American Literature’s Hemispheric Address: 1823-1923

Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, 1:00 p.m. – 1:50 p.m.
Tucker Hall 221
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Office: Tucker Hall 033; College Apartments 217
Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is a study of American literature’s address to and engagement with the hemisphere in the long nineteenth century. As such, it is first and foremost an inquiry into the concepts—“America,” “literature,” “address,” “hemisphere,” race and period—that animate our study. Our first task, then, is to turn these concepts into problems. What constitutes American literature in this period? What are the conditions of its production, circulation, and reception? To what, and to whom, is it addressed? Who are its readers, its publics, its characters, its addressees? Who are its legitimators, authorities, and apologists? The course is arranged around major transformations in hemispheric relations, including the invocation and exercise of the Monroe Doctrine (1823), the annexation of Texas, the U.S. Mexican War (1846-1848), the Treaty of Guadeloupe (1848), U.S. expansionism before and after the Spanish American War (1898), the construction and administration of the Panama Canal Zone (1903-1914), and the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). We conclude with a look at the hemispheric contexts of the Harlem Renaissance.

Much of what we think of as American literature in this period is in fact a trans-American literature, insofar as it responds to these developments and the historical antagonisms that define them. Rather than adopt the conventional periodization, 1865-1914, which chunks U.S. literature into antebellum and postbellum periods defined by the Civil War, proceeds to Reconstruction and its demise, the rise of Jim Crow and new forms of anti-black racism, and concludes with the collapse of the world order before the onset of World War I, we’ll frame these processes in terms of enduring hemispheric continuities. We’ll read about how writers of the “American Renaissance”—Thoreau, Melville, Emerson, Hawthorne, and Whitman—thought about the massive annexation of Mexico, the subsequent Gold Rush, and the conflictual settlement of newly acquired territories; how writers like Frederic Douglass, José Martí, Stephen Crane, W.E.B. Du Bois, and James Weldon Johnson understood the U.S. occupations of Haiti, Cuba, and Puerto Rico; how authors as different as Mariano Azuela, Katherine Anne Porter, and María Cristina Mena responded to the Mexican Revolution; and how U.S. imperialism and slavery in the Caribbean found their way into the heart of the literature of the Harlem Renaissance.

COURSE TEXTS


Additional assigned texts will be provided on the course website.

**COURSE WEBSITE**

Our class has a Blackboard site that contains the syllabus, assignments, and other course-related materials. You can log in to our Blackboard site at blackboard.wm.edu.

**REQUIREMENTS**

10% **PARTICIPATION IN CLASS**

Regular attendance and active, thoughtful participation in class are required. Classes will be a mix of lecture, small-group and large-group discussion. Discussion requires every student to take the intellectual risk of offering observations, ideas, and arguments in class in response to one another and to the instructor. You aren’t supposed to know all the answers in advance, but you are required to come to class prepared to join in a communal effort to figure things out. If you are apprehensive about speaking in class, please see me during office hours at the start of the semester.

I do not permit the use of laptops, smartphones, tablets, or smartwatches in class. Their potential uses do not outweigh their power to distract from discussion. I will make exceptions for students who require accommodation for a disability.

If you have a special obligation that will require you to miss several classes (e.g. religious observances, varsity athletics), please talk with me at the beginning of the semester. If you fall ill or miss class for a family emergency, please contact me as soon as possible; you can make up for an excused absence. If you miss three classes without excuse, the maximum participation mark you can earn is a B; if you miss four, C. Missing more than four meetings without an excuse will normally result in a failing grade for the course.

Lateness, lack of preparation, and disruptive behavior will affect the participation grade. Students who arrive late to class more than three times will receive one absence. Students who arrive later than 15 minutes past the start time will be counted as absent for that class period.

10% **COURSE BLOG & INFORMAL WRITING ASSIGNMENTS**

Weekly blog entries and occasional informal analytical writing assignments on the basis of your own or others’ writing. Graded complete/incomplete.
25% PAPER 1

An interpretive essay (5-7 pp.) making an argument about one text. Choice of topics distributed in advance. You will have an opportunity to revise this paper.

30% PAPER 2

An interpretive essay (6-8 pp.) making an argument about one text, making appropriate use of secondary sources. Choice of topics distributed in advance. This paper is due on the final day of the course. You will not have the opportunity to revise it.

25% TAKE-HOME FINAL

Essay questions, open book, no collaboration.

GRADING

William & Mary uses a four-point grading system. The general standards for grades are as follows:

A range: Outstanding work, demonstrating thorough mastery of course materials and skills.

B range: Good work, demonstrating serious engagement with all aspects of the course but incomplete mastery of course materials and skills.

C range: Satisfactory work, meeting requirements but indicating significant problems mastering the course materials and skills.

D range: Poor or minimally passing work, meeting the basic course requirements, but frequently unsatisfactory in several major areas.

F: Failure due to unmet course requirements or consistently unsatisfactory work.

