

620:053:02 *Survey of American Literature Spring 2005*
American Visions: Dreams and Nightmares

Instructor: Dr. Anne Myles
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Office hours:

My regular office hours are Tuesday 1:00-2:30 and Wednesday 12:30-1:30; I can also talk briefly after class. If these times don't fit your schedule, please contact me and we can arrange something else. I am frequently in my office at other times besides scheduled office hours; feel free to knock anytime you see my door cracked open.

Description:

This course will introduce you to major periods and trends in American literature, and give you a taste of the work of some of the major writers of this tradition. It is, of course, impossible to do justice to American literary tradition(s), let alone to individual writers, in a one-semester survey of nearly 500 years. This semester -- as we approach a major election and live through a continuing national and international crisis -- our readings will focus on exploring the visions, and realities, that have inspired and haunted America. What is "the American dream," and where does it come from? Who does it leave out? And what about the dark side of the dream, the nightmares that have haunted the nation as well? Throughout the course we will pair writers to examine the close relationship of dream and nightmare and trace the visionary impulse in American literature from the Puritan projection of "a city on a hill" to the terrors and promise of the millennium. While we'll pay plenty of attention to literary dimensions, an underlying principle of the course is that, contrary to Laura Bush's (political) assertion last year that American literature is "not political," it has always been a means of debating, challenging, and ultimately helping to create the nation.

Prerequisites:

620:034, Critical Writing About Literature (or the equivalent), is a pre- or co-requisite.

Required Texts:

- Lauter et al, eds. *The Heath Anthology of American Literature, Concise Ed.*
- Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine* (novel).

Required Work (I'll give you more specific guidelines before each assignment):

1. **First Paper.** This will be a fairly short (3-5 pages) analytic paper based on one of the first four pairings of texts we cover in the class. You will discuss in your own words the connections and/or contrasts you see between the texts in one of the pairings: how do these texts define, challenge, or complicate the idea of the “American dream,” or in some way offer us insight into the course theme of “American visions”?
2. **Second Paper.** This will be a somewhat longer paper (at least 5 pp.) involving research. You will focus on one of a choice of texts covered in class, and research several different critical interpretations of it (ideally, different critics’ perspectives on some particular issue within the text). Your paper will discuss the interpretive issue(s) the text raises, explain the arguments of your critical sources, and offer your own response to or evaluation of these issues and arguments.
3. **Third Paper.** This final paper will ask you to think as an editor or teacher. From our readings in the course (adding, if you wish, other selections from the *Heath Anthology* or covered in *Multicultural Literature* if you’ve taken that course) you will select 4-6 texts to be grouped together within a special section in an (imaginary) secondary-school American literature anthology. The section might be organized around the theme of this course, or around another theme or concept if you wish. Your paper (4-6 pp.) will be either a proposal submitted to the anthology publisher for the section you envision, or the introduction to the section that would be printed in the anthology.
4. **In-class oral discussion response.** You will sign up to prepare a short “discussion response” to one of the works/pairings we are covering, which you will read or speak to the class. It will conclude with 1-2 ideas or questions shared with the rest of the class as a possible basis for class discussion. See the guidelines sheet at the end of this syllabus for further information.
5. **Final Exam.** The exam will include A) a short-answer section in which you will be asked to *identify the authors of* and *answer questions on* passages from works covered throughout the syllabus; B) an essay section with one or two questions about our final texts in the semester, the film *The Jazz Singer* and the novel *Jasmine*.

Grading:

Your course grade will be determined by the percentage of points that you earn, minus any subtractions for poor attendance or late work. Especially strong class participation will strengthen your final grade if your grades for written work do not seem to me to fully reflect your overall performance in the course. The total number of points possible for the semester may vary slightly from this estimate.

(See next page)

First Paper	50 points
Second Paper	100 points
Third Paper	75 points
Final Exam	75 points
In-class response	10 points
Attendance/participation	30 points
Total	340 points

Your semester grade will be calculated based on the following standard percentage scale out of the total points possible:

A	95%	B-	80%	D+	67%
A-	90%	C+	77%	D	64%
B+	87%	C	74%	D-	60%
B	84%	C-	70%		

If you are unable to complete all the work by finals week and wish to receive a grade of I (Incomplete) you must request this of me specifically before the beginning of finals week. However, I will *not* give Is to people who have vanished for much of the semester and make a sudden late reappearance. According to University policy, the final date you may drop the class and receive a W on your transcript is Friday, March 11.

