

James R. Holsinger
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Office Hours: MW 12:30-1:30 and by appt.

American Literature: Beginnings to 1865 (ENGL 241)

Course Overview: In this course we will undertake the daunting task of surveying American literature from the “beginning” up to the American Civil War. While no course can claim to cover all (or even most) literature from this expansive period, a wide array of readings have been chosen to foster a broad understanding of early American literature and culture. Along the way we will ground these writings in their proper historical context, taking note of thematic trends while also locating critical divergences among writers and texts. You will likely notice that the list of assigned readings remains highly “canonical” throughout. We will, however, spend a fair amount of time this semester questioning *why* certain texts are included in the canon as well as taking note of changes in the canon over the past few decades. In other words, this course will introduce a canon of literature at the same time that it challenges canon formation.

Our goals in this course will align with the larger goals of major-level English courses. Such courses are intended to give students the necessary skills to:

1. Interpret texts within diverse literary, cultural, and historical contexts.
2. Demonstrate a general knowledge of the social and structural aspects of the English language.
3. Demonstrate a range of contextually effective writing strategies.

Required Texts: Please purchase the following texts (note that you must acquire the 8th edition of the Norton Anthologies):

Baym, Nina, Ed. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature: Volume A (Beginnings-1820)*. 8th ed. New York: Norton, 2012.

Baym, Nina, Ed. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature: Volume B (1820-1865)*. 8th ed. New York: Norton, 2012.

Participation: Participation implies more than simply showing up for class. I will expect you to complete all readings and come to class ready to discuss what you’ve read. It is also important that you maintain a positive attitude about the class and about the work of your peers. In short, I’ll rely on each of you to keep class discussion moving forward.

Reading Quizzes: You will need to complete all assigned readings before class. To ensure that you are completing these readings we will have daily reading quizzes. These quizzes are not meant to deceive you and are only intended to gauge whether or not you completed the readings. In other words, if you read and spend some time thinking about the texts before class, these should not be difficult. Please note that while there is no formal attendance policy for the course, **you must be in class (and on time) to receive credit for the daily quiz**. If you are absent or come to class late you will not be permitted to make up the quiz. At the end of the semester I will drop your two lowest quiz grades.

Attendance: You are expected to attend all classes. If you know that you will be missing class in advance, please let me know so that I can get you any necessary materials. In the event of unforeseen circumstances that require you to miss a significant number of classes, please contact the Office of Student Life at (304) 293-5611 or by email at studentlife@mail.wvu.edu.

Essays: Over the course of the semester you will write two (2-3pp.) essays. These essays are intended to give you an opportunity to make connections between texts. As such, you should not simply restate discussions we have had in class nor should you merely offer plot summary of primary texts. Outside/secondary research is not necessary to complete these essays. Please refer to the assignment prompts for a more detailed description of these assignments.

Exams: There will be two exams this term. The Midterm Exam will cover all readings up to that date, while the Final Exam will be cumulative (i.e. any text on the syllabus is fair game for this exam). These exams will consist of passage identification and analysis, multiple choice, short response, and essays. The Midterm exam will have in-class and take-home components while the Final exam will be completed during the two-hour period allotted. You will need to purchase a blue book for each exam.

Office Hours: While my office hours are Monday and Wednesday from 12:30-1:30pm, I am available at other times to meet. Please don't hesitate to set up a meeting with me if you have any questions or concerns. I'm happy to answer quick questions by email but I'd prefer to meet in person to discuss your progress in the course.

Plagiarism: Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. Penalties range from an "F" on the plagiarized assignment to an "Unforgivable F" in the course. If you have any questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty, please feel free to ask me or consult the WVU student handbook.

Cell Phone Policy: Please silence your cell phones during class. If I notice you texting during class I will ask you to leave the classroom. If you are expecting an important (i.e. emergency) call, please let me know before class begins.

Grade Breakdown:

Final Exam:	30%
Midterm Exam:	20%
Essays:	20% (10% for each essay)
Reading Quizzes:	20%
Participation:	10%

West Virginia University is committed to social justice. I concur with that commitment and expect to maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. Our University does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, color or national origin. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration.

If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Disability Services (293-6700).

Reading Schedule Subject to Slight Changes. Readings should be completed before the date listed.