The final grade is subject to my discretion. Unsatisfactory work in all areas of the course will result in an F even if the numerical score corresponds to a passing grade. It is not possible to pass the course without turning in both papers and completing both the midterm and the final.

Unless you make other arrangements with me in advance, graded assignments will be penalized by one-third of a letter grade for each class day they are late. If you are habitually late with your assignments, you will be unable to participate fully in the class.

RECORDING OF CLASS LECTURES & DISCUSSIONS

Students may not record class lectures and discussions without permission. Permission will be granted on a case-by-case basis.
WRITING RESOURCES CENTER

The Writing Resources Center (Swem Library, 1st floor) offers one-on-one consultations for students to discuss their work in any discipline with well-trained writing consultants. Consultants will work with you at any stage in your writing process. They will work with you to help you do your own best work, so you should expect to be actively involved in your session. The WRC is a resource for all William & Mary students. Whether you consider yourself to be a strong writer or a weak one, you can benefit from meeting with a writing consultant.

The hours for the current semester are posted on the website. I encourage you to reserve an appointment in advance. You may schedule a session online or in person. In addition to consultations at the WRC, Swem Library offers a number of other resources for students, including workshops, guidance on research, and physical spaces ideal for an array of projects, from individual projects to group work.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is at the heart of the university, and we all are responsible to each other and to our community for upholding the ideals of honor and integrity. William & Mary has had an Honor Code since at least 1779. Your full participation and observance of the Honor Code is expected. To present something as your own original writing or thinking when it is not is plagiarism. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating are serious violations of trust. Academic and intellectual dishonesty, including plagiarism, will have severe consequences, in accordance with the student-led honor system. For details about your responsibilities as a student, please see the Student Handbook.

CHosen NAME & GENDER PRONOUNS

This course aims to be an inclusive learning community that supports students of all gender expressions and identities. Please let me know if you would like to be addressed by a different name or set of pronouns than those listed in the official class roster. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

I assume that all of us learn in different ways. If there are circumstances that may affect your performance in this course, please talk to me as soon as possible so that we can work together to develop strategies for accommodations that will satisfy both your learning needs and the requirements of the course. Whether or not you have a documented disability, William & Mary provides many support services that are available to all students.

Student Accessibility Services is the office responsible for assisting students with disabilities. If you have a disability that interferes with your learning (whether visible or invisible, physical or mental), you are encouraged to register with this office. Student Accessibility Services will work with you to determine appropriate accommodations for your courses, such as additional time on tests, staggered homework assignments, or note-taking assistance. This office will give you a letter outlining the
accommodations you need that you can share with your teachers; specific information about your disability will remain private. If you have any questions about accommodation, or what constitutes a disability, I invite you to speak with me or to Student Accessibility Services.

SCHEDULE

I. RACE & PERIODIZATION

Wednesday, August 28.

Introduction. Readings for discussion distributed in class.


Friday, August 30.


II. THE “AMERICAN RENAISSANCE” & THE LITERATURE OF THE AMERICAS

Monday, September 2 [Labor Day, class will be held].

Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Rappaccini’s Daughter” (1844).

Wednesday, September 4.

Herman Melville, “Hawthorne and His Mosses” (1850).

Thursday, September 5.

Blog posts due by 5 p.m. to Blackboard.

Friday, September 6 [Last Day to Add/Drop]

Herman Melville, “Authentic Anecdotes of Old Zach” (1847).
Ralph Waldo Emerson, Editors’ Address (Massachusetts Quarterly Review 1847); U.S.-Mexican War journal entries (course website).

Monday, September 9.

Sojourner Truth, transcription of what is known as her “Ain’t I a Woman?” (1851) speech Frederick Douglass, “What to a Slave Is the Fourth of July?” (1852).
Henry David Thoreau, “Slavery in Massachusetts” (1854).

Wednesday, September 11.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Fugitive Slave Law” (1854).
Frederick Douglass, “Aggressions of the Slave Power” (1856) (course website).

Thursday, September 12.

Blog posts due by 5 p.m. to Blackboard.

Friday, September 13.

Herman Melville, “Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street” (Putnam’s Monthly, 1853), through page 35.

Monday, September 16.

Herman Melville, “Bartleby, the Scrivener,” complete.

Wednesday, September 18.

Herman Melville, Benito Cereno (Putnam’s Monthly, 1855), through page 80.

Thursday, September 19.

Blog posts due by 5 p.m. to Blackboard.

Friday, September 20.

Herman Melville, Benito Cereno, through page 100.

Monday, September 23.

A tribute to Toni Morrison, Blow Memorial Hall, Room 201. Sign up here if you’d like to read a passage from Morrison’s work. You may read for no more than ten minutes.


Wednesday, September 25.

Herman Melville, Benito Cereno, complete.

Thursday, September 26.