Deadlines:

Work is due on the date specified. Papers are normally due at the beginning of class, but I will not penalize you so long as they are in by 5 p.m. on that day. (Do not skip class because you're having trouble with your printer, etc.) There will be subtractions from your grade for late work, increasing with the length of time the paper is late. In those cases I will give the paper a "merit grade" which lets you know how I responded to the paper in itself, and the official "recorded grade" which factors in the lateness. I am willing to negotiate extensions requested at least one class in advance, preferably more. E-mail submission is acceptable if you can't make it in to campus. Even if a piece of work is very late, it is always better to turn it in that not; I won't refuse it and will always give you some credit.

Revision Policy:

Yes, you are welcome to revise your essays if you are dissatisfied with the grade -- so long as there is time left in the semester to do so. If I give the revision a higher grade, it replaces the old grade. However, you need to meet with me first to go over my comments and your revision plans. I expect substantial rethinking/rewriting in a revised paper; except in special, mutually agreed-upon cases, I will return unmarked a revision that contains only mechanical or sentence-level changes. When you submit a revised essay, you must also attach the original copy of the first version along with my comments and grade sheet; I cannot evaluate your changes otherwise. Due dates for revisions are

generally negotiable/flexible, but I will not accept revisions after the last week of regular classes (i.e., no last-minute revisions of earlier work accepted during finals week; I have too much to grade then as it is).

If you are unhappy with your marks on written work you have submitted, please consult with me and we'll determine whether, and how, you might improve your score on these or your ultimate grade in the class. Obviously, the earlier in the semester we discuss this, the more opportunity there is for you to make a meaningful difference in your grade.

I am also always willing to look at rough drafts (though I make no promises about drafts shown me less than 48 hours before the paper is due). If time is tight, it generally works best if you can e-mail me your draft as a Word attachment; that way I'll probably get it quickly and I can send it back to you with comments as soon as I've read it.

Format for Submitting Class Work:

All essays must be word-processed/typed in a plain, average-sized font, double-spaced, with approximately 1" margins on all sides, on 8 1/2" x 11" plain paper. I recommend Times Roman 12-pt. font (as in this syllabus) or something similar.

No separate title page is necessary. At the top of the first page of your paper (I don't care which corner[s]), include your name, the name of this course, and the date. Centered beneath that, give your paper a title that gives some idea what it is about – do not use just the title of the work you are writing about. Double-spacing between the title and the beginning of the text makes it easier to read. Also, please number your pages -- do so by hand if you forget to do it on the computer.

In a separate page at the end of your paper, list all the texts you have used in the paper in correct MLA style. There are guides to MLA style in any writer's handbook and on countless websites. If you have a question, please ask.

All quotations from the text or direct references to passages in the text of the work(s) you are writing about must be followed by page references. I expect prose, poetry, and dialogue to be quoted in the correct form(s).

Proofread your paper carefully (spell-checkers help but won't do the whole job [*see?*]); numerous typos and other errors you could easily have fixed make you look careless or indifferent and will detract from your grade, probably more than one or two honest mistakes in syntax will.

Also, be sure to save all your work on a disk, both completed papers and important writing in progress. On occasion papers do get misplaced during the grading process – or your computer may crash. Don't let this become a crisis!

Attendance:

Expected and required. I do take attendance in class. Legitimate reasons for missing class include your own illness; a death or medical emergency in your immediate family; your required attendance at an official University-sponsored event; or dangerous driving conditions. If one of these pertains to you, please notify me by e-mailing me or leaving a message on my office voice-mail, if possible before the class you will miss.

In the event of bad weather, assume that class is being held so long as the University is open. If class is cancelled, I will send you an e-mail if at all possible.

