

Graduate Course in American Studies
Spring 2003
Instructor: Dr. Željka Švrljuga

The Politics of Race: African American Issues

The course will examine some major texts that focus on the issues of race and the institution of slavery in particular. The range will include spirituals, folktales, essays, slave narratives and neo-slave narratives, texts that are written by both white and black writers. The aim is to study their cultural and political expression, as well as their individual significance. Because the texts speak from different vantage points, our task is to raise a number of questions: What is race and how is it perceived? What is slavery? What is freedom? How does pleading one's own cause differ from having others speak for African Americans and about their experience? How is storytelling related to slavery and liberation? How are slavery and the oppression of women connected? What is the connection between creating a free story and creating a free self?

Primary Readings:

Spiritual, "Go Down Moses"

Phillis Wheatley, "On Being Brought from Africa to America" (1773)

Folktale, "Tar Baby"

Noel Chandler Harris, "The Wonderful Tar-Baby Story," "Free Joe and the Rest of the World"

Booker T. Washington, Chapter XIV. "The Atlanta Exposition Address." From *Up from Slavery* (1901)

W.E.B. DuBois, Ch. III. "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others" From *The Souls of Black Folk* (1902/1903)

Zora Neale Hurston, "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" (1928)

Herman Melville, "Benito Cereno" (1852)

Fredrick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845)

Harriet Beecher Stowe, Ch. XXX. "The Slave Warehouse." From *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or the Life Among the Lowly* (1852)

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)

Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1936)

Ishmael Reed, *Flight to Canada* (1976)

Secondary Readings:

Houston Baker, Jr. "Figurations for a New American Literary History: Archaeology, Ideology, and Afro-American Discourse." *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature. A Vernacular Theory*. Chicago and London: Chicago UP, 1984. 15-63.

- James Olney, "I was Born": Slave Narratives, their Status as Autobiography and as Literature." *Callaloo* 0:20 (Winter, 1984), 46-73.
- Houston Baker, Jr. "Autobiographical Acts and the Voice of the Southern Slave." *Critical Essays on Fredrick Douglass*. Ed. William L. Andrews. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1991. 94-107.
- Ray, Richard E., "Benito Cereno: Babo as Leader." *Melville's Short Novels: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*. Ed. Dan McCall. New York & London: Norton, 2002. 329-340.
- Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "The Trope of the Talking Book." *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988. 127-169.
- Henry Louis Gates, Jr. "Zora Neal Hurston and the Speakerly Text." *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988. 170-216.
- Ashraf H.A. Rushdy, Ch. IV. "The Passion of Resistance: Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada*." *Neo-slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literarz Form*. New York & Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999. 96-131.