

Melissa Range
Lawrence University
melissa.h.range@lawrence.edu

Archival expert assignment sheet

This term, you will be in charge of leading one class as the “archival expert.” Your assignment is simple: I want you to read nineteenth century newspapers published by African American editors. Using two of the library’s electronic databases—*African American Newspapers* and/or *Accessible Archives*—you will make use of digital archives to provide historical context for the day’s reading.

Here’s what to do for prep work, step by step:

- On the date you’re signed up to be the archival expert, look at when the writer published their works. (So, for example: Frances Ellen Watkins Harper published *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* in 1855.)
- Determine a location that is relevant to the writer, if possible. For Harper, this could be Baltimore (where she grew up), Philadelphia (where she lived and worked as an adult), or Boston (where she frequently lectured).
- Now choose a newspaper that is relevant to the date and the location of the poet. If you want to get even more specific, you can (for example, you could look at an abolitionist newspaper for Harper). If you can find one, you can also choose a newspaper where the writer published.
- Select an issue of the newspaper and read the whole thing: news, editorials, poetry, even the advertisements. (Be forewarned, the print is tiny and there’s a lot of text.) As you read, make note of anything at all—newspaper poems, news items, even weather—that you feel gives interesting context to the work the class will be discussing.
- From here, you have the tools to give the class some interesting historical contexts. During class, be prepared to give us around 20 minutes of historical context, drawn from what you read. Feel free to read us excerpts from articles or poems. Don’t feel like you have to cover everything in the newspaper—two or three things will be enough.
- Make a Powerpoint, Prezi, or handout to share a few images with us. Give us your reading of both the culture that produced this writer (particularly how the writer fits, or doesn’t fit, into the historical context) and anything you notice about how historical context informs a specific example from the writer’s work (a few paragraphs, a poem or two, etc.). (Don’t feel like you have to force the writer to neatly fit into the contexts the newspapers provide. Even the absence of the writer’s concerns from the newspaper will tell you something about the writer and their work.)
- To facilitate a good discussion on what you’ve found, be prepared to ask the class 2-3 discussion questions to get the conversation going.

Nineteenth century African American periodicals you can access from our library’s databases page include:

- *Freedom’s Journal*, edited by Samuel Cornish and John Russwurm (African American Newspapers database); 1827-1829
- *The Rights of All*, edited by Samuel Cornish (African American Newspapers database); 1829

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- *The Colored American*, edited by Samuel Cornish (Accessible Archives database); 1836-1842
- *The North Star*, edited by Frederick Douglass (African American Newspapers database); 1847-1851
- *Frederick Douglass's Paper*, edited by Frederick Douglass (African American Newspapers database); 1851-1860
- *The Christian Recorder*, edited by Benjamin Tanner, among others (Accessible Archives database); 1861-1902
- *The Provincial Freeman*, a Canadian newspaper edited by ex-pat American Mary Ann Shadd Cary (Accessible Archives database); 1854-1857
- *The Cleveland Gazette*, edited by H.C. Smith (African American Newspapers database); 1883-1945
- *The Colored American* magazine (different from the newspaper above!), initially edited by Pauline E. Hopkins (Accessible Archives database); 1900-1909
- . . . there are many, many others, so if you are poking around and discover one you're more interested in that fits our timeframe, just let me know so I can approve your choice. Please note that all of the newspapers listed in the *African American Newspapers* database are edited by African American folks, but not all of the newspapers in *Accessible Archives* are (so you will have to do some research before choosing your newspaper).

Black periodicals elsewhere online

- *Weekly Anglo-African Magazine*, edited by Thomas Hamilton (HathiTrust; link on Moodle); 1859-1865

Supplemental periodicals

These periodicals contain a wealth of information about Black life (with a particular emphasis on the abolitionist movement), and some of them definitely published our authors in their pages; however, they are not edited by Black editors. They might still prove useful to you, however. You are welcome to consult these periodicals for your presentations, too, as a supplemental source.

- *The Liberator*, abolitionist newspaper edited by William Lloyd Garrison (America's Historical Newspapers database); 1831-1865
- *The Pennsylvania Freeman*, abolitionist newspaper edited by John Greenleaf Whittier, among others (America's Historical Newspapers); 1836-1854
- *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, abolitionist newspaper edited by Lydia Maria Child, among others (Accessible Archives); 1840-1870
- *The Freedmen's Record*, a Civil War and Reconstruction-era periodical focusing on the concerns of newly emancipated Black Americans, as well as the efforts of teachers and relief workers in the South, edited by a collective of northern abolitionists (Accessible Archives); 1865-1874

If you need help with choosing a newspaper or using the databases, please come see me!

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Written component

You don't have to write anything formally for this assignment, but I would like a works cited page (in MLA style) and a copy of your notes/outline/Powerpoint/handouts. Emailing all of this to me is fine.

Archival expert assignments will be graded according to how well they:

- Thoroughly give us historical context to the writer and their work (50 points)
- Demonstrate archival research skills (30 points)
- Engage the class in discussion (20 points)