If a situation arises that will cause you to miss a number of classes, notify me as soon as you reasonably can so that we can discuss how we will handle it. If you are going through a personal or family crisis that wreaks havoc with your ability to participate in the class, I strongly urge you to withdraw from it: see the reading and assignment schedule for the last date this semester on which you may withdraw with a "W." Every semester a few students have problems and ask for Incompletes: in my experience few of them ever complete their coursework later. You will spare yourself and me future headaches by not getting yourself into this situation. There is no stigma attached to withdrawing from a course.

Academic Ethics:

All students are expected to abide by the University's official policy on academic ethics. You can review this policy at <http://www.uni.edu/pres/policies/301.html>. If you have any question about what would constitute plagiarism in relation to your use of a particular source, please consult with me or, if I am not available, with another faculty member. Keep a record of the sources you consult while doing research for a piece of writing; you should be able to retrieve all sources consulted if an issue should arise.

Any work you submit that appears intentionally plagiarized (you attempt to pass off language, ideas, or a complete text from another source as your own, assuming or hoping I won't be able to tell) will be graded F, and you will have to redo the assignment from the beginning on another topic, under close supervision. In addition to the above penalties, I reserve the right to automatically fail any student from the course for wholesale or repeated plagiarism.

Students with Disabilities:

If you have a disability requiring special accommodation in the classroom or for exams or other assignments, please contact me early in the semester so we can work out the appropriate adjustments. Please bring some kind of official documentation if possible; I should receive this directly from the university, but I may not have it at hand.

Reading and Assignment Schedule

January

M 10 Introduction

“The City on a Hill”

We begin with two core visions of America that, for better or worse, have persisted from early America and continue to influence current political discourse: America as the “city on a hill” and as a land of secular opportunity.

W 12 John Winthrop, from “A Modell of Christian Charity,” 147-157. Less central for class discussion, but recommended: read Winthrop’s *Journal*, 157-64. The extract focuses on the story of Anne Hutchinson, a radical female religious teacher whose public and unsubmissive voice generated the first major breach in Winthrop’s desired holy community.

M 17 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day – no class.

W 19 J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, Letter III, “What is an American?” from *Letters to an American Farmer*, 435 & 441-446; Martin Luther King, Jr., “I Have a Dream,” 2265-2270.

F 21 *Last day to drop course without a W*

Immigrant Dreams and Disillusionments I

Bradford’s history reveals a lot about the ways Puritans regarded the world, but it is also one of our first stories of an immigrant community, struggling with its own success. Bulosan offers a somewhat more familiar immigrant’s tale, yet one that similarly involves a struggle between vision and reality.

M 24 William Bradford, extract from *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 164-178.
Carlos Bulosan, “America is in the Heart,” 2190-2194. Also look at “Carved on the Walls: Poetry by Early Chinese Immigrants,” 2163-2166.

Crossing Cultures

In one of the first published works by a colonial American woman, Rowlandson draws on the Bible as a framework for making private and public meaning from a terrifying captivity ordeal. Writing in the early 20th century, Zitkala-Sa recounts the struggles of culture-crossing in an opposite direction.

W 26 Mary Rowlandson, from *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restauration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, 206-231.

M 31 Rowlandson continued; Gertrude Bonnin (Zitkala-Sa), from *The School Days of an Indian Girl* (1686-1696). Recommended: get started on Franklin reading (long).

February

Making It (?) in America

One of the most important and influential books in America, Franklin's Autobiography as a model for the "self-made man" in a rising nation. (It is also, read properly, quite funny.) But for many people, the story of a life involves obstacles Franklin never considered. . . .

- W 2 Benjamin Franklin, "The Way to Wealth," 365-373; *Autobiography*, Part I, 381-424
- M 7 Franklin, *Autobiography*, Part II, 424-434; Meridel LeSueur, "Women on the Breadlines," 2085-2092; Richard Wright, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," 2141-51.

"Only that day dawns to which we are awake"

These two Transcendentalist visionaries exhorted their contemporaries (and us) to look at the world, and ourselves, with fresh eyes. We'll examine connections and differences in their ideas and voices, and the lasting fascination among American writers with nature and spirit.

