

English 39500-02
Instructor: Christina Katopodis
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Office: 1238 HW
Mon 1:30-2:30pm
and by appointment

American Literature: Origins to the Civil War

M/TH 2:45-4:00pm | Room HN C101

The Puritan settlers came to New England with the conviction that God had sent them on an “errand in the wilderness.” Their encounters with the landscape and the indigenous populations produced an intense and varied religious experience. The diversity of American religious experience expanded through the Enlightenment and American Revolution, leading to 19th Century attempts to balance religious virtue with pragmatic principles. We will examine American religious and political origins through the early settlers’ experiences in the American wilderness, the Puritan and Transcendentalist search for truth in nature, as well as the national desire for self-definition in 19th Century American literature before the Civil War. The course will be focused on how environment has shaped American identity, and how environment is used as a literary and philosophical tool: to frame narratives, position pragmatic arguments, catalyze personal and political change, and open possibilities for explorations of gender and sexuality.

****A note about my pedagogy for your consideration. My teaching is student-centered, which means our syllabus will be shaped largely by you, the students (see “Schedule of Readings”). You will get out of this class what you put into it, and you will have a say in how you will be held accountable for the work (see “Grading Breakdown”). Although I was not democratically elected to be your “leader,” we will negotiate and agree on:**

- (1) a contract/constitution for how class time will be spent;**
- (2) a fair and just attendance policy;**
- (3) multiple forms of participation that give everyone room to participate;**
- (4) how you will be given feedback and grades;**
- (5) what adventure in reading we choose to go on after October 4th.**

Unless indicated otherwise, everything on this syllabus is negotiable, which means both you (by majority vote) and I must agree to them. If you would rather sit in a classroom and listen to long lectures, this probably isn’t the right class for you.**

Required Text - Subject to Revision & Vote

The Norton Anthology of American Literature (Vol. A, any edition)

Grading Breakdown - Up for Deliberation & Vote

??? Participation/Attendance/Group work
??? Accountability for doing the work
??? Midterm or Bi-weekly reading responses
40% Final paper or final project (8-9 pages)

Attendance Policy & Course Expectations - Subject to Revision & Vote

Attendance and punctuality are important to your success in this class. If absent, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed, including announcements made at the beginning of class. If you miss four (4) or more class meetings, you will likely fail the course.

I expect you to come to class having read the assigned texts and with one prepared comment on the text to share with the class: either (1) bring a discussion question to class, (2) select an interesting or important passage from the text to bring to the class's attention, or (3) have a prepared comment or observation about the text ready to share, written down.

Using Technology in the Classroom - Subject to Revision & Vote

You will need a Google account to access the syllabus and engage in collaborative projects for this class. I highly encourage you to use your laptop in class if that helps you with note-taking, etc., and it is especially helpful if we are collaboratively taking notes in the same Google Doc. If you don't have a smartphone or laptop that you can bring to class, please see me in the first week of class to work out another way to participate. Please silence your phone and keep it stowed away from view unless it's an appropriate time to have it out or in case of emergency.

That said, "with great power comes great responsibility." I will not police you. If you decide to live chat with friends or distract yourself during class time, that's on you. In that case, it is not my fault if you miss something, it is not fair for you to ask me to repeat myself, and it is not my problem if you "don't get it" because you weren't paying attention. You're an adult. It's on you to pay attention. To be successful in this class, you need to do more than just show up.

Attendance Method Options (Pick 1 or we can do both 1 and 3) - Deliberation & Vote

(1) Submit Your Discussion Questions on an Index Card

[More details about what this looks like: Write your name and a discussion question that you thought about at home on an index card, then pass them up. Great way for everyone to participate at least once in a large class and helps me bring someone who hasn't spoken yet into the conversation.]

(2) 2-Minute Dialogic Activity with a Partner

[I will give you a topic for discussion at the beginning of class that's not directly related to the reading (pretty low stakes). Then, in pairs, each person has 1 minute to talk about the topic while the other one listens. Afterwards, groups will have the option of sharing with the whole class. Great practice with listening and speaking skills.]

(3) Think-Pair Share (I give you the discussion question)

[I will give you a discussion question about the reading and you'll have 90 seconds to respond on a flashcard individually, then 90 seconds with a partner to combine your answers. Then groups have the option of sharing what they discussed with the class.]

(4) Tweet the First 5 Minutes of Class

[Our class hashtag would be #AmLitEnv. Please use this hashtag for all class tweets. In the first 5 minutes of each class, I will put a unique hashtag for that day on the board. You have 5 minutes to compose a tweet using that hashtag and the class hashtag: tweet

either (1) a reaction to the reading, or (2) a discussion question for the class. For attendance, I recommend you prepare a question or comment in advance to quickly tweet it. You can tweet more than that, of course. I encourage you to respond to your peers, and share useful links using the class hashtag.]

Excused Absences - Subject to Deliberation, Revision & Vote

If absent or late, you could use up to TWO opportunities to do make-up work. Pick a discussion question tweeted by one of your peers (put this at the top, under your name). Write a response (300-400 words) to the question, incorporating your reflections on the reading for that day. You must PRINT this and bring a hard copy with you to the immediately following class, otherwise your absence/lateness will NOT be excused. Keep in mind: you are still missing crucial material from the class discussion and it will be more difficult to write your paper on that text.