Blog posts due by 5 p.m. to Blackboard.
III. IMPERIAL ENCHANTMENTS: THE LITERATURE OF U.S. EXPANSIONISM

Friday, September 27.

Frederick Douglass, “The Mission of the War” (1864).

Monday, September 30.

Paper 1 Draft Due by the beginning of class. Workshop.

Wednesday, October 2.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Letter to Walt Whitman” (1855).

Friday, October 4. Guest lecturer: Prof. Robert Scholnick.

Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, “Calamus” (Numbers 1-45); “A Word Out of the Sea.”

Sunday, October 6.

Paper 1 due, by 5 p.m. to Blackboard.

Monday, October 7.

Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, “Leaves of Grass” (Numbers 1-24); “Salut au Monde”; “Enfans D’Adam” (Numbers 1-15); “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry.”

Tuesday, October 8.

Blog posts due by 5 p.m. to Blackboard.

Wednesday, October 9.

Whitman in the Americas.

José Martí, “The Poet Walt Whitman” (1887).
Rubén Darío, “Walt Whitman” (1890); “To Roosevelt” (1904).
Ezra Pound, “What I Feel about Walt Whitman” (1909); “A Pact” (1913).
Federico García Lorca, “Ode to Walt Whitman” (~1929, course website).
Pablo Neruda, “Ode to Walt Whitman” (1956).

Optional: Walt Whitman, Selected Journalism on the U.S.-Mexican War (course website).
Friday, October 11. Class canceled.

Monday, October 14 [no class, Fall Break].

Tuesday, October 15.

Blog posts due by 5 p.m. to Blackboard.

Wednesday, October 16.

José Martí, “Impressions of America (by a very fresh Spaniard)” (1880); “Coney Island” (1881); “Emerson” (1882); “The Brooklyn Bridge” (1883).

Friday, October 18. Class canceled.

José Martí, “Mexico, The United States, and Protectionism” (1884); “The Indians in the United States” (1885); “A Great Confederate Celebration” (1886); “A Vindication of Cuba” (1889).

Monday, October 21.

José Martí, “Our America” (1891).

Wednesday, October 23.

José Martí, “The Abolition of Slavery in Puerto Rico” (1893); “My Race” (1893); “The Truth about the United States” (1894).

Friday, October 25 [Last day to withdraw].

Stephen Crane, “The Open Boat” (1897).
William Dean Howells, “Editha” (1905).
Hamlin Garland, from “Local Color in Art.”

Optional schematic guide: “Realism in American Literature” (Washington State University)

Blog posts due by midnight to Blackboard.

Monday, October 28.

José Martí, “A Town Sets a Black Man on Fire” (1892).
Mark Twain, “The United States of Lyncherdom” (1901).
Ida B. Wells, “Lynch Law in America” (1900).
LITERATURE OF THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION

Wednesday, October 30.

Mariano Azuela, Los de abajo [The Underdogs] (1915), Part 1, Chapters I-XIV.
“The Ballad of Pancho Villa.”

Friday, November 1.

Mariano Azuela, Los de abajo Part 1, complete; Part 2, Chapters I-VI.
Blog posts due by midnight to Blackboard.

Monday, November 4.

Mariano Azuela, Los de abajo, complete.

Wednesday, November 6.

Katherine Anne Porter, “That Tree” (1934).

Friday, November 8.

María Cristina Mena, “The Education of Popo” (1914) (course website).
Blog posts due by midnight to Blackboard.

IV. THE U.S.-CARIBBEAN NEXUS & THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

Monday, November 11.

James Weldon Johnson, Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man, Chapters I-IV.
W.E.B. Du Bois, “To the Nations of the World” (1900); “The Present Outlook for the Dark Races of Mankind” (1900).

Wednesday, November 13.

James Weldon Johnson, Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man, Chapters V-IX.

Friday, November 15.

James Weldon Johnson, Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man, complete.
Blog posts due by 5 p.m. to Blackboard.
Monday, November 18.

Arthur A. Schomburg, “The Negro Digs Up His Past” (1925) (course website).
Zora Neale Hurston, “How It Feels to Be Colored Me” (1928); “What White Publishers Won’t Print” (1950).

Wednesday, November 20.

Jean Toomer, Cane, 1-47.

Friday, November 22.

Jean Toomer, Cane, 51-105.
Blog posts due by midnight to Blackboard.

Monday, November 25.

Jean Toomer, Cane, complete.
Jean Toomer, “The Cane Years” (course website).

Wednesday, November 27-Sunday, December 1 [no class, Thanksgiving Break].

Monday, December 2.

Eric Walrond, Tropic Death, 21-83.

Wednesday, December 4.

Eric Walrond, Tropic Death, 84-127.

Friday, December 6 [last day of classes].

Eric Walrond, Tropic Death, complete.

Paper 2 due, by midnight to Blackboard.

Thursday, December 12.

Take-home Final due by 5 p.m. to Blackboard, no exceptions.