- W 9 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," 689-90, 707-723.
- M 14 Henry David Thoreau, excerpt from *Walden*, 749-50, 765-775; Gary Snyder, poems, 2584-89.

Paper 1 due

"How a slave was made a man"

Douglass's classic narrative tells us from within what it means to be a slave -- and what it means to achieve manhood -- in America. Melville's complex, surprising fiction challenges us to reexamine our assumptions about both slavery and American character.

- W 16 *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*; read through chap. 10 at least, 855-930 (but finish it for today if you can).
- M 21 Douglass, *Narrative* continued (finish it); for a voice speaking on slavery from a female perspective, please read Frances E.W. Harper, poems 931-936. Begin Herman Melville, "Benito Cereno," 1055-1057, 1084 ff., try read to p. 1104 at least.
- W 23 "Benito Cereno," finish.

Cracked foundations

Here are nightmare visions from three very different writers, exposing cracks in the psyche, the nation, and the family order. What themes link these writers? What images and symbols? How can we trace the motifs of private and public disturbance -- the cracked foundations of the American self and state?

M 28 Nathaniel Hawthorne, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," 953-968.

March

W 2 Edgar Allan Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher," 988-989, 1001-1014.

M 7 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper," 1596-1609.

Poetry for America I: "America how can I sing a holy litany" / "Much madness -- is divinest sense"

Whitman created an expansive, rhapsodic, sexual poetry for the multitudinous city and nation he perceived. Dickinson's poetry, though quieter outwardly, offers equally arresting subversions of conventional pieties and gender roles.

W 9 Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself" from *Leaves of Grass* -- get started on reading it. Have a look at 1855 Preface too, though you don't need to read every word. 1209-1276.

F 11 *Last day to drop course without an F*

M 14 Spring Break

W 16 Spring Break

M 21 Whitman, continue. Begin Emily Dickinson: read over all the poems, and the letters, but we'll focus class discussion on these: poem J. 324 (p. 1300), J. 401 (p. 1302), 435 (1302), 465 (1303-4), 709 (1309-10), 732 (1310-11), 1461 (1315).

W 23 Dickinson, continued. **Topic proposal and bibliography for Paper 2 due by Friday 3/25.**

Realism and resistance: more unconventional women

Fanny Fern, unconventional in her success as a female newspaper writer, blends humor and sentiment with sharp social critique. James, Jewett, and Freeman share the interest of realist fiction in character, and in how people negotiate social codes and expectations. In addition, their stories all focus on women who commit acts of resistance, with varying outcomes.

M 28 Fanny Fern, extracts 837-840, plus read more selections from <http://www.merrycoz.org/voices/leaves/LEAVES00.HTM>. Recommended: "Developments in Women's Writing," 1619.

W 30 I'll be away at a conference; no class.
Paper 2 due by Friday, 5 p.m., in my mailbox.

April

M 4 Henry James, "Daisy Miller: A Study," 1454-96.

W 6 Sarah Orne Jewett, "A White Heron" (1634-41) and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, "The Revolt of 'Mother'" (1642-54).

Poetry for America II: "Making It New"

Part of the modernist revolution in literature and the arts, all four of these poets found very different sources of inspiration, styles, and voices for developing a new poetry for a new century -- and new ways of seeing the common life.

M 11 Poems by Robert Frost (1799-1804), Amy Lowell (1836-45), William Carlos Williams (1850-55), Langston Hughes (2006-19).

War and Its Legacies

The story of war and its effects on the young people who must participate in it is being written around us. Here we look back at two earlier perspectives, from WWI and Vietnam. What do these stories share, and how do they differ? How do they speak to us today?

W 13 Ernest Hemingway, "Soldier's Home." Read Hemingway intro 1949-50 in book. I will provide a photocopy of this story, but if you miss getting it or want to read the story sooner, you can find a copy at <http://www.cis.vt.edu/modernworld/d/hemingway.html>. Also read Tim O'Brien, "In the Field," 2571-79.

