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ENLT 224.01: American Literature to 1865

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ENLT 224.01: AMERICAN LITERATURES TO 1865
SYLLABUS – FALL 2000

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Office hours: Monday/Wednesday 2-3:30pm, and other times by appointment. Please note: be sure to confirm an appointment time with me even during posted office hours. Otherwise I might be with another student or at the copy machine.

DESCRIPTION: A dollar bill might open up study of American literature through *e pluribus unum*. We could well spend the next fifteen weeks merely reading, if not counting, money. Our coins and greenbacks are inscribed with the spectrum of American experience, from inspired ideals of community to oppressive disparities of power. Our currency is the language of both equality and brutality. The course looks at more than four centuries of American literature and at the history of America from a continental perspective, rather than focusing only on the Atlantic seaboard. The literature and history emerge not as an expression of European designs, but as a complex outgrowth of cross-cultural conflicts and collaborations, complicated by issues of race and gender. Although we can never encompass American literary history, we will do our best by looking at both canonical and non-canonical masters of prose and poetry, comparing their versions of American identities, their questions of national and individual purpose, and their narratives of tension between American ideals and practices. Two broad historical realities, conquest and slavery, continue to challenge ideals of *e pluribus unum*, and we will trace how these thinkers negotiate those realities through gendered cultural forms.

GOALS: 1) Beginning-level recognition of the diversity of American literatures to the mid-nineteenth century. 2) Recognition of different criteria — literary and historical, artistic and social, aesthetic and ethical, textual and contextual — for considering texts. 3) Expressive skill in analyzing diverse literary texts through appropriate criteria. 4) Expressed engagement with themes of the course as they apply to 21st-century lives.

REQUIREMENTS: The following list of activities tries to quantify your expected work. Frankly, no one can “quantify the quality” of your writing or discussion. Grading in arts and humanities courses inevitably entails subjective criteria. Thus more dialogue between student and faculty can become a productive approach to the problem of grading humanities performance. I hope you come to feel that am open for you to get to know me both in and out of the classroom. Please come see me. That’s one reason this “W” course is kept relatively small. In addition, if you have any certifiable disability that makes meeting the course requirements difficult, I will be glad to work with you on a mutually satisfying strategy for success. Both form and content will be graded, and explicit writing standards will be part of each assignment. Grades are based on a combination of written work, discussion, discussion questions, and attendance.

1. Participation in discussion of daily readings (averaging 25-30pp per class + novels) will be in both small groups and the full class. The course is designed for your input. NB: “participation” can be both vocal and silent, both speaking and listening, but not all of one or the other. This requirement assumes no more than three absences. Discussion is one of the best ways to learn, and the class can hardly flow without you there. This is so crucial to the course that I’ll take a few more lines here to explain: Everyone’s idea is important. When you speak, try to give your idea away to the group. You don’t need to defend it once it’s out there. And equally, when you listen, give each speaker respect. Humor helps too. We don’t need everyone to agree, but perhaps we can build a community in the classroom, something like *e pluribus unum*.

2. With exceptions, classes will include both lecture and discussion. Take note of these logistics: The class will be divided into four teams for generating discussion questions, DQ1, DQ2, DQ3, and DQ4. (I’ll give you coaching on writing discussion questions.) On the semester schedule you will find the revolving readings for which each team must make questions. Each individual is responsible for at least three questions. Individuals or teams will make handouts of discussion questions for the entire class. That means finishing the reading and preparing the dqs the day before our morning class.

3. Four short-essay, take-home Unit Exams will combine personal response and critical analysis, graded on content and form.

4. Peer editing study groups of 3 students will meet outside of class during each of the four Unit Exams.

5. One longer essay, revising one of the first three Unit Exams, and using library resources, is due 12/12; thesis due 11/30.

6. Notice of an absence should be given in advance when we can arrange for your make-up work. More than three absences can drop the final grade.

REQUIRED TEXTS (+ handouts & reserve materials; note that most of these books are on reserve):
Hannah W. Foster, *The Coquette: or, The History of Eliza Wharton* (1798)

Required in all English classes:
Murfin & Ray, *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* (background for literary analysis)
UNIT 1 -- ONGOING NATIVE AMERICAN TRADITIONS & COLONIAL IDEOLOGIES

9/5: Introductions


9/14: Spanish Explorers, Captives, Conquerors: “Colonial Period: to 1700” 7-10; “Cultures in Contact: Voices from the Imperial Frontier” 110-115; (Yuchi) “Creation of the Whites” 115-116; Columbus 116-17: “Journal of the First Voyage” 117-125; Cabeza de Vaca 125-128: “Relation” 130-140; Villagra 162-163: “History of New Mexico” 163-172. DQ3


10/12: Film: Last of the Mohicans DQ3 (for 10/17)


UNIT 3 -- MANY VOICES OF THE ANTEBELLUM NINETEENTH CENTURY -- I
11/7: Election Day Holiday
11/21: Varieties of Narrative and Representations of Women: Melville 2397-2402: “Encantadas” 2428-2436, “Paradise of Bachelors and Tartarus of Maids” 2437-2454. 3rd Unit Exam handed out. DQ1

UNIT 4 -- MANY VOICES OF THE ANTEBELLUM NINETEENTH CENTURY -- II
12/7: A Fictional Perspective on Slavery: Melville 2397-2402: “Benito Cereno” 2454-2511. DQ1

Finals Week
12/19, Tuesday 4th Unit Exam DUE.