

ANTISLAVERY LITERATURE TEACHING GUIDE

JEFFREY BRACE'S
THE BLIND AFRICAN
SLAVE (1810)



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Teaching Approaches

The Blind African Slave is a memoir of Africa and slavery, a spiritual autobiography, and a social history of early America. It invites a variety of teaching approaches. These might emphasize teaching the text as life writing, as narrative collaboration between author and amanuensis, as a conversion narrative, as introduction to the history of Africans in New England, or a variety of other emphases. Whatever approaches adopted, this is a text that rewards close reading and patient discussion.

One of the first issues to arise is the history surrounding this narrative. Many terms of historical and geographic reference are not immediately obvious to students, even with an historical introduction. A careful review of major historical and cultural features preceding and throughout Brace's life is useful to establish a discussion. For historical context, a teacher may wish to first review the history covered between Jeffrey Brace's birth in 1742 and death in 1827 (see Appendix A). In doing so, it is important to emphasize the Mali civilization from which Brace emerged, one that he views positively compared to the cruelties of Euro-American civilization that he experienced during his adult life.

It is important to contextualize Brace not only within a set of historical events, but within latter eighteenth-century intellectual history. Too often the American Enlightenment is taught as an all-white history and the intellectual life of African Americans during this period lies neglected. Eighteenth-century African American and Native American life histories establish their authors as indisputable participants in defining citizenship in the new republic. Towards understanding this intellectual contribution, a literary-historical approach can usefully begin by conceiving this text as participating in diverse eighteenth-century narrative genres and as a forerunner of better-known nineteenth-century American slave narratives.

Religious thought is another of the teaching issues for *The Blind African Slave*, as well it is with other early Anglophone slave narratives such as those of Olaudah Equiano and Boston King. An instructor might ask students, for instance, to look for the logic to the arrangement of Bible citations. Some students find the religious language and scriptural citations boring, while other students find these sections rich in meaning connected to their own religious faith. It is helpful to locate Brace's use of the Bible within the context of literary history and nineteenth-century American discourse, especially antislavery rhetoric. One way to understand the way Brace uses the Bible is to read *The Blind African Slave* as in part a spiritual autobiography, keeping in mind that the genre history of autobiography emerges from texts like John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and from the Puritan obsession with reading one's life for theological purposes.

The question of interracial relations represents a further teaching approach. Throughout this narrative, Brace describes a constantly-evolving relationship between Euro-Americans and Africans. What begins here with race enslavement of Africans transforms into white reliance on their labor and military service, and concludes with sometimes uneasy but increasingly stable relations between a new freeman and his white neighbors in rural Vermont. How does this narrative manifest not only changes in the life of one African, but also the changes he introduces in race relations between blacks and whites? How does Jeffrey Brace provide a harbinger of coming changes in interracial relations? The discussion-worthy relationship between Brace and his amanuensis,

Benjamin Prentiss, suggests both the problems and advantages found in this new relationship.

These are suggestive approaches to teaching this narrative, and it is a text that invites new approaches. At a graduate level, for example, *The Blind African Slave* provides ample evidence for discussing it within the literature of trauma. Encouraging students to find their own argumentative approaches to the narrative will help ‘re-invent’ this as a text that speaks to contemporary concerns. This is the goal of the model writing assignment in Appendix B, one that bases itself on *The Blind African Slave* and other early African American life histories.

Page citations in this guide are keyed to the University of Wisconsin Press edition of *The Blind African Slave* (2005), edited and with an introduction by Kari J. Winter.

