**EN 127: Reading American Literature**

**Paper 1 Assignment**

**Purpose**: For this assignment, you will exercise the close reading and claim-making skills we have been practicing in class.

**Task:** In a paper between **1,000 and 1,200** words in length, you will make a claim about one or more of the primary texts we’ve read thus far*.* Please do **not** use secondary sources for this paper. Use only the primary sources to provide evidence that supports your claim. You may work with **up to two texts** we’ve looked at this semester.

**Potential questions/topics:** Use these questions to jumpstart your thinking; there is no need to answer each of these questions, or any of them, in your claim. Choose whatever excites, interests, or frustrates you most. **Think about moments that seem surprising or out of place in the text—moments that need to be picked apart and examined.**

1. Think about a particular **choice one of our authors makes** that seems surprising—Emerson’s critique of charity, Douglass’s criticism of the underground railroad, etc. Is there a way we can read that moment that makes sense within the text as a whole? Are there parallel moments you can draw lines to within the text? What is the effect of the author’s choice?
2. Think about the question of “**property**” in one or more texts we have read. How does each author define “property”? How do questions of owning one’s self play into that definition (or not)? What about questions of legal rights?
3. Think about how each author conceives of **movement and travel** within their texts. Why does Emerson seemingly contradict himself regarding his views on exploration between texts? What authorial choices does Douglass make to give the reader a sense of his restricted movement?
4. Think about **transcendentalism** as presented in one of Fuller’s, Emerson’s, or Thoreau’s texts and compare it with Douglass’s text. Does Douglass complicate questions of self-reliance, freedom, the oversoul? Are there moments in Douglass that seem influenced by transcendentalist thought?
5. Think about how each author presents the relationship between self and communities, between **self and institutions**. In which texts do we get a sense of the importance of community? What institutions loom largest in these texts, and how does the author depict that institution?

**Comments:** Whatever topic you choose, you **must** support your argument with quotations from your texts. Additionally, these quotes should be chosen because they support your argument; you must also spend the necessary time analyzing your quotations: show your reader *why* they matter. Whatever texts you choose to work with must be cited in proper MLA format. Please feel free to email me with questions, run a claim by me, or come to student hours/make an appointment. You will also want to look at the **Paper Writing Guidelines** on Blackboard.

**Requirements:**

-an MLA formatted Works Cited page

-page numbers

-staple your paper

-include a word count at the end of your essay for all drafts

**Due Dates:**

Email KL your claim (optional) **Wed. Feb. 13** by 11:59pm to receive feedback

Paper 1 Draft **Wed., Feb. 20** (hard copy in class & upload to BB)

Peer Review Workshop **Wed., Feb. 20**

Mandatory Paper Conferences **Wed., Feb. 20-Thurs., Feb. 21**

Final Draft **Fri., March 1** (hard copy in class & upload to BB)