

Formal Writing Assignments:

Sample Assignment #1

Red-lining, or the act of excluding racially minoritized people from specific areas of housing, has long been a tactic of maintaining White supremacy through racial segregation and generational-wealth suppression. California has a long history of these practices, including here on the Central Coast where we live. In your groups, please research local occurrences of red-lining or deed restrictions. Situate and compare your findings with any literary work that engages with these issues, including their ramifications on Black Americans. Please also develop potential solutions to remedy the lasting effects of red-lining and/or deed restriction. You must use secondary sources from our ethnic studies texts in your analysis and explanation. Develop a visual companion (PowerPoint, Doodle, GoogleSlides) to present your findings.

Sample Assignment #2

Locate, choose, and explore a digital exhibit from the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture. Identify a companion theme or issue within the exhibit that can be placed in conversation with any text or collection of texts from our unit on the literature of slavery and freedom. Please write a 500-750 word essay in MLA format that situates the exhibit and the texts chosen within contemporary discourse concerning racism, racialization, ethnicity, ethnocentrism, eurocentrism, White supremacy, self-determination, liberation, decolonization, sovereignty, imperialism, settler colonialism, and/or anti-racism. You must use at least two secondary sources from our ethnic studies texts in your analysis and explanation.

Sample Assignment #3

In *African American Gothic*, Maisha Wester argues for the connection between the gothic genre and the “effects of institutionalized racism upon the African American family” (187). Toni Morrison gestures to this connection in *Playing in the Dark* but focuses on the absence of Blackness within the American gothic tradition established by Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne, among others. Beginning with these positions, choose a text from our course’s reading list that engages with the gothic tradition and consider the ways in which issues like gender, class, or structural racism are located in and support the categorization of the text as a work of gothic literature. Please explain your thoughts in a 1000-1250 word essay in MLA format that includes at least two secondary sources from our ethnic studies texts that helps your analysis center on issues of structural racism.

Sample Assignment #4

“Knowledge for the sake of service” is a core principle of the Black studies tradition. Choose any text from the Civil Rights and Black Arts Movement unit, the Feminist Critique unit, or the BLM section and identify one key way the text engages with concepts like self-determination, liberation, gender equality, agency, or group-affirmation. Develop a poster-board Public Service Announcement (PSA) that identifies, explains, and disseminates the text’s core idea so that a community member who is unfamiliar with the work can understand the work’s message about Black excellence and agency. Include a QR code for information on the text, so that community members can easily locate it if they are so inclined. We will display the posters across the college campus.

Sample Assignment #5

The Contemporary Diversity in Literature unit encompasses many works by new, and often young, Black authors. Identify a work of which either the Allan Hancock College Library or your local library DOES NOT have a copy (e.g. Santa Maria Public Library, Orcutt branch, Lompoc Public Library, etc.). Write an email to the library requesting the work to be added to the collection. Make sure you include a review of the text you have chosen (at least 150 words) and an explanation (at least 100 words) for why it should be included in the library’s collection. You will send the email to the appropriate person at the library of your choice. BCC me on the email.

Sample Assignment #6

Countering the position put forward in George Schuyler’s 1926 essay, “The Negro-Art Hokum,” Langston Hughes advocates for unambiguously Black forms of cultural production in “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain.” In this essay, Hughes encourages Black artists to pursue the production of forms, themes, and rhythms distinctive to African American culture, a culture which he locates in class as much as in race. African American culture resides, for Hughes, in “low down folks, the so-called common element” and it is there where African Americans will find their artist, Black artists who create for Black people. As Hughes puts it, “If white people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn’t matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too.” This debate goes on to persist over the ensuing century: For whom should Black writers write? And when they do write, should it be for a White audience or not? Should Black writers and artists engage with traditionally white forms? Should the aim be to find a place within the Anglo-American Eurocentric canon? Does class supersede race in terms of the production of Black cultural texts? Stake your claim in this debate. You will need to write up your ideas in a formal outline, including direct quotes from at least three

specific literary texts and two ethnic studies texts that will serve as evidence and support for your position. Be prepared to give at least five good reasons to support your position in our in-class debate.

In-Class Discussion Topics:

Sample Discussion for Assignment 1:

Referencing your ethnic studies textbook and materials, please explain how red-lining maintains white supremacy. How does this understanding shift your thinking about the history of California and the Central Coast in particular? Be prepared to discuss in class.

Sample Discussion for Assignment 2:

Please consider the conversations we have had about what “material objects are.” After having completed your research and deep dive into the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture, consider the role that material history has played in your new understanding of the history of enslavement and resistance within the United States. Choose one key aspect to share with the group.

Sample Discussion for Assignment 3:

Consider your understanding of institutionalized racism: what are some key characteristics? How do you see these characteristics manifesting in the literary works of Black American writers? Be specific. Include definitions from the ethnic studies textbook and materials and direct, textual evidence from your primary sources. Work independently for the first ten minutes. In your groups, please share your ideas and consolidate them into what your group feels is the most important to the least important. Rank them on your post-it notes. We will share out after thirty minutes.

Sample Discussion for Assignment 4:

What role has community played in the development of specifically Black artistic forms and movements? Consider the Black Arts Movement to begin. How might you see community and self-determination playing out in a similar way today? How are today's movements for Black agency either more or less inclusive? Please discuss in your groups. Make sure to write down your ideas to share out.

Sample Discussion for Assignment 5:

First, what is intersectionality? How do intersectional identities become foregrounded in works of contemporary Black writers in the United States? Second, how have anti-racist concepts and practices changed in contemporary Black fiction? Please spend five minutes individually writing your thoughts down to share out with the class.

Sample Discussion for Assignment 6:

As we have learned, African American and Black identity is not a monolith. There have been fissures and debates within the Black community concerning numerous issues including, but not exclusive to, assimilation and independence, modes of creative expression, and inclusion. What do you find most interesting? What would you offer to these debates? Discuss in groups. Please identify one point from each group member.