

English 260H Section
“The Great American Novel”:
Early American Literature and its Contexts

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Office Hours: T 1-4; R 1-3 (Coffee Shop)

Fall 2014
M,W,F 2 -3
HU 314

Required Text:

Baym, Nina et al. *Norton Anthology of American Literature* Vols A & B. 8th edition. (ISBN: 9780393913095)
Moby Dick
Uncle Tom’s Cabin

Requirements:

2 Papers (750 words)	300
Oral Presentation	100
Final Project	300
<u>Final Exam</u>	<u>300</u>
Total	1000

Grades:

A=900
B=800
C=700
D=600

What is the “Great American Novel”? You’ll have the chance to wrestle with this question and its assumptions as we read *Moby Dick* and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. While we will look at some of the seminal texts and authors that make up the American Literary Tradition, our task will be to read, discuss, and describe the complexity and richness of American literature before the Civil War and examine its relationship to a variety of cultures, both indigenous and foreign. We will move triumphantly—and certainly naively—from European discovery and exploration through colonization. Then, according to God’s sovereign pleasure we’ll suffer with the Puritans and reason our way into the 18th century and Revolutionary War. We will end our class, rising above petty convention with the help of the transcendentalists. We’ll also see what voices left out of these grand narratives have to say about America and being American. Certainly women, Native American, African American and other writers will offer exception and richness to our literary tradition.

PAPERS are formal essays that focus on a specific issue or theme that comes from your reading and/or class discussion. I will provide you with two or three topics to choose from for each paper.

The FINAL PROJECT will be forthcoming! Please see that attached handout.

The FINAL EXAM will be at the time scheduled by the university. You must take the final at the scheduled time to pass the class. Please don’t ask for any exceptions. The final will be comprehensive and will require essay and Scan-Tron responses.

Academic Integrity:

I refer you to page 8 of *The Student Handbook*, <http://www.utm.edu/studenthandbook/student%20handbook1112.pdf>. In particular, plagiarism violates a number of rules in the Academic Integrity section. Any form of plagiarism justifies a failing grade for the assignment. If I deem the plagiarism to be a result of blatant disregard for the rules and conventions of documentation, or if I feel the plagiarism is purposeful in its intent to deceive, then I will fail you for the course and recommend expulsion from the university.

NOTE 1: Any student eligible for and requesting academic accommodations due to a disability is requested to provide a letter of accommodation from the Student Academic Support Center within the first two weeks of class.

NOTE 2: I do not accept papers via email. I also do not respond to student requests via email. Please see my office hours and phone number posted at the top of the syllabus. If you cannot meet with me during my office hours, please leave a message with the department secretary so we can arrange to meet some time more convenient for you.

NOTE 3: Any student enrolled in this class must have completed English 111 and 112 (or its equivalent) with a grade of “C” or better. If you haven’t, please see me so that we can get you in the proper class.

Course Objectives:

In the most general terms, this course should help you

- Understand regional, colloquial, cultural and national diversity in language and literature.
- Know a wide range of literature from many periods and various genres and relate that knowledge to class discussion and writing.
- Develop reading strategies to improve comprehension.
- Sharpen your sensitivity to the aesthetic and humanistic aspirations of authors and influential political and philosophical thinkers.

More concretely, this course should familiarize you with a range of American literature written before the Civil War. Within this historical framework, we will work toward understanding some of the aesthetic, social, political, philosophical and cultural influences in early America and how they shaped and were shaped by writing.

Participation and Etiquette:

There are no official participation points. I do, however, reserve the right to drop your grade at the end of the semester based on my perception of your engagement with the class and the materials we cover. Some of the signs I look for that indicate a lack of engagement: **cell phones/electronics**—wearing ear buds or headphones when in the classroom; texting; constantly checking the time on your phone; pretending to pay attention while your hands are busy texting under the desk; checking the internet/email during lecture and discussion;

leaving your phone in a visible location during the class period; and talking on your phone in the classroom immediately before, during, or after class.

preparation—not having the required texts; not participating in class discussion; not completing the reading; consistently turning in late work; and not thinking concretely, abstractly, and critically about the course material.

attendance and participation—consistently coming late, leaving early, or not attending class; implying that this class is not as important as another class you are taking; or consistently letting work, family, roommates, car trouble, etc. prevent you from completing assignments and attending class.

papers—not following MLA conventions when required; turning in papers without staples; indicating that you just finished the paper right before class; indicating that you took very little time on the paper; and half-hearted efforts in grammar and neatness.

