

Course Syllabus

Course Information

Lit. 3322.501

Early American Literature

Autumn, 2016

Dennis P. Walsh

JO 5.608F

Tu/Tr. 6:30-7 p.m. (and by appointment)

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Course Pre-requisites, Co-requisites, and/or Other Restrictions

See A&H Catalog or Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Studies. For complete university educational policies, please see <http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies>.

Course Description

“For we must Consider that wee shall be as a City upon a Hill,” John Winthrop, 1630

”Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just,” Thomas Jefferson, 1787

Early American Literature explores the richness and variety of literary texts written in and about America from the early 1500s to 1800. In particular, we will concentrate on Colonial and Federalist writers from the North and the South as America realizes itself in texts as much as in works. We will examine a sweep of literary forms-- history, fiction, poetry, sermons, political tracts, diaries, essays and personal narratives-- that were written by divergent voices over a period of more than two and half centuries. Moreover, students will confront the principal myths and historical realities that inform much of the readings about this “brave new world,” America, which was as much an invention of the European mind as it was a historical reality. We will pay particular attention to such large issues as God and nation, democracy and slavery, Nature and man, spiritual and physical journeys, rhetorical construction of identity, and the complex concept that Americans are a people of the word.

Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes

The class explores the central texts that informed the construction and identity of America as it transformed itself from a British colony into its own entity, the United States. An ideal democracy rises and resides upon an educated and literate citizenry, one cognizant of the multiple forces that have contributed to its essence. Early American literature is illuminating, insightful and instructive; its study is intrinsically rewarding. By course’s conclusion, students will be able to identify and define the myths, social expectations and ideological drives underpinning the rise of America from colonial outpost to unique nation. In addition to the study of Early American literatures, the class seeks to enhance the student’s written performance by requiring several

formal papers that demonstrate solid research, thoughtful reflection, strong organization, lucid and judicious prose and overall gracefulness.

Required Textbooks and Materials:

Baym, Nina. gen. ed. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature: Beginnings to 1820*. 8th ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012.

Assignments & Academic Calendar

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(This syllabus is flexible and subject to change to better meet class demands.)

- 8. 23. **Introduction:** Syllabus. Requirements. Pedagogical principles. Critical approaches. American literary eras. Myth-Genesis. Ideology. Renaissance. Reformation.
- 8. 30. **Encounters:** *El Requerimiento*, 1513; H. Cortes, 54-59; B. Las Casas, *Destruction* 38-42 (Black Legend).
South: Anglicanism. Virginia, Capt. John Smith, 83-93; *Tragical Relations*.
- 9. 06. **New England: Puritanism:** Calvinism. Wm. Bradford, *Of Plimoth Plantation*, 122-56; Underhill, 75-81. Pequot War Morton, *New Canaan*, 158-65.
- 9. 13. John Cotton, *God's Promise...*(handout); John Winthrop, *Model of Christian* ., 166-77; Winthrop's *Journal* , 177-86.
- 9. 20. **King Philip's War:** I. Mather, *Day of Doom*, a Jeremiad, (handout); Mary Rowlandson, *Captivity Narrative*, 257-88. **(Paper 1 due)**
- 9. 27. Cotton Mather: **Witch Trials**, 328-33; *Notable Exploit*, 354-56; Samuel Sewall: *Diary*, 309-23; *Selling of Joseph*, 323-26. Wigglesworth's *Diary* (handout).
- 10. 4. **Puritan Poetry:** Anne Bradstreet: 208-09, 215-22, 225-27, 230-33; Edward Taylor: *Meditations*, 291-93, *Determine*, 298-300.
- 10. 11. **Enlightenment: Scottish Common Sense:** Hobbes, Locke, Smith;
- 10. 18. **Awakening:** J. Edwards, *Sinners* 430-441; T. Paine, *Age of...* 653-59; B. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 481-535. Wm. Byrd's *Diary*, 390-96.
- 10. 25. **Virtuous Republic:** Crèvecoeur, *Letters from American* ...605-14. T. Jefferson, *Declaration*, 663-77, *Notes on*, 669-7; J. S. Murray, *Equality of Sexes*, 739-755. **(Paper 2 due)**

- 11. 1. **Virtuous Republic** (cont.) Literary America.
- 11. 8. **Poetry:** Wheatley, 764; Letters, 773-74; Mercy Otis Warren, 731-32.
- 11. 15. (Poetry) Freneau, 757-62.

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- 11. 29. **Sentimental Novel:** *The Coquette*, 818-915.
- 12. 6. **Final Papers due.**

Grading Policy

Students will be required to write three formal papers (5-6 pages in length). One of the course's goals is to enhance written expression. To that end all papers, will be evaluated for research, reflection, conceptual realization, organization, grammatical and syntactical correctness and overall gracefulness. Quality research is essential. Each paper will amount to 30 percent for a total of 90 per cent of final grade. There will be at least two spot tests that will account for another 10 percent toward the final grade.

Course & Instructor Policies

Please keep current with the readings. The class will explore the texts of more than 20 authors spanning nearly three centuries, making it easy for one to fall quickly behind. Be patient in reading the assigned texts; they are not "Twitter friendly."

It essential that students contribute to the class. It is to your advantage to challenge the texts, ask questions, pose alternative views, critique the writings and offer differing interpretations.

Please attend all sessions. There are no unexcused absences. Please let me know if you are unable to attend the evening class. Unexcused or repeated absences will have an impact on your final grade.

Please!! No electronic devices in class. They can be disruptive.
