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Fall 8-15-2021

### ENG 4750-600: Studies in African-American Literature

Angela Vietto

*Eastern Illinois University*

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#### Recommended Citation

Vietto, Angela, "ENG 4750-600: Studies in African-American Literature" (2021). *Fall 2021*. 81.  
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## English 4750: Studies in African-American Literature

Fall 2021

Prof. Angela Vietto

Office hours: By appointment, online or in the office: <https://calendly.com/vietto/30min>

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### Course Description:

African-American literature as presented in courses most often begins with mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century authors, and often focuses largely on 20<sup>th</sup>-century or contemporary literature. And there are good reasons to focus on those materials—a lot of tremendously great and culturally important writing. But this tendency can give the unfortunate impression that earlier writing by Africans and African-Americans in English didn't exist before the 1840s or so.

In this course, we will take the opportunity to read the earliest African-American writing, primarily before 1800. This will mean engaging with life-writing in a variety of forms; poetry, which was the most prestigious literary genre of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries; and other popular 18<sup>th</sup>-century genres such as sermons, essays, and letters. While these texts often deal with incredibly difficult circumstances, including the worst examples of inhumanity, they also show us the resilience of people who resisted their dehumanization and fought back in literary culture as one of many tools of resistance.

### Texts:

- From TRS, just one book: *The Interesting Narrative*
- Most of our texts are digital, supplied through D2L
- For our final project, I will ask you to select and work with a contemporary text, which you'll need to obtain from Booth Library or your local library if you are not on campus (or of course you're also welcome to purchase a copy instead).

### Learning Objectives

1. To provide strategies for reading, analyzing, and appreciating works of early African-American literature for the insight they provide about relevant genres (autobiography, poetry, protest literature, and maybe a bit of fiction) as well as early American history and culture.
2. To allow each member of the class to engage the significant issues and questions raised by the texts through writing, research, creativity, and discussion forums.
3. To assist in the development of skills of critical reading, analytical thinking, and argumentative writing.

**Student Disability Services:** If you are a student with a documented disability in need of accommodations to fully participate in this class, please contact Student Disability Services (SDS). All accommodations must be approved through SDS. Please stop by McAfee Gym, room 1210 or call 217-581-6583 to make an appointment.

**Academic integrity:** Students are expected to maintain principles of academic integrity and conduct as defined in EIU's Code of Conduct (<http://www.eiu.edu/judicial/studentconductcode.php>). Violations will be reported to the Office of Student Standards

**The Student Success Center:** Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center ([www.eiu.edu/~success](http://www.eiu.edu/~success)) for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to McAfee Gym, Room 1301.

**The Electronic Writing Portfolio:** Any written project of 750 words or longer written for this class would be suitable for submission to the EWP. Submissions must be made by the last day of finals week at the end

of the semester. Earlier deadlines apply for graduating seniors. *Note: The EWP requirement applies to undergraduate students only.*

**The English Department Statement on Plagiarism:** Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—“The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one’s own original work” (*Random House Dictionary of the English Language*)—has the right and responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignments of a grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Office of Student Standards. Respect for the work of others should encompass all formats, including print, electronic, and oral sources.

**Writing Center:** I encourage you to use EIU's Writing Center located at 3110 Coleman Hall. This free service provides one-to-one conferences with writing center consultants who can help you with brainstorming, organizing, developing support, documenting your papers, and working with sentence-level concerns. The writing center is open to help any student from any major at any stage of his or her writing process, and its system of one-to-one conferences demonstrates value and respect for individual writers, all of whom can benefit from feedback about their works in progress. Scheduling information is provided via the Writing Center link on the home page of our course.

**English Teacher Education Majors:** Students seeking Teacher Certification in English Language Arts should provide each of their English Department professors with a copy of the yellow form called "Application for English Department Approval to Student Teach" before the end of the semester. These forms are available online here: <https://www.eiu.edu/english/machform/view.php?id=19831>.

**Assignments, Deadlines & Extensions:** If an emergency arises and you must miss a deadline, please let me know, preferably by text message, before the deadline and simply ask for an extension. If you do this—again, before the deadline—there will be no penalty to your grade.