Immigrant Dreams and Disillusionments II

We revisit this central topic in American experience with perspectives in two different genres, from either end of the 20th century. The Jazz Singer was the first sound film ever; the novel Jasmine suggests both the multicultural perspectives and the innovations in narrative form that mark contemporary writing. Both texts invite us to explore the freedom to recreate oneself that America seems to offer immigrants – and the ambivalence that this offer evokes.

M 18 Film, *The Jazz Singer* (1927). You can preview it here: <http://www.filmsite.org/jazz.html>. Read ahead in *Jasmine* for next week.

W 20 *The Jazz Singer*. End of film and discussion.

M 25 Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine* (1989).

W 26 Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine*.

May

M 2 **Final Exam 3:00-4:50 p.m. Paper 3 also due at this time.**

Readings by Literary Period – A Quick Reference/Clarification Guide
(you can also use this as a “who did we cover?” study guide for the final exam)

This semester we will be grouping writers in ways that often cross periods. Further, the *Heath Anthology*, while it is structured overall by historic progression, tends to emphasize sub-groups of writers organized around broad issues. But it's important for you to know which writers belong to which period (and how their work fits within it). Our readings can be historically charted as follows:

Seventeenth Century (1600s)

William Bradford
 John Winthrop
 Mary Rowlandson

Eighteenth Century (1700s)

J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur
 Benjamin Franklin

1800-1865 (American Romanticism, from 1830s)

Edgar Allan Poe
 Ralph Waldo Emerson
 Henry David Thoreau
 Frederick Douglass
 Nathaniel Hawthorne
 Herman Melville
 Fanny Fern
 Frances E.W. Harper

Work straddles pre- and post-Civil War periods

Walt Whitman (key date: 1855, first edition of *Leaves of Grass*)
 Emily Dickinson (1862 regarded as a major year)

1865-1910 (American Realism)

Sarah Orne Jewett
 Mary E. Wilkins Freeman
 Henry James
 Charlotte Perkins Gilman
 Gertrude Bonnin (Zitkala-Sa)

1910-1945 (Modern Period)

Robert Frost
William Carlos Williams
Amy Lowell
Langston Hughes
Poetry by Chinese immigrants
Ernest Hemingway
Meridel LeSueur
Richard Wright
Carlos Bulosan (1946, but wrote mostly in 1940s)
[*The Jazz Singer*]

1945-Present (Contemporary Period)

Martin Luther King, Jr.
Allen Ginsberg
Gary Snyder
Tim O'Brien
Bharati Mukherjee

In-Class Discussion Response -- Guidelines

Shortly after the semester begins, you will sign up as a “responder” for one day in class. Probably at least two people will be responders on a given day. The days when we have responders will generally be the second day of pairing of writers that covers two classes, so that you may respond to the writer we are covering the second day, or may stay with the first writer (since there will often be more to say that we didn’t finish in the first class), or may talk about the two writers as a pair.

You are not expected to be an expert on the writer you’re responding on -- although if you wish to do further research on that writer as part of your response, I’ll be happy and impressed. What is required of you is to read the selection (and the editor’s headnote) carefully and thoughtfully, to think about the piece and the insights or questions it raises for you, and to come prepared to talk to the class intelligently for no more than five minutes about some aspect of the reading and/or your thinking about it.

To ensure that you are thoughtful and eloquent, I would strongly encourage you to write out your response and read it aloud (2 to 2 1/2 pages is about five minutes when read aloud). Do bear in mind that you are writing something designed to be spoken; it’s better to use a conversational style than long, academic sentences. If you are comfortable talking without a script, it’s fine not to write your response, or to use just an outline. Remember, though, that only the most extraverted among us find talking like this easy.

Please conclude with 2 or 3 idea points or questions that you would like to see discussed in class. Type or write these out so we can project them on the Elmo (I recommend using at least 14-pt. font so the projection will be large for everyone to see without the ends cutting off).