Contested Origins

8/20	M	Course introductions; Syllabus overview
8/22	W	"Beginnings to 1700" A. 3-18; "Stories of the Beginning" A. 21-34
8/24	F	Columbus, "Letters" A. 34-38; Smith, "The General History" A. 81-92
8/27	M	Bradford, <i>Of Plymouth Plantation</i> A. 121-56
8/29	W	Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity" A. 165-77
8/31	F	<i>Bay Psalm Book</i> A. 186-92; Williams, <i>Key into the Language of America</i> A. 193-204; <i>The New England Primer</i> A. 361-63
9/3	M	No Class: University Holiday
9/5	W	Bradstreet, "Prologue," "The Flesh and the Spirit," "The Author to her Book," "As Weary Pilgrim" A. 207-9, 222-25, 233-4; Taylor, "Upon a Wasp Chilled with Cold" A. 304-5
9/7	F	Mather, <i>Magnalia Cristi Americana</i> A. 327-28, 333-54

What is an American?

9/10	M	“American Literature 1700-1820” A. 365-76; Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” A. 396-98, 430-41;
9/12	W	Cluster: “Native Americans: Contact and Conflict” A. 442-55; Franklin, “Concerning the Savages of North America” A. 455-57, 476-80; Freneau, “The Indian Burying Ground” A. 756-59
9/14	F	Crevecoeur, <i>Letters</i> A. 605-25
9/17	M	Paine, <i>Age of Reason</i> A. 639-40, 653-59; Jefferson, <i>Notes</i> A. 659-61, 668-77; Bleeker, “On the Immensity of Creation” A. 722-3, 733-4
9/19	W	Equiano, <i>Narrative of the Life</i> A. 687-721; Wheatley, “On Being Brought from Africa to America” A. 762-4
9/21	F	Murray, “On the Equality of the Sexes” A. 737-47; Child, “Letter XXXIV” B. 180-82, 199-204
9/24	M	Tyler, <i>The Contrast</i> A. 775-816 First Essay Due
9/26	W	Tyler continued
9/28	F	Review Day, Discuss Mid-term Exam

American Historiography and Life on the Frontier

10/1	M	Mid-term Exam
10/3	W	“American Literature 1820-1865” B. 3-21; Irving, “The Author’s Account of <i>Himself</i> ” B. 25-29
10/5	F	Irving, “Rip Van Winkle” B. 29-41
10/8	M	Cooper, <i>The Pioneers</i> and <i>The Last of the Mohicans</i> B. 62-86
10/10	W	Apress, “An Indian’s Looking Glass for the White Man” B. 129-31, 154-59; Kirkland, <i>A New Home</i> B. 167-80
10/12	F	Cluster: “Native Americans: Removal and Resistance” B. 349-69

The Search for an American Poetics

10/15	M	Sigourney, “Death of an Infant,” “The Sutte,” “To a Shred of Linen” B. 106-09, 114-16; Bryant, “Thanatopsis,” “To a Waterfowl,” “The Prairies” B. 121-29
10/17	W	Longfellow, “The Jewish Cemetery at Newport,” “My Lost Youth” B. 596-97, 602-06; Emerson, “The Snow Storm,” “Merlin” B. 211-14, 342, 344-47
10/19	F	Whittier, “Snow-Bound: A Winter Idyl” B. 608-09, 612-28

Re-Evaluating American Aesthetics

10/22	M	Bryant, “Sonnet—To an American Painter” B. 126; Emerson, “The Poet” B. 295-310
10/24	W	Poe, “The Poetic Principle” B. 629-33, 728-29; Whitman, “Preface to <i>Leaves of Grass</i> ” B. 1310-1329
10/26	F	Melville, “Hawthorne and His Mosses” B. 1424-39

Aesthetics in Practice

10/29	M	Hawthorne, “Preface to <i>The House of the Seven Gables</i> ,” “My Kinsman, Major Molineux” B. 369-73, 594-95, 373-86
10/31	W	Poe, “The Raven,” “The Fall of the House of Usher” B. 637-40, 654-67
11/2	F	No Class
11/5	M	Melville, “Bartleby the Scrivener” B. 1483-1509
11/7	W	Whitman, “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,” “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” B. 1383-92, 1402-08
11/9	F	No Class
11/12	M	Thoreau, <i>Walden</i> ch.1 B. 961-64, 981-1023

11/14 W Davis, *Life in the Iron Mills* B. 1705-32
11/16 F Dickinson Poems TBA

Thanksgiving Recess

Slavery and Secession

11/26 M Sewall, "The Selling of Joseph" A.307-9, 323-26; Cluster: "Slavery, Race, and the Making of American Culture" B. 787-804
11/28 W Douglass, *Narrative of the Life* (through VIII) B. 1170-1204
11/30 F Douglass, *Narrative of the Life* (to end) B. 1204-39

12/3 M Brown, *The Escape* (PDF available on Ecampus), B. 942-44
12/5 W Review for Final Exam
Second Essay Due
12/7 F Final Thoughts, Course Evaluations

12/14 F **Final Exam, 8-10am**