**Graduate Students and Undergraduates:** This course is open to both upper-division students at the undergraduate level and to graduate students. Like all courses at the 4750-4999 level, the course has some additional expectations for anyone taking the course for graduate credit (which includes graduate students as well as undergraduates in the accelerated BA/MA program who are taking the course for credit in both programs). Specifically, those taking the course for graduate credit will be expected to use more secondary sources in both the mid-term essay and the final essay, which may naturally tend to lengthen those essays a few pages beyond the length expected for undergraduate students.

### Grading & Assignments

Reading & discussion postings / quizzes	40%
Mid-term essay	20%
Contemporary lit presentation	20%
Final project	20%

### Final Grading Scale

A	90–100%
B	80–89.99%
C	70–79.99%
D	60–69.99%
F	59.99% and below

**Reading & discussion postings:** Many students have some discussion posting fatigue from last year. But discussing literature is how we further our analytical thinking about it, and is central to the work of a literature course. So: (a) I've given a large percentage of the course grade to discussion postings, in order to give you adequate credit for doing the most central part of the work of the course, (b) I am more interested in **quality** than quantity in your discussion postings (more instructions in D2L) and (c) we will not have reading quizzes as long as discussion postings demonstrate that most people are doing most of the reading in a serious way.

**Mid-term essay:** The mid-term essay will ask you to write in response to one of the texts we read during weeks 1-6, considering both its literary characteristics and some aspect of cultural history to aid in developing your interpretation of the text. An opportunity for revision will be offered in the second half of the semester.

**Contemporary lit presentation:** You will select a work of contemporary fiction/film (since, say, the 1960s or so) that deals with the historical era we have been reading, and analyze it in light of what you've learned from the readings in our course. I'll ask you to produce a presentation for the rest of the class in which you present your analysis. Ideally, this will be a video presentation, but if that's a difficulty, you can talk with me about possibilities.

The **final project** will be wide open, with a few constraints. Pedagogical, creative/analytical, public humanities, and traditional academic essay options will be available.

### Reading Schedule

*Note: In addition to readings listed below, each week will include a video lecture or other resources and one or in some cases two discussion postings. For specific deadlines and detailed instructions for major assignments, see D2L.*

Week 1 Aug 23 – 29

#### Introductions

**Primary text:** *Some Memoirs of the Life of Job* (1734)

Week 2 Aug 30 – Sept 5

**Primary texts (several short ones this week):**

*A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprising Deliverance of Briton* (1760)

*The Life and Dying Speech of Arthur* (1768)

*A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince* (1770)

Week 3 Sept 6 – 12

**Primary text:** Phillis Wheatley, *Poems on Various Subjects*

**Secondary:** Cluster on Age of Phillis from special issue on race, religion, and revolution in *Studies in Religion and the Enlightenment*

Week 4 Sept 13 – 19

**Primary texts:** Declaration of Independence and Lemuel Haynes, *Liberty Further Extended* (1776)

Week 5 Sept 20 – 26

**Primary text:** *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho* (1782)

Week 6 Sept 27 – Oct 3

**Primary texts:**

Belinda, "Petition of an African Slave" (1782)

*A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black* (1785)

*The Life and Confession of Johnson Green* (1786)

Week 7 Oct 4 – 10

**Writing week: mid-term essay**

Week 8 Oct 11 – 17

**Primary texts:**

Selected letters and poems of Jupiter Hammon  
Petition of 1788 by slaves of New Haven for the abolition of slavery in Connecticut  
Petition to End Slavery (in Massachusetts) (1788)

Week 9 Oct 18 – 24

**Primary text:** Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, Part I

Week 10

Oct 25 – 31

**Primary text:** Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, Part II

Week 11

Nov 1 – 7

**This week, primary texts will be self-selected from**

Banneker's letter to Jefferson (1791)

A Memorial to the South Carolina Senate (1791)

David George, *An account of the life of Mr. David George* (1793)

*Dying Confession of Pomp* (1795)

*Life, Last Words and Dying Speech of Stephen Smith* (1797)

*The Address of Abraham Johnstone* (1797)

The 1797 Petition to Congress from four free African Americans to protect freed slaves from capture and resale

Week 12

Nov 8 – 14

**Primary texts:**

*Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture* (1798)

*Memoirs of the Life of Boston King* (1798)

Weeks 13

Nov 15 – 21

**Writing and presentation development for contemporary lit presentation**

Thanksgiving

Nov 22 – 28

Week 14

Nov 29 – Dec 5

**Sharing and responding to contemporary lit presentations**

Week 15 &  
Finals week

Dec 6 - 16

**Writing time for final essay**