Discussion Questions

1. In the introduction, Benjamin Prentiss states, “We must spurn with indignation any idea of the propriety of Christian nations, with no other excuse than lust of lucre and difference of religion, holding as slaves the whole African people, because they are not civilized or bear not the same complexion, having no other crime, save credulity or innocence” (89). This passage seems to suggest conflicting ideological stances. If on the one hand Prentiss condemns slavery as a moral abuse, on the other hand he suggests it is the product of a civilizational hierarchy between predators and innocent victims. Do you believe this hierarchy is true, that it is ‘the way of the world’? What political role does Prentiss adopt for himself in writing this introduction and co-writing the narrative? What does the passage beginning “This simple narrative of an individual African cannot possibly compass all the objections to slavery...” (90) suggest about the editorial politics here? Also, note the ‘Apology’ that concludes this text. (183) What does the description Prentiss provides of Brace’s meandering narration and his “not speaking plain English” suggest about their relationship as narrator and editor?
2. After condemning slavery as “the disgrace of civilization, civil liberty, and christianity” (89), Prentiss writes “each manly feeling swells with indignation at the horrid spectacle...” How does he invoke sentimental conventions of masculinity here? How does he enlist these conventions in support of a triad of civilization, civil liberties, and Christianity? Why might this formulation appear problematic to contemporary readers?
3. The introduction locates this narrative within a transatlantic movement towards emancipation. It links together the American Revolution, the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1778, and the political movement for abolition of slavery that gained momentum in the British parliament during the 1780s (90). As documents of individual personal experience in gaining freedom, how did slave narratives participated in broader, larger emancipation movements? The abolitionist movement in Britain suffered a profound setback in the conservative reaction following the French Revolution in 1789 and struggled to keep the antislavery cause alive. How might witness testimony, such as that from Olaudah Equiano,

- Ottobah Cugoano, Boston King, and others have served to frame antislavery as a moral cause?
4. Do you think there is much actual geographical or ethnographic knowledge in the opening pages of chapter 1? What problems of the cultural knowledge appear in these first couple pages, and then again in chapter 2? Where is Mali in relation to 'the Barbary States' and Morocco? What might the use Prentiss makes of eighteenth-century travel texts indicate about his knowledge?
 5. Prentiss prefaces one of these copied-out passages with the statement "Here it may not be improper to digress so far from the narrative as to give a short history of these states..." (100). Reading this as a flat statement accepts the idea that this history of a faraway place is indeed a digression. However, some narrative theory might argue that there is no such thing as a digression, and that writers make arguments even as they appear to digress. If we accept this for present purposes, what is the meaning of such digression? Why are we reading botanical reports in chapter 2? Might the recollection of these strange fruits serve to authenticate the narrator to his readers? Could it be a way of appealing to readers' curiosity concerning the strange and marvelous? How might these recollections of the flora and fauna of his homeland serve the narrator?
 6. What sort of society emerges from the brief description of Deauyah, Boyrereau's home? Where the narrative describes his family life as "nature unshackled by artifice" (95), how do we reconcile it with the artifice of ceremonial life described immediately previous?
 7. Brace and Prentiss conclude chapter 1 (96-97) with Biblical passages. The choice and organization of these passages is one way Brace expresses himself, so it is important to examine his Bible selections carefully. The first selection, Ezekiel 2:1-8, represents the words of the prophet Ezekiel a few years before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. The passage emphasizes submission to the will of God and the prophet's counsel not to rebel against God. The second, Deuteronomy 28:64, contains a famous prophesy concerning the dispersal of the Hebrew tribes and their diasporic condition. The third passage, Exodus 22:20, enjoins against mistreatment of those who travel or live removed from their homes "for ye were strangers in the Land of Egypt." What is the logic of this order of citation?
 8. John Wesley interpreted the above Exodus passage as meaning that "A stranger must not be abused, not wronged in judgment by the magistrates, not imposed upon in contracts, nor any advantage taken of his ignorance or necessity, no, nor must he be taunted, or upbraided with his being a stranger; for all these were vexations. For ye were strangers in Egypt - And knew what it was to be vexed and oppressed there." There are different views concerning this portion of Exodus. A distinguished contemporary interpreter, Nehama Leibowitz, finds this passage to be an inadequate injunction, observing "how often do we find that the slave or

exile who gains power and freedom or anyone who harbors the memory of suffering to himself or his forebears finds compensation for his former sufferings by giving free reign to his tyrannical instincts when he has the opportunity to lord it over others?” (Leibowitz, *Studies in Shemot*, 1981) Where John Wesley reads positive law into the passage, Nehama Leibowitz views it as a frequently-violated and inherently too-weak moral injunction. Is Jeffrey Brace being much too hopeful in citing Exodus to remind his readers not to mistreat strangers and exiles? Or, considering his social vulnerability, is a religious defense against the enslavement and mistreatment of Africans his best hope under the circumstances? Is religious admonition sufficient to oppose an international, multi-religious, and transatlantic slavery system?