Class Constitution - Deliberation, Revision & Vote

Ground Rules for Lecture vs. Discussion (20/80, 30/70, 40/60 ??)

Ground Rules for Discussion (what is participation? how many times can each person speak?)

Consider the Bill of Rights and the Preamble of the Constitution perhaps. "...We the People, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

Academic Integrity - Not Negotiable

The college officially states: "Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures." My motto: No replication without representation. If you plagiarize, you will fail the assignment.

Statement of Accommodation - Not Negotiable

In compliance with the American Disability Act of 1990 (ADA) and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational parity and accommodations for all students with documented disabilities and/or medical conditions. It is recommended that all students with documented disabilities (Emotional, Medical, Physical and/or Learning) consult the Office of Access ABILITY located in Room E1124 to secure necessary academic accommodations. For further information and assistance please call (212- 772- 4857)/TTY (212- 650- 3230). Please contact me by email or in person outside of class if you require accommodation.

~ Schedule of Readings ~

[Subject to Change]

Aug 27: Syllabus & Constitution

Aug 30: Deliberation & Voting

First Encounters in the Wilderness

Sep 3: [No Class]

Sep 5: Las Casas, *The Very Brief Relation of the Devastation of the Indies* [excerpt]
Smith, *The General History of Virginia* [Chapter 2, *The Third Book*]
Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation* [I, IV, VII, X in *Book One* & XI in *Book Two*]

Sep 6: Rowlandson, *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*
Mather, "A Notable Exploit: *Dux Foemina Facti*" [excerpt on Hannah Dustan]
Thoreau, *Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* [excerpt on Hannah Dustan]

Varieties of "American" Experience

Sep 13: Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity"
Bradstreet, "The Flesh and the Spirit," "To My Dear Children"
Wigglesworth, "The Day of Doom"

Sep 17: Taylor, "Meditation 38" (First Series), "Meditation 26" (Second Series)
Edwards, "Personal Narrative," "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"

Sep 20: Equiano, "Narrative of the Life" [excerpts]
Franklin, "Information to Those Who Would Remove to America"
Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* [III & IX]

Sep 24: Paine, *Common Sense* [excerpt]
Freneau, "On Mr. Paine's Rights of Man"
Wheatley, "On Being Brought from Africa to America"

Guest Lectures

Sep 27: Special Guest Dr. Kaitlin Mondello on Emily Dickinson

Oct 1: Special Guest Lecture by Austin Bailey on Emerson's "The American Scholar"

Oct 4: ****TBD****

Encounters (Re)presented, (Re)imagined

Oct 8: [No Class]

Oct 11:

Oct 15:

Oct 18:

Oct 22:

Nature and the American Renaissance OR Gender in the American Renaissance...or both?

Oct 25:

Oct 29:

Nov 1:

Nov 5:

Nov 8:

Nov 12:

Nov 15:

Slavery and Civil War

Nov 19:

Nov 22: [No class]

Nov 26:

Nov 29:

Dec 3:

Dec 6:

Dec 10:

Individual Participation (...%) - Subject to Deliberation, Revision & Vote

What this looks and sounds like is up to students.

I encourage open but *respectful* discussion; thus, derogatory comments, including, but not limited to, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, etc., will not be tolerated in class, on the class blog, using the class hashtag, or on any other platform related to class.

Accountability for Doing Work (...%) - Subject to Deliberation & Vote

Static groups with end-of-semester self and peer evaluations?

Individual reading reflections? Group reflections/co-authorship?

Research projects that dig deeper into subject matter?

Some quick help: Think about how much you want to work on leadership skills, collaboration, individual reasoning, and writing skills.

Midterm or Reading Reflections (...%) - Deliberation & Vote

Midterm...multiple choice? Short answer? Content focused? Problem-solving focused?

Individual or group?

Reading reflection...how many words? Bi-weekly? Public (with comments from peers + feedback from prof.) or private (with feedback only from prof.)? 300-600 words? How much feedback? Prompts or no prompts?

Or Midterm + Reading reflections become the “Accountability for Doing Work”

Final Paper or Final Project (40%) - Revision & Vote

Subject to negotiation and revision: Your final paper (8-9 pages) must have a thesis-driven argument about at least one of the texts covered this semester.¹ Please use MLA or Chicago Style format. Your paper must engage with 2-3 secondary scholarly sources. (Why “2-3,” you ask? If one source provides biographical or historical information without literary criticism, you need three.) I recommend you meet with me during office hours in November *before* Thanksgiving to discuss your thesis. Writing prompts available upon request.

Learning Outcomes - Deliberation, Revision & Vote

Feel free to revise, add, etc.: Students will (1) read and write critically about a survey of American literature written from a variety of viewpoints, (2) gain an understanding of the historical and sociopolitical context for that literature, and (3) sharpen their critical reading skills to think about how race, gender, and environment inform an author’s standpoint and shape what we consider “American” identity. In addition, this course will be (4) driven by student work and participation with a low reliance on lecturing in an effort to de-colonize the classroom and empower students in a safe space to become better citizens and future leaders.

¹* If there is an author from the period we didn’t discuss and you would like to write about a text we didn’t cover, you may come to my office hours to discuss your plan. I’m an Americanist, so I will happily make an exception for a well thought-out paper that fits the parameters of the course.