comparative (x is better/worse than y), Analytical (discussion of method).

Warrants: These are statements that explain why a claim is true. It continues the line of thought that your claim posits,

allowing me to follow why you believe it is true. It often is a **clarification or development** of a phrase within the claim.

Data: This is the key piece of factual evidence from an objective source that describes the percept or concrete object defined in the claim. Data should be contextualized for the reader so that it can be properly appreciated.

Interpretation: This is one of the most important (and most frequently overlooked) sentences in a paragraph. Rather than letting your data or warrant speak for itself, the interpretation tells your reader specifically how the data fits the definition offered in the warrant—and why, therefore, your claim is valid. Put otherwise, this is the sentence in which you *make* your argument rather than merely *asserting* or *repeating* it.

Hypotest: This functions to test the claim by presupposing the truth of an alternative, then arguing why this alternative is inferior.

Impacts: The function of this sentence is to inform me why the paragraph I just read is important to your argument. For it to be important to your argument, make sure it extends your thesis. This can take the form of if/then logic: If x is true, then it means y relative to the thesis.

When discussing literature, consider the following as a guideline: claims refer to authors, interpretation focuses on narrators and characters, impacts apply to the reader.

Intro/Conclusion: Follow the hourglass model—general introduction, narrowing to argument, expanding back out to a conclusion that ties into the introduction. An introduction should begin with a general observation that introduces a **topic** at an approachable level, followed by a second sentence that defines the **scope** of the argument, often by foregrounding an inconsistency, paradox, or problem that we generally ignore. The next sentence is the **thesis**, which proposes a solution or resolution to the issue raised in the second sentence, and this is often followed by a sentence that outlines your **method of argumentation**, or the way that you propose to defend your thesis. Some papers benefit from a second paragraph that provides a **definition** of a major term that will be used throughout the paper, and some benefit from a **description** of a key piece of data or object of inquiry. If the thesis sentence serves as the **claim** a paper argues and the conclusion provides the **impact**, then these paragraphs would provide a **warrant** and **data** respectively.

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ASSIGNMENTS:

Report 1:

Write a paragraph whose scope is defined by a **claim** that evaluates the extent to which ONE author in the anthology (Edwards, LeJau, Hammon, Liele/Bryan or Haynes) provides or performs a sense of religion as discussed by one of the theoretical models (Raboteau, Miller, Berger, Cone). The claim format is as follows: Author (from the anthology) accomplishes (theoretical model) because _____. The **warrant** should define the conceptual term (religion or suffering) by using a definition or quotation from an appropriate source. The **data** will be a sentence or two quoted from the author about whom you are making a claim. The **interpretation** will show what in the quoted text applies to the definition of the conceptual term offered in your **warrant**. If you wish to use a **hypotest**, you could provide a counterargument—either a different understanding of the claim or the interpretation—followed by an explanation of why your original inclinations provide a more satisfying understanding of the data. The **impact** argues why what you asserted in your claim is important, significant, or meaningful in a context outside of the scope of the claim.

Report 2:

Write a paragraph whose scope is defined by a **claim** that argues how Equiano's description of Ibo religion, or of Christianity, meets the definition of religion provided by one of the theoretical authors. Use a warrant from one of these authors to define "religion." The data should come from Equiano's narrative, limited to a line or two that provides a clear example of the concept you wish to illustrate. The **interpretation** should clearly identify which words or phrases particularly match up with the **warrant** that you chose, making the argument. If you wish to use a **hypotest**, you could provide a counterargument—either a different understanding of the claim or the interpretation—followed by an explanation of why your original inclinations provide a more satisfying understanding of the data. The **impact** argues why what you asserted in your claim is important, significant, or meaningful in a context outside of the scope of the claim.

Group Paper 1:

Write a paper that includes an introduction, a conclusion, and four CWDII body paragraphs that presents an argument concerning how *either* Equiano *or* Bibb *or* Jacobs *or* Turner internalize the story from the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament in ways that give meaning to suffering or point to a path of resistance. Make **claims** that balance assertions about the author against conceptual terms from Berger, Cone, Miller, or Raboteau—with a specific "by" or "because" clause. Allow your **warrants** to represent and develop terms from Berger, Cone, Miller, or Raboteau, using **data** from the literature, followed by an **interpretation** that puts the two together. The final sentence should be an **impact** that shows how the reading affects the author and relates to the thesis. I heavily encourage you to use a CWDII outline to organize your thoughts, perhaps working through 2-3 drafts of the outline, before beginning to write a rough, and then final, draft of the paper. The introduction should pitch the topic at an everyday level that narrows to a thesis, the body paragraphs should work together to develop a cohesive and coherent argument that proves that the thesis is true, and the conclusion should show why the truth of the thesis is important in resolving/answering the problem or paradox provided in the introduction.

Paper 2:

Write a paper that includes an introduction, a conclusion, and eight to twelve CWDII body paragraphs that presents an argument concerning how one author in one work exemplifies one of the major elements of nineteenth-century African-American religion. This could include the theme of making meaning out of suffering, the question of revelation, the creation of community, the hope of redemption, or the experience of grace. Make claims that draw conceptual terms from the appropriate author discussed in the first week of class that are defined in your warrants, and use data from the literature you select, followed by an interpretation that puts the two together. I heavily encourage you to use a CWDII outline to organize your thoughts, perhaps working through 2-3 drafts of the outline, before beginning to write a rough, and then final, draft of the paper. The introduction should pitch the topic at an everyday level that narrows to a thesis, the body paragraphs should work together to develop a cohesive and coherent argument that proves that the thesis is true, and the conclusion should show why the truth of the thesis is important in resolving/answering the problem or paradox provided in the introduction.

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Policy Statements:

Academic Honesty expectations:

Cornell College expects all members of the Cornell community to act with academic integrity. An important aspect of academic integrity is respecting the work of others. A student is expected to explicitly acknowledge ideas, claims, observations, or data of others, unless generally known. When a piece of work is submitted for credit, a student is asserting that the submission is her or his work unless there is a citation of a specific source. If there is no appropriate acknowledgement of sources, whether intended or not, this may constitute a violation of the College's requirement for honesty in academic work and may be treated as a case of academic dishonesty. The procedures regarding how the College deals with cases of academic dishonesty appear in The Catalogue, under the heading "Academic Honesty."

Students with disabilities:

Cornell College makes reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities. Students should notify the Coordinator of Academic Support and Advising and their course instructor of any disability related accommodations within the first three days of the term for which the accommodations are required, due to the fast pace of the block format. For more information on the documentation required to establish the need for accommodations and the process of requesting the accommodations, see <http://www.cornellcollege.edu/academic-support-and-advising/disabilities/index.shtml>.

Support for Educational Priorities and Outcomes:

This course supports the Educational Priorities and Outcomes of Cornell College with emphases on knowledge, inquiry, communication, and reasoning.