9. At the conclusion of chapter 2 appears another set of Bible passages, this time three psalms. The first, Psalm 133, calls for unity and fellowship. The second, Psalm 128, speaks of the blessings of family and home. And finally – noting that “The narrator feels the full force of the application of the following psalm to himself...” (108) – he invokes Psalm 129. Remembering that the last psalm addresses affliction and the operations of providence, how does this threesome of psalms cohere?

10. Brace derives the origin of Bow-woo religion and culture to Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses and a Midianite priest. (112, 115-117) Also, Brace uses Genesis 2 to suggest that the river Pishon (whose identity remains disputed in scholarly literature) and unidentified land of Havilah were in Africa. (113) What does he achieve by constructing such a mythic histories? Consider two points. First, a common proslavery justification for the enslavement of African peoples came in the citation of Biblical history, particularly the story of Noah’s son Ham and the alleged condemnation of his descendants to servitude. If Brace employs arguments based on biblical texts, how might he be challenging using the Bible to underwrite slavery and racism? Second, note how Brace addresses himself to his readers: “Now, altho I am a poor, despised wretch, in the sight of man, permit me, kind reader, to offer some ideas of mine, and do not despise them because they come from an African negro, who are, by white men, considered an inferior race of beings.” (112) How in this and following passages does Brace contest white racial monopoly on biblical interpretation? For further discussion of Biblicism, defenses of slavery, and religious origins of racial inequality in the West, see David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 64ff.

11. What is Brace’s relationship with Christianity, as evidenced in the retelling of his narrative to the point of his enslavement? How does he reconcile the contradiction between his enslavement and his embrace of the religion of the slave-masters? He speaks of Christians “who preach humility, charity, and benevolence” (119) and then cites Luke 23:34 (“Father forgive them for they know not what they do”). If, as Brace suggests, it is the slaves who are crucified like Christ, then in terms of traditional Christian belief what service do they

- perform for their white masters? There is a suggestive quotation of Luke 10:25-37 and the parable of the Good Samaritan (123). Why does Brace cite this parable aboard a slave ship? What moments of doubt occur where Brace questions his faith? (see 125)
12. Read the first four pages of chapter 4 recounting Brace's fourth day in captivity and his encounter with other freshly-enslaved people (120ff.). There are several different types of narrative here: personal memories, an antislavery poem, and biblical verses. Why does Brace use such a variety of genres? What effect does it create?
 13. There are multiple forms of violence in the slave ship that conveyed Brace and approximately three hundred fellow slaves from Africa to Barbados. How does this violence – beatings, rape, starvation, torture, murder – foreshadow the violence of a slave colony? Might we discuss the nameless ship of this narrative as a model of the slave-state where subject Africans lose control of their bodies? How does the ship serve to educate Africans concerning their status and role in the new society where they are headed? What are the consequences of open resistance aboard the slave ship?
 14. Chapters 4 and 5 contain numerous descriptions of rape on the slave ship and upon arrival in Barbados. There is palpable social fear of sexual violation that manifests itself in Brace's account. What psychological effects on African women and men might have occurred due to their relative powerlessness to prevent repetition of rape? In the Barbados prison, for example, Brace states 'Fathers and mothers were eye witnesses to their daughter's being despoiled. Husbands beheld their wives in the hands of the beastly destroyers. Children bore testimony of the brutality practiced upon their mothers.' (133-134) How might sexual violence have provided a psychological mechanism to create a subordinate slave mentality? Is there any evidence in this narrative that such trauma succeeded in transforming Brace into a mental slave as well as a physical slave? In relation to this question, note Brace's statement "The natural man must be obliterated and degraded, that even the thought of liberty must never be suffered to contaminate itself in a negro's mind; and the odious thing, equality, should be taught by European discipline never to raise its head." (137) How does the mass rape that Brace and others witness function as civil discipline in a slave society?
 15. How does Brace address white readers in describing such violence? Can we identify instances of bitter irony? Consider such passages as "Bango was sold and called for by the *humane* christian purchaser, who had doubtless been devoted to the covenants of our Lord and Saviour..." (132) or "Courteous reader, if you live in civilized society and enjoy the privileges of an enlightened people..." (133). Brace does not refer here to either humane or civilized acts, but joins the rhetorical practice of Equiano in using language that tries not to offend readers while describing intensely offensive acts. Is this a successful rhetorical strategy, or simply one they adopt with little recourse?

