

English 175: Introduction to American Literature

Hidden Town: Slave Narratives, Global and Local

Last year the “[Slavery, Race and Memory Project](#)” started work to “guide the research, preservation, and communication of an accurate depiction of the University’s relationship to slavery and its implications across Wake Forest’s history.” Questions about the relationships between Universities and the enslaved people whose unpaid labor they profited from are impacting campuses across and beyond the US South, from Georgetown students starting a reparations fund to the existence of a [Universities Studying Slavery](#) consortium. But in thinking about the multitude of ways that Wake Forest has profited from slave labor we will also look beyond our campuses and to the broader community, or the history of Winston-Salem. We will do this by considering not just a series of the most famous slave narratives ever written but by turning from those famous stories to local narratives and accounts of the lives of enslaved people in Salem, NC. Literature courses often focus on famous canonical texts, especially at the introductory level. But in this section of “Interpreting American Literature” you will have the opportunity to be part of new attempts to interpret materials that have not been discussed—many of which are still unpublished after spending years in boxes of documents that were viewed as irrelevant. Put another way: in this course we will engage with materials that have been left out of our inherited histories. And we will do this by working with [Old Salem’s Hidden Town Project](#): a groundbreaking initiative that works to research and reveal the history of a community of enslaved and freed Africans and African Americans who lived in “Old Salem.” At this stage in Hidden Town’s development ten boxes of archival materials represent ten slave dwellings that have been identified within Old Salem’s grounds. A group of curators, interns, and volunteers are working to unravel and then piece together threads of the complicated use of slave labor to build the town and then contribute to the mercantile prosperity of Salem—and Winston-Salem today. And in this community engagement section of ENG 175 you will help them with that work, producing a digital exhibit that interprets and helps contextualize these stories with research and creative work.

Our course will begin with two of the most famous slave narratives ever written: Frederick Douglass’ *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. We will also read literature inscribed on pots made by David Drake, or “Dave the Potter,” which will lead us to questions about genre, or what, exactly, the relationships between artifacts and narratives are. Next we will think about slave narratives as objects, turning to primary texts in Special Collections that you will learn about and summarize in small groups, processing the histories of these material artifacts and crowdsourcing more information about the conventions and traditions of slave narratives, developing a deeper understanding of how the genre works. After this broad introduction to writing by people who were enslaved, we will turn to the community engagement portion of the course, virtually visiting the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts to see parts of the actual house where Harriet Jacobs lived, pots made by David Drake, and other materials related to slavery in the American South. Then you will start projects that contribute to [hiddentown.org](#), working in groups to produce related research papers and creative projects that bring this material to life: from stories or children’s books to podcasts or short films. These creative projects will have a real audience: students preparing to visit Old Salem.

Learning Outcomes

- To learn about both the history of slavery and the genre of the slave narrative
- To situate that history and literature within a number of relevant contexts
- To improve close reading skills
- To conduct research and engage with both primary sources and literary criticism
- To produce, support, and revise argumentative essays
- To develop creative responses to artifacts connected to the history of slavery in our community
- To understand and practice sharing information with both public and scholarly audiences
- To share and collaboratively develop ideas about literature, criticism, and your own writing
- To develop digital literacy in a multimodal world

Required Texts

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Norton Critical (ISBN 9780393614565)
Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Bedford, ISBN 9781319048891)

Schedule of Readings & Assignments

I. Famous Narratives

January 27: Introductions to the class and to each other

"[The Idea of America](#)" by Nikole Hannah-Jones

February 1: Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Preface – Chapter 8)

February 3: Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Chapter 9-Appendix)

Douglass' "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?"

[Douglass' Descendants Deliver his Fourth of July Speech](#)

February 8: Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Preface – XXV)

February 10: Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (XXVI – Appendix)

February 15: Dave the Potter couplets and background ([here](#))

"Signifying Marks and The 'Not Counted' Inscriptions of Dave the Potter" ([here](#))

Introduce Critical Response Papers & Special Collection Projects

February 17: **Critical Response Paper Workshops**

II. Lesser-Known Narratives: Special Collections & Local Archives

February 22: MESDA Virtual Tour

On the history and evolution of MESDA ([here](#))

"Black and White all Mix'd Together": The Hidden Legacy of Enslaved Craftsmen ([here](#))

Explore the [MESDA craftsmen database](#) using the "status" menu for free black, indentured, and slave artisans. Get a sense of what kinds of records exist for craftsmen of African descent.

Add at least 100 words about something that interests you to [this google doc](#). (Questions count!)
(This is to help our tour guide get ready for your visit.)

Submit Preference Form for Special Collections Texts & Groups by noon

February 24: **Critical Response Paper Workshops**

March 1: Introduction to Special Collections

March 3: Optional Zoom meetings to go over special collections projects: sign up [here](#).

March 8: Special Collections Project Workshops

March 10: Optional Zoom meetings to go over special collections projects: sign up [here](#).

III. Unpublished Local Narratives: The Hidden Town Project at Old Salem

March 15: Introduction to your Hidden Town Projects & possible objects

Hidden Town [website](#), along with the three linked pieces of coverage in newspapers

Hiddentown.org, view last year's projects

Answer brief questions on the following google docs ([Section L](#) | [Section M](#))

March 17: Optional Zoom meetings to go over special collections projects: sign up [here](#).

Special Collections Projects Due by 10 PM

March 19: **Submit Object Selections for Final Projects by 5 PM**

March 22: How to do material culture research with Daniel Ackermann & Johanna Brown

March 24: Sometime this week: consult via email/phone/video with your assigned librarian or archivist.

March 29: Zoom lecture on and context about Hidden Town from Martha Hartley, co-chair of the project.

Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World*, Introduction ([here](#))

Ferguson's *God's Fields*, Ch. 1 & 10 ([here](#))

The Lebenslauf (i.e. life story) of Abraham, along with other materials (155-171) ([here](#))

March 31: Zoom meetings in your small groups: sign up [here](#).

April 5: Introduction to Digital Essays, Adobe Rush, and other possible technology with Brianna Derr.

April 7: No Class: "Spring Break"

April 12: Pitch your ideas to Old Salem's Learning in Place Team: sign up [here](#).

April 14: Zoom meetings with Brianna Derr to go over questions and ideas in your groups: sign up [here](#).

April 19: Work-in-progress presentations to get conceptual feedback and ideas from the class

April 21: Optional Zoom meetings in your small groups to go over any questions: sign up [here](#).

April 26: Draft workshops

April 28: Optional Zoom meetings in your small groups to go over any questions: sign up [here](#).

May 3: Conclusions & Evaluations

Submit written responses to work-in-progress presentations.

May 5: Zoom meetings in your small groups to go over any final questions: sign up [here](#).

May 12: Submit final projects by 5 PM.

May 14: Submit reflective writing by 5 PM.

Assignments

- Participation: 20%
- Critical Response Paper: 5-page argumentative essay about a slave narrative or narratives: 20%
- Special Collections Crowdsourcing: compare another slave narrative to work we read in class: 10%
- Hidden Town Group Projects: research paper and creative project to educate students: 50%