Research Paper-in-a-Box

I want you to practice some basic research skills on a more contemporary Anglophone Caribbean or Caribbean-diaspora fiction writer whose work we’re not reading. Some of the writers below are popular, even famous or best-selling, authors in the US or the UK; others are less well-known. (Some of them also write in other genres besides fiction.) While I’d love to let you make your own choice, I also want to make sure that all of the writers get covered, so I’m assigning a roughly equal number of you to each one. If, after doing a quick-and-dirty web search on all of the writers, you decide you’d like to trade assignments with someone else and you can secure their assent, then I’ll allow that.

- Robert Antoni (Tony, Brittany, Trey)
- Dionne Brand (Miranda, Kammy, Jasmine)
- Nalo Hopkinson (Claudia, Cortney, Lizy, Melissa)
- Marlon James (Yolanda, Kameron, Alexis, Shane)
- Anthony Joseph (Alondra, Christi, Lovell)
- Tiphanie Yanique (Caitlin, Tyler, Janna)

Start by selecting, collating, editing and synthesizing the best biographical and critical information you can find about your writer, distilling that info into a two- to three-page sketch of his or her life and career. (Double-spaced pages, one-inch margins, half-inch header in the upper right-hand corner with your surname and the page number.) One of the challenges you will face is what New Yorker magazine writer Leo Robson calls “the central problem of any literary biography: how to connect the life and the work”—i.e., explaining what in this person’s background and education led her to become a writer.

In constructing this section, you should draw from at least three reputable sources, no more than two of which should be openly accessible web sites. (Other potential sources: headnotes and “about the author” sections of print books and anthologies; literary reference books in the HSU library’s collection; scholarly journal articles; profiles or reviews in prominent magazines and newspapers; author or publisher websites; and so on. Gather as much information, from as wide a variety of sources, as you can.) Structurally speaking, however, you might model your product on web sites such as:

- Author pages on Wikipedia
- Author pages at www.enotes.com/authors
- Author pages at literature.britishcouncil.org/writers
- Poet pages at www.poets.org, The Poetry Foundation, or The Poetry Archive

(That’s not an exhaustive list.)
It should go without saying that “patch-writing”—i.e., cutting and pasting other people’s words—won’t do (it’s an increasingly common form of plagiarism, for starters); neither will minor rearrangements and strategically placed synonyms. Instead, you will need to extract the raw data from your sources, collating, synthesizing, and reassembling it into a fluid narrative of your own, inserting commentary, interpretation, and connective tissue as necessary. Append a “Sources” page to this section, with bibliographic citations in standard MLA format. Include all sources consulted here, including any and all that you quote or paraphrase in your sketch. (I’m counting on you to attribute the latter such sources appropriately, using the standard MLA parenthetical method of citation.)

The remainder of your by-the-numbers research paper will consist of an annotated bibliography in 3 (or 4) sections. Track down the following:

- at least two good/worthwhile/oft-cited scholarly books, book chapters, or journal articles that discuss this writer and/or her work;
- at least two reference works, print or electronic, that contain entries for this writer; and
- at least two reputable electronic or audio-visual resources devoted in part or in full to this writer.

(If you have trouble filling your quota in any of these categories, you may substitute a substantial book review of one or more of the writer’s works from a major West Indian, British, or American newspaper; a respected national magazine; or a literary or academic journal. I understand that there may well be some overlap between this bibliography and the “sources” page of your biographical sketch.)

Again, supply a citation, in standard MLA format, for each item in your bibliography. Then, below each citation, provide (in the form of a short, left-justified, block paragraph) an annotation that consists largely of description, seasoned with a little evaluation. That is: explain what the item is (if it’s not evident from the title), what it does (or what it covers or claims or argues) and/or doesn’t do, and why it’s worth looking at. If you don’t know what such an “annotation” might look like, there are plenty of reasonably good explanations and examples floating around out there on the web. Google “annotated bibliography.”

If you are a prospective teacher, you might also consider including a fourth section with at least two good teaching resources of any type (print, audio-visual, new media), either on the writer him- or herself, or on a literary/cultural/geographical/historical topic germane to one of his/her best-known or widely-taught works. Your annotations of each of these items should justify your selection, indicating briefly how you might use it in the classroom, why it might be valuable, and what pedagogical goals it would serve.

Total length of this paper: about 10 pages, ±2.

Due: Friday, October 12th.