

LITERATURE OF THE (POST)PLANTATION

EPB 12 – M/W, 5:00-6:15

Instructor: Enrico Bruno

MAJOR COURSE TEXTS

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852 play)
Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)
Charles Chesnutt, *The Conjure Woman* (1899)
W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)
Langston Hughes, *Mulatto* (1930)
William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936)
Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (1977)
Claudia Rankine, *Citizen* (2014)



Boone Hall Plantation, ca. 1925, Edwin Harleston

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The antebellum plantation has long been a focal point of American economic, political, and social history. Slave labor was essential in building the early American economy and was a primary catalyst for the Civil War. Despite the dehumanizing conditions of the plantation and laws that prohibited literacy amongst enslaved peoples, the plantation produced enduring works of literature, from the autobiographies penned by former slaves to the anti-slavery texts written by white abolitionists. It is in these works that our exploration of plantation literatures begins.

But this course is interested not only in the literature that came directly from the plantation, but also the texts that emerged from what critic Valerie Loichot calls the *postplantation*. While the Thirteenth Amendment may have ended the specific form of plantation slavery that ruled the American South for over a century, attitudes and patterns of behavior on the plantation left a legacy that extends far beyond 1863. By examining texts from the late 19th century through the 21st century, we will identify how the collapse of slavery created shockwaves in the way Americans conceive of race and belonging that reverberate today, in our political and legal structures, our conceptions of distinct U.S. geographies, and our broader cultural narratives of national identity.

The course begins with texts written and published before the start of the Civil War that paint sometimes conflicting portraits of the plantation; works by former slaves, abolitionists, and white regionalists will help us understand how 19th century Americans experienced the plantation through literature. Texts from the Reconstruction period will demonstrate how the racial caste system of the plantation was not wholly eradicated by Emancipation, but redesigned via Jim Crow laws and a history of racial violence. We'll spend the last few weeks of class considering how post-Civil Rights literature represented African American unfreedom, then finally consider how the postplantation survives today via the racial caste system of mass incarceration, the persistence of racial stereotypes, and police brutality.

The course requires a mid-term essay that asks you to respond to one of several prompts that will allow you to demonstrate your close reading and analytical skills while focusing on a single

course text. A final research paper will ask you to consider how a major course text responds to the historical moment from which it emerges. In addition to these two longer assignments, you should submit two short response papers (roughly 850 words) at any point in the semester; these response papers should put two course readings in conversation by drawing connections between their thematic concerns, discussing how they complicate one another, etc.

GRADING

Final grades will be determined on the University's A-F grade scale, with A as the highest possible grade. Course grades depend mainly on a series of major writing assignments. The rest of your grade depends on engaged and respectful participation and a course presentation.

Final Grade Percentages:

20%	Mid-term essay
25%	Final essay
20%	Engaged and respectful daily participation
20%	Notebooks (homework, in-class and short assignments, etc.)
15%	Two short response papers

Assessing Grades:

Grades for major assignments will be posted on ICON under "Grades" approximately two weeks after the due date. Your participation grades will be posted once at midterm and once at the end of the semester. If you have a question or concern about a grade on a particular assignment, please observe the 24/7 rule: wait 24 hours to contact me about the assignment, but do not contact me 7 days after I returned the assignment with a final grade.

CALENDAR OF COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAMS

This is a tentative calendar and is subject to change. Updates will be posted to ICON and/or shared in class. Students are responsible for tracking course activities, readings, and assignments as the semester progresses.

UNIT I: THE PLANTATION

Week 1:

M: Introductions to course

W: Excerpts from Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (ICON)

Week 2:

M: Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Acts I-II)

W: Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Acts III-IV)

Week 3:

M: Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Act V)

W: Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Chs. 1-13)

Week 4:

M: Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Chs. 14-30)

W: Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Chs. 31-41)

UNIT II: THE RECONSTRUCTION SOUTH

Week 5:

M: Thomas Nelson Page, "Marse Chan: A Tale of Old Virginia" [ICON]

W: Selections from Charles Chesnutt, *The Conjure Woman* [ICON]

Week 6:

M: Excerpts from Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery*; W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (The Forethought, Chs. I-III)

W: W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chs. IV-VII)

Week 7:

M: W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Ch. VIII-XIV)

W: Selections of poetry (Dunbar, Whitman, Johnson) [ICON]

UNIT III: THE OLD AND NEW SOUTH

Week 8:

M: Langston Hughes, *Mulatto* (Act I)

W: Langston Hughes, *Mulatto* (Act II)

Week 9:

M: Excerpts from Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*

W: William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (Chs. I-III)

Week 10:

M: William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (Chs. IV-VI)

W: William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (Ch. VII)

Week 11:

M: William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (Chs. VIII-IX)

W: Harlem Renaissance poetry (McKay, Hughes, Brown) [ICON]

UNIT IV: THE POSTPLANTATION

Week 12:

M: James Baldwin, "Notes of a Native Son"; excerpts from Valerie Loichot, *Orphan Narratives* [ICON]

W: Virginia Hamilton, "The People Could Fly" [ICON]; Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (Chs. 1-2)

Week 13:

M: Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (Chs. 3-6)

W: Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (Chs. 7-10)

Week 14:

M: Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (Chs. 11-15)

W: *Thirteenth* (documentary); excerpts from Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*

Week 15:

M: Claudia Rankine, *Citizen* (Pts. I-V)

W: Claudia Rankine, *Citizen* (Pts. VI-VII)