The African American Literary Tradition

What does it mean for a writer to be part of this tradition? Prepare a speech (write your essay) for a national symposium focused on this question. Your readers are scholars and already have a familiarity with the literature that you choose to present (so don’t summarize the work please). Your audience is composed of literary scholars; they’ll be relying on you to develop these voices/examples with specific details from the authors’ works/texts. Give evidence from the text (specific examples, quotes, or a paraphrase / summary of a passage) to support your thesis. It is the support, the evidence, that you cite that indicates the thoughtfulness of your critical reading.

Take a grand view: In your pre-writing considerations, reflect on the wide range of this tradition, from beginnings to now and consider yourself an expert on African American Literary Traditions. You have only three (full) or four pages (single-spaced) so you’ll have to pick your examples wisely.

So gather all that you know about this tradition and focus on this guiding question – what is the African American Literary tradition and who best represents it?

VOICES
Draw from the voices we've studied all term; choose at least one representative voice from at least three of the following categories:

- The Vernacular Tradition
- The Literature of Slavery and Freedom, 1746 – 1865
- Literature of Reconstruction to the New Negro Renaissance, 1865 – 1919
- Harlem Renaissance, 1919 – 1940
- Realism, Naturalism, Modernism, 1940 – 1960
- The Black Arts Era, 1960 – 1975
- Literature since 1975

TROPES
Focus your THESIS on our guiding framework for ENG257: one can appreciate the canon of African American literature by understanding the tropes, the “linkages in the chain.” As you develop your essay, keep your focus by drawing from the many tropes of African American Literature that we’ve been exploring:

Freedom
Resistance to Tyranny
Dedication to Human Dignity
Talking Books
Representing
Signifying
Protest
Blues
USEFUL HINTS

• Go back to the questions on the weekly writings to help guide and develop your discussion.
• You don’t need to do any research outside of our text (although you certainly may – but if you do, be certain to 1) evaluate your sources [no Wikipedia please!] and 2) accurately and clearly incorporate your sources (i.e. paraphrasing, summarizing, quoting) and finally 3) document your sources with in-text citations and a Works Cited page.
• The best critical literary/historical/cultural inquiries to draw from (summarize, paraphrase, and directly quote – again make sure that you accurately incorporate and document) are the Introductions to our sections

• *The Vernacular Tradition*, Robert O’Meally
• *The Literature of Slavery and Freedom, 1746 – 1865*, William Andrews and Frances Foster
• *Literature of Reconstruction to the New Negro Renaissance, 1865 – 1919*, Frances Foster and William Andrews
• *Harlem Renaissance, 1919 – 1940*, Arnold Rampersad
• *Realism, Naturalism, Modernism, 1940 – 1960*, Deborah McDowell and Hortense Spillers
• *Literature Since 1975*, Barbara Christian and Cheryl Wall

FORMAT:

Please write your essay on a word processor, (don’t forget to title your work), single-spacing, and using 12 point font. Scope: 1500 – 2,000 words (include word count in header). Please also use MLA format to document your sources (be vigilant in documenting your sources!).

ASSESSMENT GUIDE

**Content:** Interpretation is focused and developed by course themes, illustrates an excellent understanding of the literature, and represents not only a thoughtful engagement of the material but an originality of approach (write an essay that only you could write)

**Organization and Development:** Writing asserts interpretation in a clear thesis statement, develops this thesis well with details, specific examples, and quotations from the literature. Writing uses secondary sources occasionally to support interpretations.

**Clarity/Quality of Writing:** Writing is clear, effective, and demonstrates standard grammar conventions and MLA format.

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