

**Instructor: Mariana Teixeira Marques-Pujol**

**Course: Slave Narratives: Politics and Culture in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century America**

**Number of class hours : 20h**

## **Syllabus**

**Sciences Po Toulouse**

**English track**

**International and Comparative Studies**

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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

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At the crossroads of the autobiography, the historical document, and the novel, slave narratives have been calling the attention of scholars from different fields since the 1940s. Such accounts of the journey of slaves toward freedom were found in judicial records, journals, and broadsides and were also published in separate books as early as the 1780s. These very personal stories, in the middle ground between fact and fiction, have contributed to shaping national narratives both in the United Kingdom and in the United States – according to the abolitionist Theodore Parker, “*all the original romance of Americans is in them, not in the white man’s novel*” (1849). In this course, students will learn the characteristics of the genre of slave narratives and its evolution from the 18th century onwards through the analysis of excerpts and the reference to sources such as the Library of Congress collection “Born In Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936 to 1938.” They will also discuss the political and cultural impacts of 18th and 19th-century slave narratives on 20th-century African-American historiography and fiction, and its influences on current activist trends.

### **ASSESSMENT:**

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Quizzes (40%)

Group Discussion (20%)

Conference report (40%)

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

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Recent editions of Slave Narratives:

Douglass, Frederik, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave. Written by Himself*. Edited with an Introduction by David W. Blight. Boston, New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1993.

Equiano, Olaudah, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*. Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Vincent Carretta. London: Penguin, 2003.

Jacobs, Harriet A. (Harriet Ann). *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers. With an Introduction by Valerie Smith. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Northup, Solomon. *Twelve Years a Slave*. Edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. Introduction by Ira Berlin. New York; London: Penguin Classics, 2012.

Truth, Sojourner. *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*. Introduction by Nell Irvin Painter. New York; London: Penguin Classics, 1998.

#### Primary Sources (W.P.A. Interviews):

Collection "Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938." <https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/about-this-collection/>

#### General Bibliography:

Berlin, Ira, Marc Favreau, and Steven F. Miller, *Remembering Slavery: African Americans Talk About their Personal Experiences of Slavery and Freedom*. New York: New Press, 1998

Crew, Spencer, Lonnie Bunch and Clement Price, eds., *Slave Culture: a documentary of the slave narratives from the Federal Writers' Project*. Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood, 2014.

Davis, Charles T., ed., *The Slave's Narrative*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Ernest, John, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the African American Slave Narrative*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Fisch, Audrey, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to The African American Slave Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Jackson, Edward Mercia, *American Slavery and the American Novel, 1852-1977*. Bristol, Ind., U.S.A.: Wyndham Hall Press, 1987.

Kolchin, Peter, *American Slavery. 1619-1877*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2003.

Lewis, Janaka Bowman, *Freedom Narratives of African American Women: a Study of 19<sup>th</sup> century writings*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2017.

Plasa, Carl, *The Discourse of Slavery: Aphra Behn to Toni Morrison*. London; New York: Routledge, 1994.

Rawick, George P, *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography: supplement, series 1. Contributions in Afro-American and African studies; no. 35*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Pub. Co., 1977.

Starling, Marion Wilson, *The Slave Narrative: Its Place in American History*. 2nd ed. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1988.

#### COURSE CONTENT:

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The course will deal with the following topics:

- Slavery and slave narratives
- Equiano and the “origins” of the African American slave narrative
- Antebellum slave narratives: Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and more
- Slave narratives in American literature
- 20<sup>th</sup>-century literary texts and projects associated to slave narratives

The general objectives of the course are:

- To understand and identify the basic characteristics of slave narratives and what can make them part of the American literary corpus
- To locate fictional and critical texts within their contexts and traditions
- To perform a critical reading of secondary sources and use them to substantiate the analysis of texts

In terms of skills, the course aims at allowing students to:

- Learn and practice close reading
- Develop their oral & public speaking skills through group discussions
- Learn and/or practice writing a conference report

#### COURSE SCHEDULE:

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Please note that the following schedule might be adapted.

Week	Topics/Activities
1 / Jan 6	Course Introduction. Discussion of Caleb Bingham’s “Dialogue Between a Master and a Slave” (1797)
2 / Jan 13	The rise, development and circulation of the slaves narratives. Discussion of excerpts of O. Equiano’s <i>The Interesting Narrative</i> (1794 edition)
3 / Jan 20	Discussion of excerpts of Frederick Douglass’s <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave. Written by Himself</i> .

4 / Jan 27	QUIZ 1 + Discussion of excerpts of Frederick Douglass's <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave. Written by Himself.</i>
5 / Feb 03	The slave narrative in American literature
6 / Feb 10	Discussion of excerpts of Harriet Jacobs, <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.</i>
7 / Feb 17	QUIZ 2 + Telling slavery in "freedom's" time (discussion of different texts & online materials)
8 / Mar 03	Telling slavery in "freedom's" time (discussion of different texts & online materials)
9 / Mar 10	GROUP DISCUSSIONS
10 / Mar 17	CONFERENCE