**English 215**

**Reading Literature**

**Law, Race and American Literature**

**Terry Oggel**

Fall 2019

TTh 3:30-4:45 Office hours: Th 4:45-5:30 & by app't. Temple 3310

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**FIVE IMPORTANT NOTICES**

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**Student Conduct**: Students are expected to adhere to VCU’s Student Conduct in Instructional Settings policy, online at <http://www.assurance.vcu.edu/Policy%20Library/Faculty%20Guide%20to%20Student%20Conduct%20in%20Instructional%20Settings.pdf>.

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**ADDITIONAL IMPORTANT NOTICES PROVIDED ON MY WEBSITE**

# Required Texts

Print

Mark Twain, *Pudd’nhead Wilson*. 1894. U of California P, 2005.  ISBN 9780393925357

Dion Boucicault, *The Octoroon***.** 1859. Kessinger Legacy Reprints, n.d. ISBN9781162703619

Frances Harper, *Iola Leroy*. 1892. Penguin, 1988.  ISBN 9780195063240

Charles W. Chesnutt. *“The Wife of his Youth” and Other Stories*, 1899. U of Michigan P, 2008. ISBN 9780472061341

Online

Literature

Herman Melville. “Benito Cereno.” 1855. <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/m/melville/herman/benito-cereno/>

Charles W. Chesnutt. “*The Wife of his Youth” and Other* Stories. 1899. <https://archive.org/details/wifeofhisyouthot00ches>

Law

Declaration of Independence, 1776. <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/declara/declara4.html#ruffdrft> and

<http://americainclass.org/sources/makingrevolution/rebellion/text6/jeffersondraftdecindep.pdf>

U.S. Constitution, 1788. each student a personal copy

Ratification of the U.S. Constitution. Distributed digitally and in print

United States Supreme Court. *Dred Scott v John Sandford*, 1857. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h2933t.html>

Emancipation Proclamation, 1862. <https://constitutioncenter.org/media/files/ep_miniposter.pdf>

**Recommended**

*MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 8th edn.

**Course Description**

This course will survey multiple ways in which law, race, and often gender weave throughout the landscape of 19th- century American literature. Texts will include novels by Frances Harper (*Iola Leroy*) and Mark Twain (*Pudd'nhead Wilson*); a novella by Herman Melville (“Benito Cereno”); a play, *The Octoroon* by Dion Boucicault; and short stories by Chesnutt. If there’s time, we could include poems by Paul Lawrence Dunbar, as well. We will study legal documents such as the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the Supreme Court’s Dred Scott Case. In the U.S. race is usually thought of as African American and Euro-American, but American Indians, Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans are involved in some 19th-century American literary texts as well. Projects can be arranged to examine how law fits in with these literary depictions.

**Objectives and Methodology**

This course examines the interrelationships of law, literature and race during America’s 19th century. The course will seek to determine the effect of race on literature and law of the period: who is defining that effect, under what circumstances, and to what purpose? To accomplish this, works by our writers will be studied in their historical, intellectual and aesthetic contexts. We will pay attention to these relationships both when they are conspicuous and when they are inconspicuous or even absent. What does silence say? Several works include offensive language and behavior. These will be treated directly in class, with care and respect.

The course will have a discussion focus. Students are expected to attend *every* class, to be up with the reading and involved in the discussion, and to give presentations and conduct research. There will be opportunities for extra-credit class presentations. Besides class participation, which includes attendance and class presentations, the final grade will be determined by a midterm exam, a paper (optional), quizzes, and a comprehensive final exam.

**Requirements**

**Attendance is** **important.** Attendance signup sheets will be passed around each class period. Students should explain missed classes beforehand when possible or promptly afterwards for sure (please use e-mail). Though this does not excuse the absence, it shows seriousness about your work in the course. Failure to account for an absence double-jeopardizes the grade. The quality of coursework will suffer if classes are missed (hence, the grade, too).

More than mere attendance is required for a high quality performance, however. **Participation** in class discussions is expected. Our class is small enough to keep to a discussion format. That enhances learning. Credit is awarded for good and consistent participation; absences and lack of participation will lower the grade.

The optional **writing project** for the course will produce a paper, 10-12 pages (not including Title Page and Works Cited) that extends beyond the class discussions and exhibits some originality and intellectual independence regarding our two authors. It may be critical or historical (it may entail research, but that’s not necessary). It is to be presented in the format appropriate for an academic essay in an upper-division English course according to the most recent edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers*. The paper may not focus on a work studied in the course. It is to treat some facet of James or Twain or both. I will have conferences to help you develop your topics. A 125-word statement of your topic is to be submitted in writing within 48 hours following the conference. This will help the paper be of higher quality. The writing (and research, if included) needs to be appropriate in quality and quantity for a course of this level. The due date for the paper is marked on the course outline. Late papers are penalized. Papers must be submitted in print, not electronically.

All of the writings we study or parts thereof are to be read by the day they are assigned. As a policy, missed work cannot be made up except by way of notes from classmates. No laptops or handhelds, etc. in class unless for classwork. No leaving during class. Contact outside of class will be via email.

## Student Presentations

Each student, individually or with another, will make a brief oral report accompanied by a handout introducing us to each of the works we’re studying. A format sheet with a set of guidelines will be provided. Though not formally graded, these will be for *extra credit* and will be added at the time of the calculation of the final grade.

## Grading

Final course grades will be determined from the midterm, the optional paper, and the comprehensive final, as well as from class participation which includes attendance. Consistent class participation of a high quality including discussion will count favorably; weak class participation will count negatively. Both the midterm and the final will be composed of a combination of short answer (±35%) and essay (±65%). For the final grade, the midterm will count ±30%; the comprehensive final ±40%; class participation ±30%. For those opting to write a paper, the midterm (±24%) and the paper (±27%) will count less heavily than the final (±33%); class participation and discussion will count ±16%.