ENG257 African American Lit
Weekly Reading and Writing #2

READING
Tuesday
- Continue: *Spirituals*, pages 8 – 10 and selections on our “Audio Companion
- *Literature of Slavery and Freedom, 1746 – 1865*, pages 151 – 162. Pay special attention to *Radical Abolition and the Fugitive Slave Narrative* pages 158 – 159 where you’ll find the trope of the black message/white envelope; and *Folk Traditions*, page 161, trope of
signifying.

Thursday
- Frederic Douglass intro, pages 385 – 395, then begin his Narrative: Chapter one, pages 395 – 398, Chapter VI pages 409 – 411, and Chapter X, pages 421 - top of 428 and browse the remainder of his *Narrative*.

QUESTIONS FOR OUR DISCUSSION
Tuesday:
1. What were the origins, conditions, and experiences of the spirituals? Why do we call them spirituals?
2. What was the purpose of the spirituals? What did the creating and singing of them provide?
3. What are some of the themes of the spirituals?
4. In what ways are the traits of the vernacular (page 6) illustrated in the spirituals (e.g. “Steal Away to Jesus”)?
5. Is the idea of the vernacular dependent on definitions of racial essences that are not knowable outside the black tradition?
6. What is black about the black vernacular?
7. When is “American” culture not black and vernacular? Or – put another way – how does the black vernacular infuse contemporary American culture?

Thursday:
1. Transcendentalist clergyman Theodore Parker wrote (page 159) that slave narratives qualified as America’s only indigenous literary form, for “all the original romance of Americans is in them, not in the white man’s novel.” What is romantic about the slave narrative?
2. Douglass introduces a new trope: representative man (or in the contemporary vernacular – representin). How and what did he stand for?
3. Let’s discuss the ways in which another trope is apparent in his work: words as weapons.

WRITING: Please choose from the questions above (one or a few in combination) and write a thoughtful, focused response.

CREATIVE WRITING OPTION: Read Robert Haydyn’s sonnet homage to Douglass (page 1528). Write your own sonnet homage to Douglass. Then, in a prose explanation write about the ways that Douglass’ narrative has moved you specifically.

FORMAT
• Word-process: Write one full page single-spaced
• Include a heading in the upper left-hand corner (your name; date; ENG257 Weekly Writing #2)