16. The ‘daughter of the King of Guingana’ story (134-136) employs a very old literary device, a frame story. Specifically, this is a single framed story set within a larger story. Framed stories often crystallize a central message within a larger story that storytellers are telling, or identify a narrator’s perspective. How might this story relate or crystallize a larger tale? How does it speak to relations between Africa and Euro-America? Another framed story appears at the beginning of chapter 6, this one by an unnamed countrywoman of Brace. How does this story differ from the preceding framed story? Is it significant that both framed narrators are women?
17. Research the career of the English poet William Cowper (1731-1800). Why would Jeffrey Brace quote his poem “The Negro’s Complaint”? Why did other authors of slave narratives quote Cowper?
18. Brace relates his desperate hunger, his beating at the hands of Welch, and inability to express himself. “Thus was I sold, and thus was I whipped, without being able to expostulate or enquire of my tyrant the reason for treating me in the foregoing manner...” (141) He immediately follows this statement with a poem, “The Negro Boy.” Why does the narrative employ the interjection of a poem at this point?
19. Brace appears to have a death-wish throughout much of the initial part of his captivity. He says at one point “I expected the white people would whip me to death, and I wished to die so that I could go back to my father and tell him what kind of beings there is in this country.” (144) At another point during a naval battle he states “I stood on the upper deck, exposed to all the enemy’s shot for about seven minutes, contemplating a meeting with my grandfather, who had gone before me. I was disappointed...” (149) But is this truly death instinct? One reason we speak about a wish to die is to conquer that desire, to live rather than to succumb. Does Brace really wish to die? Compare these thoughts with the dream in which he is flying back to his home in Africa (155), a dream that appears elsewhere in African American stories of ‘flying slaves.’ How does he awake from this pseudo-death vision? (156) How do such vision dreams help Brace overcome and survive thoughts of death?
20. Describe the relationship between Brace and Mary Stiles. (157-158) How do schooling and literacy create friendship between them? Note that until well into the nineteenth century it was very unusual for blacks to attend school in Connecticut. What sort of person must Mary Stiles have been to pay school tuition for Jeffrey Brace? What might be her motivations for doing so?
21. Brace concludes his account of his service in the War of Independence with the words “Thus was I, a slave, for five years fighting for liberty.” (166) What are the contradictions within this sentence and how does Brace reconcile them? How might Brace’s post-war emigration – remembering that Vermont was a separate

