

PAPER 1 PROMPT (GROUP 1):
SLAVERY, FREEDOM, AND SECTIONAL CONFLICT

Due by the beginning of class on Tuesday, 10 February 2015
(4-6 typed pages, 1" margins, 12-pt. Times New Roman, double-spaced)

*Paper should be submitted in both **HARD** and **ELECTRONIC** copies via ANGEL*
Please use .doc or .docx format (I cannot read .odx or .pages files)

For your first paper assignment, you will consider the meaning and experience of slavery and freedom for antebellum African-Americans, as well as their role in bringing the conflict over slavery to a head. Your sources for the paper will be as follows:

- Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*;
- Selected segments of the film, *12 Years a Slave* (shown in class);
- Excerpts from Eliza Potter, *A Hairdresser's Experience in High Life*, ed. Xiomara Santamarina (available on ANGEL);
- The class lectures for Lessons 2, 3, 4, and 5 (available on ANGEL).

N.B. Members of Group 1 will *not* be responsible for Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. While I strongly encourage you to read Jacobs's remarkable narrative (surely one of the great works of American autobiography), it is not required for members of your group.

In a 4-6 page essay, you will:

- Describe the overall narrative of Douglass's work;
- Compare and contrast Douglass's experience of slavery and freedom with that of Solomon Northup and Eliza Potter;
- Describe how Douglass, Northup, and Potter defined freedom;
- Offer your thoughts on how African-Americans (both free and enslaved) helped instigate and sustain political conflict over the future of slavery.

To support your claims, please cite course texts and/or lectures using simple parenthetical citations, e.g. (Douglass, 36), (*12 Years a Slave*), or (Trainor, 14 January 2015 lecture).

A successful essay will:

- have a title that addresses / summarizes the argument and themes of the paper;
- have **a strong, incisive, and well-defined thesis**;
- have a graceful, well-crafted introduction and conclusion;
- **have strong paragraph topic sentences that summarize the content of the following paragraph, and demonstrate strong, clear links to the overall argument of the paper**;

- demonstrate mastery of the ideas and concepts described in the books and lectures above;
- include **meaningful** citations of course materials;
- be effectively organized;
- show signs of close and careful proofreading.

***** PLEASE NOTE *****

For Paper 1, I **WILL** take off points for grammar and spelling mistakes (every **three corrections** will result in a loss of **one point** from your grade). You are now in college; sloppy writing is no longer acceptable.

With that in mind, I'd like to offer several tips for writing and organizing your papers effectively:

1. Do not try to sound smart (i.e. write in an affected academic fashion). You *are* smart. And that will come across. Bloated vocabulary will only make you sound desperate (and more often than not, students who try to inflate their vocabulary end up using such words incorrectly). You may even consider writing your essays by hand before typing them. I find that many undergraduates write more clearly and effectively when they trade in the keyboard-and-screen for pen-and-paper.
2. Outline your argument first, then translate it into prose. This will help you figure out the structure of your essay before you have to worry about word choice, grammar, and spelling. Please do not dismiss this as a juvenile exercise! Many, if not most, books and dissertations begin with detailed outlines.
3. Read your essay aloud to yourself. If and when you stumble over a sentence or phrase, rewrite it. Repeat this process until you stop stumbling.
4. Most importantly, consider making use of Penn State's many writing-related resources (including making an appointment with a Boucke writing tutor: <https://pennstatelearning.psu.edu/tutoring/writing>).

Please aim to have a complete draft of your paper ready by Tues., 3 February 2015. This will give you an opportunity to discuss your argument in class. I will also be happy to discuss the contents of your papers and read polished drafts during office hours (see syllabus for details).

Paper 1 will be worth 15% of the final grade. The grading scale is available on the course syllabus.