**English 4400: Minority American Literature**

**Final Paper**

**The Assignment**

This semester, you will be required to write a scholarly essay that advances your argument about a text or a pair of texts. You may choose any of the texts that we will discuss this semester. Your scholarly argument will be bolstered by research that you conduct. You should include at least four sources. I expect your argument to be original and based on a close reading of your text(s). You will need to include textual evidence to validate your claim. There are no right or wrong arguments. As long as you can convincingly argue your perspective based on sufficient textual evidence, your claims are valid.

You must submit a written proposal by October 30, 2018. The proposal should include a discussion of what your argument will be and a discussion of at least two sources that have helped shape your thinking about the topic. The proposal should be one to two pages long and in proper MLA format; it should include a works cited page. The paper is due on November 27, 2018, and it should be 8-10 pages in length. The paper should be in proper MLA format; it is worth 20% of your grade.

**The Argument**

The major part of analysis is discussing the significance of your argument. I call this your “so what” of your argument. It is not enough to just make a claim; you have to tell your reader why your claim is important and prove it. You also need to make sure that your claim is a critical argument. It should not be a claim that is too simplistic or simply part of the plot.

**Examples of Poor Critical Arguments**

Kate Chopin rails against traditional gender roles. *(This argument is too simplistic and evident from a summary standpoint of her work. You would need to dig deeper than this. You could argue that Edna’s choice at the end of the novel represents a failure to assert power over her life rather than a triumph.)*

Nella Larsen uses the trope of the tragic mulatto. *(Ok, so what? You would need to dig deeper than this. It is obvious just from reading her text that the biracial protagonist is a mulatto whose difficult life would relate to the tragic mulatto trope; therefore, it is not a critical argument to say so. However, you could discuss how Helga attempts to revise the trope or how Larsen reconstructs the trope for her particular contemporary moment and why that is significant, etc.)*

**Examples of Good Critical Arguments**

Despite Charles Chesnutt’s political consciousness, Julius McAdoo, from his collection *The Conjure Woman,* is an example of African American minstrelsy that is counteractive to Chesnutt’s intention.

Though *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* contains satirical elements, it becomes difficult to distinguish its satire from southwestern humor; therefore, his social commentary is hampered.

**The Research**

I only want you to use scholarly sources for this paper. That means that you can only uses sources that are written by academics (professors and researchers).

* Academic Databases are a good place to start your research. They can be found in GALILEO. Many articles are available in full-text pdf format through these databases. They may also alert you to good books or anthologies about your topic. All material that is not available in digital format can be ordered through our Interlibrary Loan Service/GIL Express. Useful databases:
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