Schedule

8.25-29

M Introductions; Syllabus
W “On Being Brought from Africa to America,” “My Kinsman, Major Molineaux”
F *Moby Dick Chs. 1-3*

9.1-5

M No Class—Labor Day
W *MD 4-20*
F *MD 21-29* Paper #1 Assigned

9.8-12

M 30-60
W 61-80
F 81-99

9.15-19

M 100-128
W 129-End
F *Uncle Tom’s Cabin, Chptrs. 1-3*

9.22-26

M Paper #1 Due; *Chptrs 4-8*; Paper #2 Assigned
W 9-21
F 24-30

9.29-10.3

M 31-39
W 40-End
F Buell and Deforest Articles; Class discussion.

10.6-10

M Final Project Assigned; Class discussion (continued).
W Library Resources
F Personal Needs Day

***Paper #2 Due before you leave for Fall Break.

10.13-14 Fall Break

10.15-17

DISCOVERY, EXPLORATION, AND NATIVE AMERICAN NARRATIVES

W Columbus, Cabaza de Vaca, de las Casas, Native American Stories

F Bradford, John Smith, Thomas Harriot

PURITANS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN AMERICAN MYTH

10.20-24

M —Report on Final Project— Winthrop

W Bradstreet, Taylor

F Rowlandson

AMERICAN ENLIGHTENMENT: REVOLUTION, CITIZENSHIP, AND RACE

10.27-10.31

M Franklin; Edwards

W Wheatley, Jefferson

F Crevecoeur, Madison, Occom

ROMANTICISM, TRANSCENDENTALISM, POETRY AND FICTION

11.3-7

M Irving, Cooper, selections from Native American oratory

W Emerson, Whitman

F Thoreau

11.10-14

M Poe

W Hawthorne

F Dickinson, Whitman

SLAVERY AND THE LITERATURE OF PROTEST

11.17-21

M Douglass

W Jacobs

F “Declaration of Sentiments” (Internet), Davis, “Paradise of Bachelors...”

11.24-28

M **Review for Final Examination**

Wednesday-Friday **Thanksgiving Holiday**

12.1-5 **Final Oral Presentations; Final at Date and Time Scheduled by University**

English 260—Final Project

“American Literary Tradition: *Moby Dick*, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and “The Great American Novel”

In your opinion, if you had to choose one, is *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* or *Moby Dick* the “Great American Novel” (GAN)? Of course there are other considerations than these two, but for the purposes and historical constraints of this class I would like you to choose one and support your assertion by incorporating four considerations:

First, define what characteristics the GAN should have. These characteristics can be aesthetic, philosophical, social, cultural, economic, or otherwise in nature. This is a large topic, so you will be doing yourself a favor if you can narrow your focus to a single or just a few characteristics.

Second, make a case for your novel based on the text itself. An assumption behind this assignment is that the text contains a complete or near complete representation of American experience in some way, so it stands to reason that the text itself should contain essential American characteristics within the plot and literary rendering of the story. In other words, your text needs to stand on its own merits as the GAN.

Third, support your ideas and your analysis of the text by referring to writing from the other periods of American literature that we will cover. I would like to see how your GAN converses with the other readings from other time periods that have been germane to the American experience. I would like you to spend considerable thought on this part of your paper, relating what you have read at the beginning of the semester to what you will be reading in the second half of the course. The more conversant your text is with these others, the more convincing your argument will be. I am particularly interested in how this “grand narrative” of American exceptionalism responds to Native American, African American, gendered, and economic voices present in our readings.

Fourth, show how your ideas coalesce with, relate to, respond to, or argue against other scholarly considerations of your text and/or American culture. I would like you to consult at least one reference source and two scholarly articles about the GAN, your novel, or the characteristics you are covering.

The Final Project should be 8 pages and is due before November 25th. Please follow MLA formatting, citation, and documentation standards.