

American Literature to 1865

Spring 2013 / Section 01 / Armstrong 112 / 11:30-12:20 pm

*"All history becomes subjective; in other words there is properly no history, only biography."
~Ralph Waldo Emerson, Essays: History*

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Office Hours: M/W 1:30-2:30 p.m., or by appointment (recommended)

Course Description:

In his book *Liberation Historiography* John Ernest writes, "When we recognize that U.S. culture is not monolithic, and that one is a member of many cultures intricately linked—and often at odds with one another—then one can appreciate the lasting value... of culture as one approaches the individual life story as a work of history" (161). This sets up our approach to American literature for the semester: first, that America's past is made up of "many cultures, intricately linked" each of which had a unique perspective on what "America" meant; and second, that the best way to understand America's conflicted past is to listen to individual voices to understand the complexity, diversity, and richness of each person's experiences. Both of these components help us to understand how America as a nation was formed and how its ideals, laws, beliefs and practices were constantly challenged and amended. We will begin our study with Native American literature that pre-dates the first contacts with the New World, and by semester's end we will cover the period up to the end of the Civil War in 1865. We'll read autobiographies, sermons, captivity narratives, poems, fiction, appeals, pamphlets, and slave narratives, and through each of these selections we will see how individual lives and stories complement one another while also complicating our picture of America's past.

What is at stake, then, in our study of American literature to 1865? Why read these texts now, in 2013, when things are so different for us as a nation? Or are they? This semester you'll see how conflicts in the past still define our present. In many ways, we are still trying to decide who fits under the term "American," and we're still debating how American principles are best lived out in laws and cultural practices, both in our country and abroad. The truth is, America has always been a conflicted space and its history is one of contact and change. Consider the early European settlers whose plans for America certainly led them to violently overthrow the Native American tribes who already called this land home; or consider how America was supposedly founded on principles of freedom and equality (according to Thomas Jefferson) but then violated these principles by simultaneously upholding the practice of slavery. For too long, America's story has been told as a neat and clean narrative, but such a narrative ignores the impassioned debates and the cultural contacts that have formed our nation.

And so we delve into the mess that is America's past—and we'll do so in a way that helps us understand the various perspectives and concerns of its people through the literature of the time. In our class time this semester we will consider how answering the question, "What is American literature?" essentially answers the more important question "What is America?" or even "Who is American?"



*America the Rough Draft:
Here, a suitable metaphor for our
history—the rough, highly-edited draft
of the Declaration of Independence.*

Required Text: (available at both the University bookstore and the Book Exchange)

- Lauter, Paul, et al., eds. *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*. Vols. A & B. 5th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006.

Attendance:

Your regular attendance is required, and your grade may be lowered for poor attendance, down to and including "F." You are permitted **four** absences. A fifth absence will result in a full grade reduction for the final course grade (A to a B, B to a C, etc.). With a fifth absence, you will fail the course. These numbers include all

absences for whatever reason. **If you miss a class, YOU must take responsibility to get the handouts from eCampus and contact me for any course materials or info you may have missed.**

Lateness and Professional Etiquette:

You need to come to class on time, so we can get started with the material and so you don't miss handouts, instructions, or quiz questions. **If you come in after class starts, you need to check in with me after class to be sure I mark you as present.** Lateness is reflected on your Participation/ Professional Etiquette grade, with -2 points for **each** lateness; extreme or habitual lateness can count as a full absence. At any point during the semester, you can ask me what your attendance record is.

As for Professional Etiquette, I ask that you:

- Participate in class, do not distract your classmates, and are physically and mentally engaged in our discussions and day-to-day work;
- Come on time and prepared with your materials (you need to bring your book to class and will want to take notes from the discussion);
- Respect your instructor and classmates by silencing your cell phones and iPods before class begins (as opposed to setting phones to vibrate, which everyone can still hear). **Students who text, check messages, or listen to iPods in class will be asked to bring their device to the front of the classroom for the remainder of class. If it happens again in a future class period, you will be asked to leave and take an absence.** Do. Not. Text. In. My. Class.

Class Discussions and Reading Quizzes:

Class discussion will be vital component of this course. You'll find that even the most difficult reading assignments will take on new meaning after you discuss them with your classmates and have more insight into each text's importance. This is why class time is so valuable. While each discussion will be different, we will usually address one or more of the following themes: contact between peoples, conflict of ideals, steps in nation formation, and development of literary styles. In this way we'll trace how contact and conflict shaped the nation's formation and why each author chose a particular writing style to express their perspectives and ideas. I expect each of you to not only offer comments or to help summarize the reading, but to also pose questions for the class, connect the day's readings to previous readings, and discuss how the readings build on the themes mentioned above.

