

English 207
Backgrounds in American Literature:
Surveying America: 1630-to the Present
Instructor: Zubeda Jalalzai

Always historicize!

—Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (1981)

My language is very much based on what I read and how it affects me, that is, on the surprise that comes from reading something that compels you to read differently, as I believe literature does . . . every work suggests a new approach. As risky as that might seem, it is, I believe what intelligence means — a tuned sensitivity to that which is alive and therefore cannot be known until it is known.

— Barbara Christian, “The Race for Theory” (1988)

This course examines American literary production from the first English settlers to the present day. We shall follow American literature historically and critically as well as through developments in literary form. Asking how politics and history shape the form as well as the content of literature, our analyses will include the following areas of American literature and culture: Puritanism, Revolution, Transcendentalism, American Gothic, Slavery and Race, Harlem Renaissance, Modern/Postmodern America, and Contemporary Ethnic literature. We will be reading critical essays alongside the primary material to help us think through greater theoretical, historical, or literary issues.

Required Texts: available at Off Campus Book Store, 1017 Smith Street

Lauter, Paul. *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*. Concise Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2004.

Richter, David H. *Falling into Theory: Conflicting Views on Reading Literature*. 2nd edition. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2000.

Recommended Texts:

Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 6th edition. New York: Modern Languages Association, 2003.

Murfin, Ross and Supryia M. Ray. *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003.

Attendance: Much of your grade depends on your class participation; therefore, non-attendance will lower your grade. You are allowed two unexcused absences. For every absence after two, your *final grade will decrease by 1/2 letter grade* (ex: if you have 3 total absences, 2 are allowed, and 1 is unexcused. If your *FINAL* grade is a "B" [3.0], two unexcused absences will decrease it to a "B-" [2.67]). **If you arrive late or leave early on two occasions, you will have earned one unexcused absence.**

Classroom etiquette: Once class is in session, leave the room **ONLY FOR EMERGENCIES**. A constant flow of traffic in and out of the room is disruptive and disrespectful to your class mates. **No Lap Tops, Cell Phones, or Texting in Class.** Take notes with pen and paper, and turn cell phones off while class is in session. Texting is very obvious from the front of the room and certainly detracts from your participation.

Contact: For any course business or announcements that must be communicated outside of class, I will use your RIC email accounts exclusively. Please check your RIC email regularly.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the intentional or unintentional use of someone else's words or ideas as your own. If you plagiarize someone's words or ideas you will receive a "0" on the assignment and you may either fail the course or be asked to leave the class. ***Every case of plagiarism will be reported to the English Department.*** Depending on the nature of the plagiarism, you may also be asked to leave the college. Do not pass off the ideas you get from Wikipedia, *Cliff Notes*, or *Sparks Notes* (or ANY on-line or printed material) as your own. If you are indebted to any outside source (including a paper you've written for another class) you must cite that source. The consequences for not doing so are serious. Do cite the sources of your information in oral presentations as well as written work. **Cutting and pasting material from the internet as well as paraphrasing too closely to the original language (even with proper citation) is plagiarism.**

Grading:

Paper	30%	Step 1 Proposal	10% of paper grade
		Step 2 Close Reading	40% of paper grade
		Steps 3 and 4 Final Paper (cultural, historical, critical context) plus Revision	50% of paper grade
Participation	20%		
Exam 1	25%		
Exam 2	25%		

Failure to submit any one of the major assignments will result in failure of the class

Late Papers: All steps in producing the semester long- paper assignment must be completed on time to receive full credit. **I do not accept late work.** If you suffer a major illness or death in the family, you may submit missed assignments but only if you can verify your absence. Late paper grades will be reduced ½ letter grade for each school day late.