- country at this date – be viewed as a comment on the newly-independent American nation? What did Vermont promise in its 1777 constitution that made it attractive to Brace?
22. Brace provides only several sentences concerning his wife. (168) He describes her as “a native African female, who possessed a reciprocal abhorrence to slavery and whose sufferings had been equal to any that can be delineated by the pen...” (168) If we do not take at face value his explanation that it would make the memoir too long, why might Brace have been so reluctant to write on the subject of his wife?
 23. What sort of relations does the Brace family have with its white neighbors in Vermont? Using the latter parts of chapter 9 and chapter 10, provide examples of these relations.
 24. In *Slavery and Social Death* sociologist Orlando Patterson describes “natal alienation” as one of the constituent elements of slavery. In addition to using violence and degradation, he observes, slaveholders severed slaves from their ancestors and from their descendants, thus rendering them “genealogical isolates” or existential orphans. Describe how Brace is severed from his ancestors and how he resists that severance. Then examine how powerful white people in Vermont attempt to sever his and Susan’s connection to their children. Why do white people covet the Brace children? Why is it so important to Jeffrey and Susan to keep their children in their own family household? Consider the ways in which emotional, economic, and biological survival and well-being are intertwined. Discuss the long-term effects of what Orlando Patterson calls “natal alienation” on families and communities after slavery was abolished. In what ways are the bonds of kinship, community, and family simultaneously threatening and necessary to survival? How does “natal alienation” affect the protagonists’ struggles to deny and/or to affirm family and community?
 25. Chapter 11 deals with Brace’s religious conversion. It is a chapter that aligns him with African slave narratives published in the eighteenth century, such as those of Olaudah Equiano and Boston King. Why does he believe that “all nature held me in abhorrence” in his unconverted state? (181) Might social alienation contribute to a conversion experience such as he reports? How does Brace interpolate his evangelical faith with a belief in human equality? Consider the possibility of reading his reported conversion and change of heart as parallel to the reason he provides for writing this “simple narrative,” that reason being to open “the hearts of those who hold slaves and move them to consent to give them that freedom which they themselves enjoy, and which all mankind have an equal right to possess.” (182)
 26. Many critics have observed that US society suffers from historical amnesia cultivated by people who argue that we make progress by forgetting the past (as if forgetting is the same as putting it behind us.) In contrast, writers in the slave

narrative tradition emphasize the importance of remembering the past. James Baldwin argues that the blues artist risks "ruin, destruction, madness, and death, in order to find new ways to make us listen. For, while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we triumph is never new, it always must be heard." In an interview Toni Morrison observes:

The past is the way we were, it's who we are. It's avoiding it, pretending it was something else, lying about it, deceiving ourselves about it that causes the problem of growing up, of being an adult, of occupying the body and the mind completely. Even on a personal level, pretending that one had no childhood or that there were not unpleasant things in it, that paralyzes growth. It also paralyzes the possibility of getting through it and reaching bliss and reaching a level where you really belong in this place, where you really belong and you know that you belong and that there's work to do.

What does *The Blind African Slave* teach you about the interpenetration of past and present, the living and the dead? What does Brace's story of suffering, survival, and (qualified) triumph reveal about American and world history? Why is it important to remember and to pass on stories about slavery and the struggle for liberation? In what ways is the past inextricably linked to the present? What is the importance of memory in Brace's story?

27. Meditate on the literal and symbolic meanings of home. What does "home" represent to Jeffrey Brace? In what ways are he and other Africans dispossessed of their homes? What does home mean to slave traders and slaveholders? What relation do they build between their possession of their own homes (bodies, houses, countries) and the dispossession of other people? Theodore Adorno once said that the highest form of morality is not to feel at home in your own home. What do you think he meant?

APPENDIX A

Mali to Vermont: A Transatlantic Timeline for Jeffrey Brace

This timeline provides information on African, Caribbean and early US historical and religious events that provide context to the life of Jeffrey Brace (approx. 1742-1827).

