

English 342
An Introduction to American Literature: Before and/or After 1865?

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The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem.
—Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1855)

The Civil War changed nothing and everything.
—Ira Berlin, *The Long Emancipation* (2015)

Overview: This course is an intensive introduction to American literature from its origins to the contemporary period—but with a twist. Standard surveys of this tradition break at the year 1865; the ostensible conclusion of the Civil War organizes syllabi and anthologies, with eras, authors, and courses falling either before or after this chasm. But that’s not at all how American literature actually developed. Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, and Emily Dickinson, to name just three of the most familiar authors in the canon, produced both before *and* after 1865, and writers like Samuel Hall—a name we scarcely know—wrote in response to abiding questions of liberty and equality, slavery and freedom, and justice and mercy that unfolded in the nation’s bloody internecine conflict. Recognizing this reality, our course will use the year 1865 as a reference point for our efforts to examine the meaning of “America” and “literature.” Among other questions, we will ask: In what ways does the definition of “America” and “American” change based on who defines them? How do race, gender, and regional identities influence this process? What sorts of works count as “literature,” and where do we find them—in newspapers, bound books, pamphlets, and magazines? Throughout the term, students will complete a series of exercises that target the skill of close reading; they also will practice the work of contextualization and explore the archives and databases that support and enable the ongoing study of American literature. Our work will culminate in a class-produced anthology of American literature before and/or after 1865.

Objectives: The aim of this course is to introduce you to the methods and tools for interpreting, analyzing, and interrogating “American literature.” To this end, you will:

- practice the skills of close reading, study important historical contexts, and learn and apply key literary terminology (e.g. slave narrative, manuscript, periodicals) and theoretical concepts (e.g., slave narrative, periodical, periodization);
- use these skills, terms, and concepts to interrogate the organization of our course texts and to propose alternative genealogies;
- cultivate your ability to formulate a compelling argument about a literary text and support this argument with evidence of various kinds and analysis;
- consult and conduct research in key electronic archives and databases; and,

- lay the foundation for the future study of literary history, through other English courses, independent research, and possibly graduate-level work.

Required Texts and Materials:

- *The Concise Heath Anthology of American Literature*, Volumes I and II, gen. ed. Paul Lauter. New York: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2014. Vol I ISBN: 9781285079998, Vol II ISBN: 9781285080000 (be sure to purchase the specific edition of both volumes)
- Access to a printer and a healthy supply of paper (hard copies of all Blackboard materials and writing assignments are required)

Important Electronic Databases and Archives:

- Walt Whitman Archive: <http://www.whitmanarchive.org/>
- Emily Dickinson Archive: <http://www.edickinson.org/>
- Melville Electronic Library: <https://mel.hofstra.edu/index.html>
- African American Newspapers: http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/HistArchive?p_product=EANX&p_action=timeframes&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbid=F61W50JMMTQ5MDAyNjY5MC40MDY0Njc6MT0xMjoxND AuMzIuMTYuNTE&p_clear_search=yes&d_refprod=EANX&&d_collections=EANAAA|EANAAA2
- Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers: <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>
- Nineteenth-Century US Newspapers: <http://infotrac.galegroup.com/itweb/usafacad?db=NCNP>
- Historical *New York Times*: <http://search.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimes?accountid=11496>
- Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/>
- Hathi Trust Digital Library: <https://www.hathitrust.org/>
- GoogleBooks: <http://books.google.com>

Recommended Texts/Resources (available in the library and/or online):

- *A New Literary History of America*, ed. Greil Marcus and Werner Sollors (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2012)
- *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Available online at: www.oed.com
- *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 8th ed. (New York: Modern Language Association, 2016)

ASSIGNMENTS AND EXERCISES

Participation: This course requires your active, informed, and energetic participation. Participation counts for 25% of your final grade, and as such it will have a significant impact on your overall course performance. Both *preparation for* and *contributions to* our class discussion matter—and for the latter, both *quantity* and *quality* matter. Excellence in participation is defined by the following characteristics, all of which we might group under the identity of *intellectual leader*.

An intellectual leader...

