

American Vistas: Writings from 1492 to 1861

42.294 The History of American Literature I
Spring 2010
Michael Millner
michael_millner@uml.edu
Office hrs: T/Th 12:30-1:45
and by appointment

“American Vistas” broadly surveys “American writings” over a 375-year period even as it repeatedly questions and re-evaluates what constitutes “America” and “American writing.” The plural and polyglot “vistas” of the title is meant to suggest multiple visions of America and American writing. How these various vistas relate and interact with each other will be one of our central questions.

We will ground our examination of these American visions in historical specifics as much as possible (a daunting imperative in a course of such large scope). Hence, another of our primary concerns will be the relation between text and context. What values and ruptures do these texts reveal? How should we understand the work they do?

Although our discussion topics will range widely, we have three touchstones. First, over the past decade and a half, terms and concepts like “globalism,” “transnationalism,” the “Atlantic World,” and the “post-national” have begun to transform the study of American literature and American culture. This paradigm shift is due in part to contemporary world events – our world became a much more global place when The Wall came down, the era of two superpowers ended, and technological transformation meant that culture and capital could be exchanged more easily than ever before. Thus we begin this course in a transatlantic fashion – not in North America but in London looking across the sea to North America. Our first text is Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, and I hope that this play about the major themes of the new Atlantic world (for instance, the questions of authority and morality raised by encounters with other unknown people and cultures) will allow us to put other works on the syllabus into a more global context. To this end, we will also read authors that may appear at first to have little to do with the United States: works of the Spanish explorer or the African diasporan Olaudah Equiano (who spent much of his life in London). These texts, as well as those by Native Americans and African-American slaves, often unsettle the conventional narrative of early American literature which plots a story from a small religious community to a national (re)naissance.

Second, the class will turn to writings of various genres (letters, explorers’ diaries, sermons, poetry, short stories, essays, political documents) in order to examine a number of historical forces and events: exploration, migration, first contact between Western Europeans and Native Americans, settler colonialism, the Iroquois Confederacy, nation building, empire building, African diaspora, the Pequot War, King Philip’s War, the Great Awakening, western expansion, the rise of the professional author, the Enlightenment, the rise of the public sphere, Puritanism, Deism, romanticism, the Revolution, transcendentalism, capitalism, individualism and self-reliance, reform movements, Manifest Destiny, urbanization, early feminism, the “American Renaissance” . . . the list goes on.

Third, to this long list of historical forces and events we will add a number of conceptual terms which will help us understand and develop an important self-consciousness about the project of studying these writings. Those terms will include: American exceptionalism, canon formation and the politics of the canon, historiography, cultural production of identity, self-fashioning, hegemonic or cultural power, nation as imagined community, transatlantic, and transnational.

Your final grade in this course will be determined by your performance on three tests (20% each), quizzes and class participation (20% together), and a final paper/project (20%). A rules and regulations handout will follow this handout.

A few more notes:

Please read all author introductions.

This course is about half lecture and half discussion.

Note that there are two open days for the discussion of the final paper.

You should keep track of the dates of all the writings.

Required Texts:

Nina Baym, et al. eds. The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Volume One, Beginnings to 1865. Seventh shorter edition. W.W. Norton.

William Shakespeare. The Tempest. Graff and Phelan, eds. Second Edition (2008). Bedford/St. Martin. NOTE: You can also use the first edition; however, I will be using the second.

Important Dates:

Jan. 29	Last day to add without a permission number
Feb. 5	Last day to add with a permission number, last day to drop without record
April 12	Last day for students to withdraw from course with a "W"

In accordance with University policy and the ADA, I will provide accommodation for students with documented disabilities. If you have a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services: McGauvran 363 (978-934-4338) as soon as possible. They will contact me regarding effective accommodations. In order to speed up this process, you can also let me know in person or via email. This documentation is confidential.

Course Rules and Requirements

1. **Class participation** makes possible a dynamic, collaborative learning community -- the possibility that we as a community produce knowledge. For this reason, class participation is part of your final grade. In order to participate you must, of course, come to class well prepared. Don't just do the reading, but write down questions you have and begin to develop opinions about the reading. Always bring the assigned texts and materials with you to class: every class discussion will involve us in some close analysis of specific passages and images. I will often provide handouts with study questions, and you should come to class having considered those questions in depth. You should also come to each class with at least one marked passage or image and/or one well-considered question or observation to launch discussion. The less assertive need not fear: class participation is not measured by how much you talk; rather, it is the degree of your involvement with and attentiveness in the class, your ability to listen to and respond to your peers, your willingness to share your thoughts in a constructive way.
2. You will write one **formal paper/project** in this course. I will distribute a handout detailing requirements, due dates, and procedures. The assignment is due **AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS** and must be typed. Late assignments lose half a letter grade for each class period late. **Only hard copies of written work will be accepted.**
3. **Plagiarism or cheating** of any sort will result in failure of the course. For a discussion of plagiarism see the plagiarism handout.
4. This course has three **tests**. Tests may only be taken late under extraordinary circumstances, and the student must provide a note from a doctor or a dean. In such situations, the request to take the test late must be made at least 24 hours in advance. Failure to follow these rules will result in a zero on the test.
5. **You are required to attend class.** Also, you must have prepared whatever material the assignment requires. An absence will affect your participation grade. And prolonged absences will lead to failure of the course. If you miss class more than three times I will expect you to see me in my office to discuss your future in the course and possible withdrawal. If you miss five classes you will fail the course.
6. If you come to class **excessively or repeatedly late**, it will affect your grade. Also, please refrain from getting up and leaving the room during class unless it's an emergency.
7. You may drink in class, **but you may not eat**. Please silence your phone (vibrate is not silence), and please refrain from messaging during class. If your phone is in way used in class, I will immediately confiscate it and call my close friend who runs a gambling ring in Turkmenistan.
8. Your **final grade** is comprised of your grades on the paper/final project (20% of total), your grade on the three tests (20% each of total), and your grade on daily quizzes and class participation (together 20% of total).
9. In the event of a **class cancellation** because of snow or my absence, please stay current with the syllabus.
10. Please feel free to drop by my office hours to discuss the class or the reading/writing assignments. Of course, I will be happy to make appointments at other times if my office hours conflict with your schedule. **You can best reach me by email.**
11. You are responsible for checking your **UNIVERSITY email account**.