1585-late 18 th century	Moroccans conquer Mali, replacing the Songhai empire; after the conquest, Timbuktu declines as a commercial and cultural center.
1738	Methodist movement led by John Wesley begins.
1741	Jonathan Edwards publishes his sermon ‘Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God’; the Great Awakening evangelical movement sweeps through the colonies.
1742	Approximate date of Brace’s birth in Mali.
1750-1800	Transatlantic slave trade at its peak.
1754	French and Indian Wars begin (known in Europe as the Seven Years’ War).
1755	Jean Jacques Rousseau, <i>Discourse on the Origin of Human Inequality</i>
1758	John Wesley baptizes two African American slaves, breaking the color line for Methodists.
1760	Britton Hammon, <i>The Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings and Surprising Deliverance of Britton Hammon, a Negro Man</i>
1761	Phillis Wheatley, age eight, arrives in Boston on a slave-ship and is sold at dockside; she speaks only Wolof; eight years later she publishes her first book of poetry.
1762	Brace participates in the British assault on Havana; later that year he arrives in Boston.
1763	Treaty of Paris ends ‘Seven Years’ War’; England gains Canada from the French; Brace taken to New Haven, Connecticut; in Vermont, the town of Georgia chartered.
1768-	Brace becomes a slave to the Stiles family in Woodbury, Connecticut.
1776-83	American Revolution; Brace serves as a soldier from 1777-1783.
1777	Republic of Vermont promulgates a constitution that bans slavery.
1779	Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom enacted; written by Jefferson, it guarantees separation of church and state and holds “the opinions of men are not the object of civil government, nor under its jurisdiction.”
1780	Pennsylvania becomes the first state to ban slavery – but for newborns only.
1783	Brace gains his freedom in 1783 due to military service, despite claims of his former master, Benjamin Stiles; Brace emigrates to Vermont.
1784	Connecticut legislature passes an act for gradual emancipation of slaves.
1785	David Walker born in Wilmington, North Carolina.
1786	Vermont legislature passes “An Act to Prevent the Sale and Transportation of Negroes and Malattoes Out of This State.”

- 1787 Freed slaves found Sierra Leone under British rule. In Philadelphia, Richard Allen and Absalom Jones found the Free African Society, a religious mutual aid organization.
- 1789 French Revolution begins; Olaudah Equiano publishes *An Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Written by Himself*.
- 1791 Vermont becomes 14th US state.
- 1795 *The Age of Reason*, Thomas Paine.
- 1796 European exploration of Mali begins. Mungo Park, Scottish surgeon, reaches the Niger River at Segou; Park describes his journey in *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa*; in 1806 Park travels 1500 miles up the Niger River, loses a small military force, and drowns.
- 1801 Haitian Revolution begins, led by Toussaint L'Ouverture.
- 1804 British and Foreign Bible Society established for missionary work in Africa and elsewhere.
- 1805 After a religious conversion, Brace receives baptism at the Baptist church in Georgia, Vermont.
- 1807 Great Britain abolishes the slave trade.
- 1810 *The Blind African Slave* published in St. Albans, Vermont.
- 1811 Captain Paul Cuffe, son of an ex-slave and a Massachusetts Indian woman, leads an all-black exploration expedition to Sierra Leone; in 1815 he returns there with 38 colonists.
- 1816 Richard Allen, an ex-slave in Philadelphia, founds the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the first African American denomination.
- 1818 Approximate date of birth of Frederick Douglass on Maryland's Eastern Shore.
- 1819 Vermont Colonization Society formed (see John Hough, [*A Sermon Delivered Before the Vermont Colonization Society*](#), 1826) to advocate returning blacks to Africa as unsuitable for life in white American society.
- 1821 Industrialization in New England. Lowell, Massachusetts mills recruit women from Vermont.
- 1822 Freed US slaves establish Liberia, aided by the American Colonization Society.
- 1823 Alexander Twilight becomes first African American to earn a college degree, at Middlebury; he later serves in the Vermont legislature. Champlain Canal opens, linking Lake Champlain with the Hudson River; Vermont opens to water-borne commerce.
- 1827 Jeffrey Brace dies.
- 1828 Mali becomes better-known to the West. René Caillié of France becomes the first European to reach Timbuktu and survive to publish the tale; wins 10,000-france prize from the Geographical Society of Paris.
- 1829 David Walker publishes first pan-Africanist political text, *Appeal to the Coloured People of the World*; Walker dies following year.
- 1834 Vermont Antislavery Society forms; abolitionist Samuel May is mobbed next year in Montpelier and prevented from speaking.
- 1849 Vermont legislature resolves that slavery is "a crime against humanity."