Schedule

{ note: the dates given are the dates on which the assignments are due }

Week 1 1/25-1/28	M	Introductions
	Th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •“Creation of the Whites” Yuchi (40) •“The Coming of the Spanish and the Pueblo Revolt” Hopi (95-99)Over the week-end also read/review the four choices for semester long paper assignment: Roger Williams, Harriet Jacobs, Eudora Welty, Lawrence Ferlinghetti
Week 2 2/1-2/4	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Richter “Why do we Read?” in <i>Falling into Theory</i> (15-30) from <i>The Jesuit Relations</i> (107-116) •Thomas Harriot, from <i>A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia</i> (118-125)
	Th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •John Winthrop, from <i>The Journal of John Winthrop</i> (147-149, 157-164) •Anne Bradstreet (187-188) “The Prologue” “The Flesh and the Spirit”
Week 3 2/8-2/11	M	<p>FIRST STEP OF PAPER DUE: 250-300 word statement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Benjamin Franklin, “The Way to Wealth” (365-373) •Thomas Jefferson, <i>Declaration of Independence</i> (480-84) from <i>Notes on a State of Virginia</i> (495-96)
	Th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Phillis Wheatley, (569-70). “On Being Brought from Africa to America” (575) and “To His Excellency General Washington” (577) •William Apess, “An Indian’s Looking Glass for the White Man” (644-650) •Paulo Freire, “The Banking Concept of Education” in <i>Falling into Theory</i> (68-78)
Week 4 2/15-2/18	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Ralph Waldo Emerson, from <i>Nature</i> (689-94) •Henry David Thoreau, from <i>Walden</i> (765-75) •Walt Whitman, 1209-11, “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” (1286-93)
	Th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Nathaniel Hawthorne, “My Kinsman, Major Molineux” (953-67) •Edgar Allan Poe, “The Raven” (988-90, 1028-32)
Week 5 2/22-2/25	M	•Herman Melville, <i>Bartleby the Scrivener</i> ” (1055-84)
	Th	<p>Midterm Review (bring in questions)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Jane Tompkins, “Masterpiece Theater: The Politics of Hawthorne’s Literary Reputation” in <i>Falling into Theory</i>(137-47)
Week 6	M	EXAM 1

3/1-3/4	Th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Declaration of Sentiments” (861-62, 864-66) •Frederick Douglass from <i>Narrative of the Life</i> (866-84, 900-31)
Week 7 3/8-3/11	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Emily Dickinson, (1295-97) <li style="padding-left: 20px;">“I’m Nobody” (1299) <li style="padding-left: 20px;">“Some Keep the Sabbath” (1300) <li style="padding-left: 20px;">“My Life had Stood—a Loaded Gun” (1311) <li style="padding-left: 20px;">“Tell all the Truth but tell it slant” (1313) •Gilbert/Gubar, “The Female Swerve” in <i>Falling into Theory</i> (174-82)
	Th	<p>SECOND STEP OF PAPER DUE: 4-6 pages, CRITICAL, CLOSE READING (No research)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Willa Cather, “A Wagner Matinee” (1782-87)
Week 8 3/15-3/18		SPRING BREAK
Week 9 3/22-3/25	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Gertrude Stein, from <i>The Making of Americans</i> (1845-49) •Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, from <i>The Epistemology of the Closet</i> in <i>Falling into Theory</i> (182-97)
	Th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Mark Twain, “The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg” (1359-1361, 1368-1399)
Week 10 3/29-4/1	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •“Modern Period 1910-1945” (1713-36) •Robert Frost, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” “Desert Places,” “Design” (1799-1800, 1803-05)
	Th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Zora Neale Hurston, “Sweat” (2034-2042) •Alain Locke, “The New Negro” (1987-96) •Langston Hughes, “I, Too” (2006-07, 2010) •Henry Louis Gates, “Canon-Formation, Literary History, and the Afro-American Tradition: From the Seen to the Told” (175-82)
Week 11 4/5-4/8	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •William Carlos Williams, “Spring and All, “To Elsie” (1850-52, 1853-56) •Wallace Stevens, “Sunday Morning,” “The Snow Man,” “Anecdote of the Jar,” and “Of Modern Poetry” (1954-60)
	Th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Randolph Bourne, “Trans-National America” (2052-65) •Anzia Yezierska, “America and I” (2065-73)
Week 12 4/12-4/15	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •William Faulkner, “Barn Burning” (1960-1974)
	Th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •John Steinbeck, from <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i> (2132-42) <p>FOURTH STEP OF PAPER DUE: 4-6 pages, HISTORICAL/SCHOLARLY RESEARCH</p>

Week 13 4/19-4/22	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •“The Beat Movement” (2352) •Jack Kerouac, “The Vanishing American Hobo” (2360-66) •Allen Ginsberg, “America” (2375-77) Roland Barthes “The Death of the Author” (253-257)
	Th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Toni Morrison, “Recitatif” (2394-2408) •Maxine Hong Kingston “No Name Woman” (2476-2485)
Week 14 4/26-4/29	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Louise Erdrich, “Saint Marie” (2530-40) •Bharati Mukherjee, “Happiness” (2485-2491) •Gayatri Spivak, “Imperialism and Sexual Difference” (339-348)
	Th	<i>Wall Street</i> 1987, dir. Oliver Stone
Week 15 5/3-5/6	M	finish <i>Wall Street</i> .
	Th	Exam Review COURSE PAPER DUE, 10-12 pages

FINAL EXAM: MAY 10-14 (to be announced)

Semester Long Course Paper

The formal critical writing component of the course will require a semester-long, multi-step paper involving both your own **close reading and analysis** and some basic **historical and scholarly research**. The paper will engage a text not assigned for regular class discussion; **but all these texts are required reading for this assignment**.