Again, there’s no set way I’m looking for you to respond -- what’s appropriate will vary so much depending on the piece, on the context, on your response as a reader. Here are some ideas for directions to go:

- Did you struggle with reading this piece, or understanding some aspects about it? What do you think produced that struggle? Where did you come out? Can you talk about what your process (hopefully involving repeated readings) revealed to you?
- Is there a particular passage or aspect that really stood out for you in one of the texts in this pairing? Which, and how, and so what? Can you connect it to other passages?
- Did the editor’s headnote for the reading you’re choosing to discuss help you understand it? Why or why not? Did it leave you with more questions than it answered (about the writer? the work?) -- what were they? Were you able to find any answers in other sources? What questions do you still have?
- Did my mini-note under the title of each pairing in the syllabus help you put the two readings together? How does the work we’re reading manifest any element I pointed

to there? Are there other ideas you have about why these works might go together? Or do you think they don't work as a pairing – why?

- How do works written earlier speak to you as a reader in 2004 (if they do)? If there's a great distance, can it be overcome? How or how not?
- Do you personally have distinctive, individual ideas about the nature of American dreams and American nightmares? If so, how do you think they shaped your response as a reader of the text(s) you're discussing?
- If you were (or are planning to be) an English teacher, is a particular text we're reading one you'd want to teach in a high school class? Why or why not? (Are we reading a writer you read earlier in school? Do you recall anything about how s/he was treated? Does his/her work strike you differently now?)

If you are presenting on the same day as someone else and you want to coordinate in some kind of joint response, that's OK -- just let me know in advance what you're planning to do. For example, you might simply review your ideas in advance so you present interestingly different approaches, or you might want to stage contrasting responses to the text, or even respond to each other in a dialogue or some other unique way.

Don't be afraid to have fun and be creative (whether you're working together or alone). The rest of us have to listen to you . . . give us something we'll find stimulating to listen to. The ultimate point of this response assignment is, first, to give you a chance to practice your speaking/presentation skills, but second, to give you some responsibility for bringing interest and variation to class days and let you have some effect on directing our discussions.

620:053:02 Major American Writers S 05 Myles

Guidelines for First Paper – due Monday, February 14

The first four pairings or mini-units in the class (“The City on a Hill,” “Immigrant Dreams and Disillusionments,” “Crossing Cultures,” “Making It [?] in America”) are designed as a broad introduction to the course theme, “American Visions: Dreams and Nightmares.” All of these units link early American (pre-1800) texts with twentieth-century works.

For this first paper (3-5 pages; worth 50 points), your assignment is to discuss the connection(s) and/or contrast(s) you perceive between two works covered within these units. The works may be from one unit or may cross units, but at least one of the works you discuss must have been written before 1800. There are probably many different ways you could connect or contrast the two, so you will have to choose some particular focus. You might decide to focus on how the two works illuminate some aspect of the “American visions” idea, or you might see some other element you’d prefer to address, particularly something we didn’t get around to in class.

A few sample ideas for focus-points for a paper like this: the different sources of disillusionment in Bradford and Bulosan; how a female perspective shapes Rowlandson’s and Zitkala-Sa’s accounts; how Franklin’s and Wright’s styles are shaped by the different readers they are writing for. . . .

Here’s what I will be hoping to see in this paper:

- Evidence that you have read (and reread!) the texts you’re discussing carefully and with understanding (or at least with thoughtful, articulate perplexity). You should quote from the texts and/or refer to details, not just make statements about them with no specific textual evidence. If you feel confused about a particular passage in or aspect of a text you wish to write about, please come to me and I’ll happily go over it with you.
- Evidence that you’re *thinking*, engaging with ideas, reflecting on America or anything else. I will *not* be pleased if it looks like you’re simply regurgitating the substance of class discussion (though it is fine to pursue further a point you or someone else made in class). I’ll be happy if you can come up with a new angle or a fresh insight. I’ll be delighted if it looks like you’re examining through your own beliefs/commitments as an American (or as a visitor in America, if you are a foreign student). If writing about your own or your family’s background/experiences helps you explain your perspective on the readings, go for it! However you approach it, do not feel pressured to come up with some grand overall conclusion.
- Good organization, clear sentences, good proofreading, blah blah blah. You can use a traditional introduction/discussion/conclusion structure if you want, but you don’t have to. Write a paper that expresses in a coherent way what you want to say. For this paper, you do not need a Works Cited page, unless you use sources other than the anthology or handouts in class.