Reading quizzes will occur at least once a week, will be unannounced, and may occur any of our three class days. For this reason you'll want to stay up to date with the reading assignments and be sure that, as you read, you're understanding the main idea of the text.

- **READING STRATEGIES:** Students often ask how they can remember what they read. I suggest that you keep brief notes as you read. If you dedicate a small notebook to this kind of note-keeping, you'll have a great review tool for the mid-term and the final. Just write down each author's name, the text's title, and any other important information (publication date, author's background, historical events that put the reading in context); then keep a list of key points the author makes, as well as some of the examples or ideas that he/she presents, or if it's fiction or poetry, write a short summary of what happens in the text, as well as main characters' names. These are just basic suggestions, but if you'd like more tips for note-taking or reading comprehension, just ask me or talk to one of the tutors at the Writing Center. There will be a lot of readings to keep track of this semester.

Response Papers

Five times this semester you'll be asked to submit a response paper (the weeks are marked on the schedule). In these papers you'll analyze some aspect of the readings and seek to synthesize at least two of the reading selections since the previous Response Paper was due (not just that day or week). You may compare a specific aspect of the readings, contrast their purpose or message, or explain how they address a certain debate of the time period—such as freedom, slavery, women's rights, death, conflict, belief, etc. For instance, you might discuss how one early settler talks favorably about Native American culture, from a distance, while another writer who lived among the native peoples is able to speak about their culture from the inside, first-hand. Or, you might discuss how an author was able to escape slavery by learning to write and how literacy then becomes a tool of freedom and liberty. The topic of your response is up to you. You simply want to **engage** with the reading in some way that looks closer at a specific idea or issue—and **does not merely summarize the reading**. If you summarize the reading only, you will not get credit. Also remember to

include examples from the text, along with page numbers. These papers can be semi-informal, meaning you are free to use “I think” or “I believe,” but you **MUST include a thesis statement that mentions the two works you're looking at and states how you will analyze the two of them together.** Ultimately these are a way for you to narrow in on a specific aspect of the reading and then express your ideas on what you've read. We will discuss more about these Response Papers in class, prior to the first one's due date.

Format: Your papers should be typed in Times New Roman 12 point font, double-spaced, printed in dark ink, and have one-inch margins. Place your name, date, and the number of the Response Paper in the upper left-hand corner of the first page. You should also include a centered, informative title. Number all the pages except page one, and **staple together**. And yes, the staple is necessary!

Grades:

Participation/ Professional Etiquette:	10%
Reading Quizzes:	20%
Response Papers:	20%
Mid-term Exam:	20%
Final Exam:	30%

Office Hours:

Please think of my office as an extension of the classroom, and feel free to use my office hours to discuss any aspect of your reading or writing. I love to discuss literature, as you may have guessed. Come with questions about particular assigned texts, come with ideas you'd like to develop in your writing assignments, or just come to talk. You may also make an appointment with me; just ask.

Writing Center:

The Writing Center is an invaluable resource for all kinds of writers at WVU. You should consider the Writing Center a place to get feedback, work through concepts and fine-tune your writing; it is also a great place to find handouts on writing techniques, proper citation, and tips. You may make an appointment or stop by. For hours or to make an appointment, contact:

http://english.wvu.edu/centers_and_projects/wcenter
304-293-5788
G02 Colson Hall (the ground floor)

Disability Services:

If you are a student with a documented disability who will require accommodations in this course, please register with the WVU Office of Disability Services, located at G-30 in the Mountainlair (Phone: (304) 293-6700 Voice/TDD: (304) 293-7740 and email: access2@mail.wvu.edu) for assistance in developing a plan to address your academic needs. Students who are already registered with the ODS and wish to receive accommodations in this course are strongly encouraged to share their Accommodation Letter with me in a timely manner.

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism:

In order to make the most out of this course, you are expected to present your own best effort. **Any attempt at plagiarism** will result in a 0 for the project and, in some cases, for the entire course. Plagiarism is defined as, “material that has been knowingly obtained or copied in whole or in part, from the work of others” (English Department policy as outlined in *JAC* xiii). The policy also states that, “Academic dishonesty involves representing as your own work **any part** of work done by another; (and) submitting the same paper or substantially similar papers to meet the requirements of more than one course without the written approval and consent of all instructors concerned” (xiii). Such dishonesty not only includes taking work from other students and representing it as your own, but also taking whole papers or parts of papers or research from any other source (website, magazine, paper-writing services, etc.) and representing them as your own work. This is never acceptable under any set of circumstances, and please know that I and the university take plagiarism *very seriously*. Both plagiarism and cheating are considered forms of academic dishonesty. In clear cases, you will receive an F for the course and appropriate academic discipline. If you are ever in doubt about whether you're violating this policy, please talk to me.