*In the first step of the project, you will select the text to be studied and suggest some topics for research.

*In the second and third steps, you will draft separate parts of the paper;

*In the fourth final step, you will produce a 10-to-12-page course paper that **revises, integrates, and expands** the earlier material.

Below are instructions and deadlines for completing the project. **All writing submitted as part of this assignment must be prepared according to MLA guidelines. Any evidence of plagiarism at any point in the project will result in failure of the course.**

Step 1: During the first few weeks of the course, read the following works by four different authors:

Roger Williams *Key into the Language of America* 1643 (179-185). Get longer text from Blackboard or from Googlebooks.com). Williams was the Puritan founder of Rhode Island. This text is a “dictionary” of the Narragansett language that Williams learned from the Native Americans from whom he also acquired the land to start Providence.

Harriet Ann Jacobs from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* 1861 (1813-1897). Full text is available on Googlebooks.com. Jacobs was an escaped slave whose autobiographical account of her life and escape elicits intriguing comparisons with the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*.

Eudora Welty “Why I live at the P. O.” 1941 (2175-2183). Welty is a contemporary southern novelist and short-story writer whose work compels through its peculiar and humorous characters, highly ironic situations, and distinctive writing style, heavily marked by Mississippi Delta vernacular.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti “I Am Waiting” 1958 (2352-56). Ferlinghetti was a beat poet, highly influential in the counter cultural movements of the 1960s.

Step. 1. Due February 8, *After reading the entire work* carefully, select one of the above authors/texts for your project and submit a 250-to-300-word (word-processed, double-spaced) statement in which you explain concisely but substantively (1) why you chose the author/text (what interests you) and (2) what issues pertinent to the author/text you might explore in your historical and scholarly research. Note that your primary research focus will **not** be the author’s biography (see instructions for Step 3). This statement will be worth 10% of the overall project grade, so prepare it carefully.

Step 2: Due March 11, submit a four-to-six-page analytical paper on the text you’ve chosen. This paper will involve a close-reading (structural analysis) and detailed discussion of narrative technique of the sort you were trained to do in English 201. *Do*

not do research in secondary critical sources for this paper. The insights should be a product of your close attention to the text and to the technique of the author. Your paper should also not try to say everything possible about the poem(s) or narrative; it should focus on aspects of the work(s) that you find most pertinent or compelling critically. This paper will be worth 40% of the overall project grade. The emphasis of my response will be on improving and developing the critical insights and the writing.

Step 3: Due April 15, submit a four-to-six-page paper in which you situate your chosen text in a pertinent historical, cultural, and critical context. **Your purpose will be to suggest how the text(s) reflects or engages its historical and cultural moment.** Do not focus on the author's biography except as it reflects larger historical and cultural forces or concerns. For example, if you are working on Jacobs you will not emphasize specific biographical details. You might, however, consider the author's "cultural positioning" both as a nineteenth-century woman and as a slave. If you are working on Welty, you will not speculate on the author's psychology, but you might consider how her short story engages the narrator's psychology within the framework of the family and perhaps the region, itself. Let the content of the text you've chosen suggest the topics of your research. In your paper, focus on some aspect of the historical, cultural, and critical context of the work. You will have to refer to details of the text in this paper, but your purpose here is not close literary analysis but broader (outside) contextualizing. This step involves research. Use formal academic sources (peer-reviewed books and articles). While you can also cite web sources, encyclopedias, and other reference materials these *do not count as scholarly sources*. Do provide MLA style works cited page. This paper will receive a provisional grade and comments suggesting ways to sharpen the writing and the critical contextualizing.

Step 4: Due May 6, submit the final 10-to-12-page paper **that revises, integrates, and expands** the material from steps two and three. This will be a paper in which **you combine close literary attention to the text with careful historical, cultural, and critical contextualizing**. You should begin with a thesis that unites the two steps of the project. Your goal should be to illuminate the text critically and historically, in ways we will have been doing with our texts all along in class discussion. This final paper will receive a grade that represents 50% of the grade on the overall project. The overall project represents 30% of the final course grade.

GOOD LUCK!