- brings the appropriate materials to class, including the readings in hard copy (if available in that medium);

- completes the assignment (reading/exercise) for class in a way that demonstrates familiarity with the material (e.g., she can easily refer to specific evidence) and reflection on the material (e.g., she can ask intelligent questions about the work or hypothesize about an idea put forth in the work);
- makes at least one contribution to the discussion per session that moves the conversation forward. Some ways to move the conversation forward include: answer a question, ask an informed question, respond to a colleague's point, summarize a thread of the discussion, suggest a new direction/topic, ask the professor/students a clarifying question, supply new textual evidence, challenge an assumption, etc.;
- offers unique insights that provoke conversation and show that the student is taking intellectual risks rather than merely offering the predictable answer;
- listens attentively to the course of the discussion, and makes smart decisions about when and how to intervene (e.g., remaining silent to allow for new voices to speak or offering a synthesis of previous points, as needed);
- forges connections between texts and across class meetings;
- helps the entire group find the balance between being attentive and being relaxed so that the overall discussion is both fun *and* rigorous.

You will receive feedback about your class participation at the midpoint of the term. We want to engage in genuine face-to-face discussions, so, unless we're working on an exercise that requires electronic technology, please keep your laptop closed and off the desk.

Text and Context Exercises: At the conclusion of every major section of our course, you will complete an exercise that synthesizes the texts, skills, and methods we've studied in that stretch. Approach every exercise with attention and care, but feel free to experiment and explore as you engage in the discovery process and as you write up your findings. Refer to specific textual evidence in your submitted exercises, and cite page numbers. The point of these assignments is for you to put into practice the key elements you'll need to succeed for our final anthology project. You must post your exercise to our Blackboard site before the start of class and review your colleagues' contributions in preparation for class discussion. Keeping these needs in mind, we will deliberate about a sensible deadline for posting and determine as a group the specific time by which you must post your contribution. Once we agree on this guideline, please be sure to abide it.

Final Project: This course culminates in an anthology of American literature before and/or after 1865, which you will design, edit, and create in collaboration with your colleagues. The purpose of this project is for you to imagine and bring to life a vision of "American literature" that recognizes the complexity of literary history. That is, you'll have to consider how the works we've read and the questions we've studied move back and forward in time, crossing the 1865 divide. To do so, you'll draw on the methods we've honed and the archives we've engaged. Your ultimate goal is to create an anthology of American literature that touches on three key moments: 1865, before, and after; you're encouraged to blur timelines in creative ways. Though the design is up to you, the anthology must include some basic elements: a prefatory essay, a table of contents, and introductory notes for each entry in the anthology. To make this long-term project manageable, we will divide it into a series of stages, including a design proposal and reading list. You'll submit draft materials and receive feedback from your colleagues and instructor before you submit your final work.

Final Exam: After reading the class anthology, you will complete an independent final exam in which you will write a response to one of your classmate's contributions, focusing on a text you haven't studied closely. Accordingly, the exam will offer you an occasion to synthesize the texts and methods we've practiced across the term and assert your own vision of American literary history.

Assessment: Your performance in this class will be based on the quality of your exercises and especially the final project and exam, as well as on the strength of your class participation. Your final grade will be calculated according to the percentages outlined below.

Grading Breakdown

Before PROG

Exercises: 15%

Participation: 10%

After PROG

Exercises: 5%

Participation: 15%

Final Project: 30%

Final Exam: 25%

POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND OTHER IMPORTANT POINTS

Blackboard: Announcements, questions to guide your reading, exercises, links, and other important materials will be available on our Blackboard site.

Communication: E-mail is an official mode of correspondence for this class. As such, you are responsible for all communiqués I send to your USAFA e-mail address. E-mail is also the best way for you to contact me.

Extra Instruction: I am available for extra instruction. Send me an e-mail, and we will work together to arrange a meeting at a mutually convenient time. Be sure to seek any assistance you may need well in advance of deadlines.

Reading Assignments: Reading assignments outlined below on the course calendar will be discussed in class on the day on which they are listed. Most readings are in the *Heath Anthology*; the relevant page numbers are listed on the schedule below next to the letter H; the 1 or 2 following this letter designates the volume number. All other readings are available on our Blackboard site within the Additional Readings tab and are marked as "Bb" below. Please read the assigned piece(s) by this date, review the guiding question posted on Blackboard, annotate key passages in the text, and come prepared to engage in a lively discussion about the text(s). For the texts posted on Blackboard, please print a hard copy of whatever work(s) we are discussing, and bring that hard copy to class.