SYLLABUS

Week (1) of 1/26

TU: **Class:** Goals of the Course; What is Literary History? What is American Literary History? Shifting Paradigms in American Literary Study

In-class exercise: Across the United States students are sitting in large lecture rooms with their Nortons propped open and their syllabi at their sides. Why? What are we trying to accomplish here? What's at stake? What do you think?

The Atlantic World of the The Tempest, 1492-1618

TH: **Read:** The Tempest, Act 1; also the biographical intro to Shakespeare in our edition, 3-9
Class: Why The Tempest? Questions of Authority, Difference, Sex, and Colonialism

Week (2) of 2/2

TU: **Read:** The Tempest, Acts 2 and 3 (Note heavier than usual reading load), and Montaigne, from "Of the Cannibals," 120-121, in our edition of The Tempest. In the Norton read Columbus' letter to Luis de Santangel, 25-27

Class: The Atlantic World in 1500 and 1600; Maps in the Atlantic World

TH: **Read:** The Tempest, Act 4 and Act 5, and Richard Hakluyt, "Reasons for Colonization," 126-135 in our edition of The Tempest

Class: The Tempest on power in the New World

Week (3) of 2/9

Puritan New England

TU: **Read:** John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," 76-87

Class: Great Migration, American Exceptionalism, Puritans and Voluntary Community; where's the south, the Caribbean, and the mid-Atlantic?

Read: Roger Williams, from A Key into the Language of America, 87-97

Class: Martin Luther, John Calvin, The tenets of Protestantism, The Word, Protestants and Natives

TH: **Read:** Anne Bradstreet, "The Prologue," "The Author to Her Book," "Before the Birth of One of Her Children," "To My Dear and Loving Husband," "To My Dear Children"

Class: Poetry and female agency in later Puritan New England

Week (4) of 2/16

TU: NO CLASS (Monday Schedule)

TH: **Read:** Mary Rowlandson, from A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson, 117-134

Class: Rowlandson's reading; Rowlandson and natives

Read: Cotton Mather, from The Wonders of the Invisible World, 141-150

Class: Witches and a Community in Crisis

Week (5) of 2/23

TU: **Midterm #1**

The Eighteenth Century and the Mixed Legacy of Modernity

TH: **Read:** Introduction to "American Literature 1700-1820," 151-161

Class: The Enlightenment, rationalism, science, race, Hobbes, Locke, Hutchinson

Read: Jonathan Edwards, "Personal Narrative," 170-181
Class: The Great Awakening, autobiography, the nature of the soul

Week (6) of 3/2

TU: **Read:** Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," 194-206
Class: Enlightenment and sentiment

TH: **Read:** Benjamin Franklin, from The Autobiography, 230-252 (first half of part one)
Class: Franklin's biography and autobiography; self-fashioning

Week (7) of 3/9

TU: **Read:** Benjamin Franklin, from The Autobiography, 252-275 (second half of part one)
Class: on reason, on reading, the public sphere

TH: **Read:** Phillis Wheatley
"On Being Brought from Africa to America," "To the University of Cambridge, in New England," "On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield, 1770," "Thoughts on the Works of Providence," "To S.M., A young African Painter, on Seeing His Works," "To His Excellency General Washington"
Class: Race and Reading between the lines, slavery, the African diaspora, double consciousness

Week of 3/16

SPRING BREAK

Week (8) of 3/23

TU: **Read:** Olaudah Equiano, from The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano 355-368
Class: Race and Self-fashioning, double consciousness
Read: Slavery, Race, and the Making of American Literature, 748-758
Thomas Jefferson, from Notes on the State of Virginia
Class: the Enlightenment and racism, scientific racism, race and sentiment

TH: Midterm #2

Week (9) of 3/30

The "American Renaissance" and the American Revenant

TU: **Read:** Norton Introduction to American Literature, 1820-1865, 431-452
Class: English Romanticism, the imagination, urbanization, the continued emergence of gender and racial politics, the printing revolution, the national imaginary, the rise of the novel, bourgeois culture
Read: Henry David Thoreau, from Walden, 844-64

TH: **Read:** Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, 920-45
Class: Douglass and reading; Douglass and self-fashioning

Week (10) of 4/6

TU: **Read:** Edgar Allan Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher," 689-702

TH: **Read:** Poe, "The Purloined Letter"

Week (11) of 4/13

TU: A class dedicated to final papers

TH: **Read:** Nathaniel Hawthorne, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," 589-605

Week (12) of 4/20

TU: **Read:** Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown"
Class: Questions of reading; art and ambiguity

TH: **Read:** Walt Whitman, from Song of Myself (sections to be announced)

Week (13) of 4/27 (Please note that the reading is light this week to enable you to work on your papers)

TU: **Read:** Whitman, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," 1057-1061

TH: **Read:** Emily Dickinson, poems 39, 236, 620, 1096, 1577, 1773

Week (14) of 5/4

TU: Final Paper's due
Class: Dickinson and Whitman, continued

TH: **Read:** Herman Melville, "Benito Cereno," 1118-1143

Week (15) of 5/11

TU: **Read:** Melville, "Benito Cereno," 1143-1174

Final Test (test #3) during exam period