APPENDIX B

Model Paper Assignment for *The Blind African Slave*

This paper assignment emphasizes comparison and contrast within a small group of early African American life narratives in order to construct an abstract argument. It lets students choose their own argument and employs a group process to elucidate possible argumentative theses that link these narratives to contemporary society.

**From: English 353
African American Literature to the Harlem Renaissance
Arizona State University
Instructor: Joe Lockard**

Paper Assignment

To date in this course, we have read three early African American life narratives by Olaudah Equiano, Boston King, and Jeffrey Brace. They were forced participants in the creation of the African diaspora, one of the most influential developments in global history. All three shared common experiences of enslavement in Africa, transport to the Americas, and eventual freedom. Each had a distinctive and memorable voice, and there is a collective grandness to their voices.

As we read such 18th-century stories, questions arise concerning how this literature affects our thinking as contemporary readers. How do we make present-day sense of this reading in order to link together three separate stories of enslavement and liberation?

Essay Question

Based on textual evidence, how can you employ these three narratives in a conceptual argument applicable to contemporary discussion? For example:

- What is the nature of freedom in these narratives? How do the authors view freedom and how should we?
- Each of these narratives is a theodicy, or an argument reconciling an assumed divine presence with the existence of worldly evil. How do the authors treat the idea of evil, and does this resonate in contemporary US rhetoric?
- How do these narratives speak to interracial relations of their time and the present day?

This is a self-directed paper: it is up to you to invent your own question and argument. You have ideas, concerns, and vision. Bring these to bear in how you write this paper.

Check-in

On [date], bring to class a typed one-paragraph statement of your paper idea, including your name. We will read aloud and discuss these ideas. Throwing out your own first idea and working with someone else's better idea is not only allowed, it is encouraged.

Evaluation

A persuasive paper will be one that frames a broader argument from the outset concerning the narratives, and employs brief textual evidence in support of the specifics of that argument. Ensure that your response has a single, analytic, and unifying thesis, not multiple argumentative claims. Papers should discuss the narratives in roughly comparable length and detail.

Your paper should not be one that is simply a paragraphed checklist of disparate observations, followed by a gross generalization, irrelevant truism, or false conclusion. Please remember the illustrative class reading from the Morpheus-Neo dialogue in *Matrix*¹ on the point of how the concept of ‘slavery’ can be stretched far beyond reason or social context, and avoid this error (e.g. papers beginning with “Ah, life is slavery...”).

Your paper will be graded on the basis of (a) a clear and convincing argument that emerges from the beginning; (b) a sustained and focused examination of the implications of that argument throughout the paper; (c) appropriate use of brief citations to provide evidentiary support for the argument; and (d) competence of writing skills and absence of technical errors.

Technical

This paper should total five complete double-spaced pages, not including a title page. Use 1-inch margins and 12-pt. Times New Roman type. Single-space citations and use parenthetical page references (no footnotes). Avoid unnecessary first-person reference (e.g. “I think...”) or overuse of the passive voice. Because this paper is short, keep your argument and examples tight. Text citations should be very brief, no more than a line or so.

Do not use any sources beyond the narratives and do no library research. The object here lies in a close reading and interpretive engagement with the texts. Your ideas are what matter, not someone else’s opinion. For this reason, plagiarism will be treated in strict accordance with university policy guidelines.

* * *

¹ *Morpheus*: Let me tell you why you’re here. You’re here because you know something. What you know you can’t explain, but you feel it. You’ve felt it your entire life, that there’s something wrong with the world. You don’t know what it is, but it’s there, like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad. It is this feeling that has brought you to me. Do you know what I’m talking about?

Neo: The Matrix.

Morpheus: Do you want to know what it is?

Neo: Yes.

Morpheus: The Matrix is everywhere. It is all around us. Even now, in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work... when you go to church... when you pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.

Neo: What truth?

Morpheus: That you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else you were born into bondage. Into a prison that you cannot taste or see or touch. A prison for your mind.



The Antislavery Literature Project