Assignment Submission: Unless otherwise noted, all work is to be submitted at the beginning of the class session in which it is due. Because of the frequent assignments required for this course, and so that I can comment promptly on your work, extensions will not be granted except under extraordinary circumstances. For the same reasons, late assignments will be penalized. Finally, follow MLA guidelines; for details, see our Blackboard site.

Documentation and Academic Integrity: The Dean’s policy on academic integrity is posted on our Blackboard site under “Writing Resources.” Be sure to review this item. You are required to abide by these regulations; failure to do so will hurt your grade and may cause you to commit plagiarism inadvertently.

COURSE SCHEDULE

I. Paradigms and Provocations

<u>Class</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Assignment</u>
1	Thurs 9 Aug	Introductions Anthologizing “America”
2	Mon 13 Aug	Due: Anthology Exercise
3	Wed 15 Aug	“Early Nineteenth Century: 1800-1865” (H1, 600-35); “Late Nineteenth Century: 1865-1910” (H2, 1-37)

II. Civil Wars: Slavery, Freedom, and the Possibility of a Just and Lasting Peace

4	Fri 17 Aug	Abraham Lincoln (H1, 1054-56), Emancipation Proclamation (Bb); Address at the Dedication of the Gettysburg National Cemetery and Second Inaugural Address (H1, 1057-58)
5	Tues 21 Aug	Thomas Jefferson (H1, 460-63), draft of the Declaration of Independence, from <i>Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson</i> (H1, 463-67) Constitution of the United States (Bb)
6	Thurs 23 Aug	Jefferson, Query XIV (“Laws”) and Query XVIII (“Manners”), from <i>Notes on the State of Virginia</i> (H1, 471-78) Lincoln, Address on Colonization to a Deputation of Negroes (Bb)

III. Texts and Contexts; or, The War in Black and White

7	Mon 27 Aug	Rebecca Harding Davis (H1, 1422-24), “John Lamar” (Bb)
8	Wed 29 Aug	Due: Periodical Exercise

Parents’ Weekend/Labor Day

23	Tues 16 Oct	Emily Dickinson (H1, 1583-88), “I like a look of Agony” (H1, 1589-90), “I reason, Earth is short—” (H1, 1591), “Much Madness is divinest Sense” (H1, 1593), “I reckon—when I count at all—” (H1, 1596), “I dwell in Possibility—” (H1, 1597-98), “Publication—is the Auction” (H1, 1599), “They say that ‘Time assuages’—” (H1, 1599)
24	Thurs 18 Oct	Emily Dickinson Archive
25	Mon 22 Oct	Due: Career Study Exercise

VI. Afterlives of 1865: Faulkner and Du Bois

26	Wed 24 Oct	W. E. B. Du Bois (H2, 524-25), “Back Toward Slavery” and “The Propaganda of History,” from <i>Black Reconstruction in America</i> (Bb)
27	Fri 26 Oct	William Faulkner (H2, 754-55), “Skirmish at Sartoris” (Bb)
28	Tues 30 Oct	Synthesis and Reflection, Ante-/Post-

VII. Re-Visions: American Literature, Before and/or After 1865?

29	Thurs 1 Nov	Anthologies Re-view
30	Mon 5 Nov	Due: Project Proposals
31	Wed 7 Nov	Meetings with ProfL
32	Fri 9 Nov	Meetings with ProfL
<i>Veteran’s Day</i>		
33	Wed 14 Nov	Due: Anthology Architecture
34	Fri 16 Nov	Anthology Research and Refinement
35	Tues 20 Nov	Due: Reading Reports
<i>Thanksgiving Break</i>		
36	Tues 27 Nov	Due: Anthology Drafts
37	Thurs 29 Nov	Anthology Workshops
38	Mon 3 Dec	Anthology Workshops

39	Wed 5 Dec	Anthology Workshops
40	Fri 7 Dec	Due: Final Anthology Project Conclusions

Final Exam (exact period to be announced)