



**SPRING 2015
DR. PATRICK ERBEN
TR 2:00-3:20PM
Pafford 307**

**Engl 4385:
Special Topics
SECRET SOCIETIES,
CONSPIRACIES
AND THE HIDDEN
WORLDS OF EARLY
AMERICAN
LITERATURE**

**Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday 12:45pm-
1:45pm, or by appointment.
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Course Description: It didn't just start with the JFK assassination—American history and literature are from the start full of conspiracies, cover-ups, scandals, and secret societies and groups that (allegedly) plan the overthrow of church and/or state, radical-esoteric sects and cults, and more! This course will look at early American literature and culture from its hidden and dark underbelly, which has regularly been the subject of speculation and fascination. As literary scholars, we have the luxury not to attend so much to what really happened but to analyze and study the American fascination with all things hidden, occult, secretly subversive, fundamentally deranged, and simply “out there.”

Just to give you a foretaste of the things we will be looking into: Anne Hutchinson's rebellion against the Puritans and her supposed “monstrous births;” the Salem witchcraft trials; the Rosicrucian “hoax” and the society's attempt to build a “universal college;” the Moravian Church and their secret experimentation with sacred sex (performed in the infamous “blue room” adjacent to church sanctuaries); the Benedict Arnold-John André conspiracy and the American spy ring that uncovered their treason; the Bavarian Illuminati and the Freemason's supposed infiltration of the early American Republic and founding fathers; the secret and then highly publicized scandal surrounding Jefferson's relationship with his slave Sally Hemings; and VP Aaron Burr's duel with Alexander Hamilton and Burr's conspiracy with Spanish-American collaborator James Wilkinson to build an independent Republic out West. Beyond studying the early American sources, we will regularly make parallels with current pop culture phenomena, from TV shows and films about the witchcraft trials, to AMC's spy show *Turn*, to the wildly popular Dan Brown novels, to the *National Treasure* franchise, and finally to ABC's *Scandal* and its thematic re-hashing of a long-term affair between a black woman and a white POTUS.

MATERIALS AND TEXTS (REQUIRED):

- ☞ A bound and handsome journal in which you will enjoy writing.
- ☞ Miller, Arthur. *The Crucible*. Penguin Classics. 978-0142437339.
- ☞ Brown, Charles Brockden. *Wieland*. W.W. Norton. 978-0-393-93253-9.
- ☞ Gordon-Reed, Annette. *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy*. University of Virginia Press. 978-0813918334.
- ☞ Additional Readings made available through CourseDen and/or hardcopy.

COURSEDEN: This course uses CourseDen to post additional reading requirements electronically.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS:

- ☞ **Readings and Participation:** Active participation is the essence of a lively and productive course. I encourage you to cultivate an engaged reading style, using underlining, marginalia, post-it notes to mark relevant pages, and notes. Classroom discussion will usually involve close readings, and I may ask you to support your comments with evidence from the text. I evaluate both the quality and quantity of your contributions, so less vocal students may excel through fewer, but thoughtful comments. I will help you prepare for your reading and classroom discussion by posting specific reading questions for each text on the website. I may restate these questions in class to

guide discussion, and you may use them to cultivate active note-taking. I will also ask you at specific points of the semester to prepare your own critical questions/ideas/thesis statements about assigned texts and bring them to class or email them to me to use them for class discussion. We will talk about what constitutes a “critical question” and your performance in formulating those questions will also become part of your participation grade.

I will assign a participation grade at the midpoint of the semester, which will give you a chance to improve your performance. I will also give you a final participation grade, which is cumulative.

- ☞ **Journal:** The point of your journal is reflect on *one or more* of the reading/viewing and discussion questions I am providing for each text or set of texts. For each text or set of texts, you have to write circa 200 words. If several excerpts were due for a specific day, then please write your journal entry on **at least one of them** (you don’t necessarily have to touch upon all of them, but it would be helpful to connect them in your responses/entries). These entries will help you to engage the texts/issues/questions and come prepared for class discussion. The journal will also help you find topics for the papers due throughout the semester. I will **check completion** of the journal entry at the beginning of each class meeting by passing around a dated stamp. Stamping the bottom of an empty page constitutes cheating! I will collect and grade the journals twice—at midpoint and at the end of the semester. **A JOURNAL ENTRY WILL BE DUE AT EACH CLASS MEETING THAT HAS A NEW READING ASSIGNMENT DUE (if the schedule says “Continued” or “Cont.” no journal entry is due). For videos/films watched in class, I will ask you to write an entry in class as well, so please *always bring your journal to class!***
- ☞ **Oral Presentation (detailed assignment description to follow):** This is a group presentation for two or three students each. I will circulate a sign-up sheet a week after the start of class, so you will have some time to think about your topic. The presentation should be no longer than 10 minutes. The point of the presentation is to connect one of the literary/historical topics or texts we discussed in class during a specific unit to a modern pop culture phenomenon or modern/current versions or adaptations of a secret society or type of conspiracy or scandal. In other words, your presentation should build a bridge between the past and present, analyzing why and how a specific topic/phenomenon still has some kind of cultural relevance today.
- ☞ **Short Analysis Paper (detailed assignment description to follow):** This paper practices the basic skills of an analytical paper about literature, including a tightly formulated thesis about a text, textual support, and interpretation/analysis. Minimum of 3 full pages (not counting the Works Cited). No secondary sources.
- ☞ **Primary-source archival sleuthing paper (detailed assignment description to follow):** In this paper, I want you to discover or *re*-cover a specific historical text or document (from an online research database) that stands in conversation with one of the texts we read for class in that specific unit. Your paper, then, would explain how the specific text

speaks to the assigned readings or to a specific theme and what kind of new or different perspective or understanding it provides. Minimum of 4 full pages.

- ☞ **A final research project (detailed assignment description to follow):** The final research paper works the same way as research papers you have written for other classes. You first craft a strong, argumentative thesis and introduction, and then work on the body of the model, where you present and interpret your primary and secondary evidence, followed by a conclusion. You may use just the historical/early American primary text or you could also draw in the present-day, pop culture texts. Your research project must furthermore include a substantial number of secondary sources. Min. of 8 full pages.

GRADE BREAKDOWN:

Participation:	15%
Journal (both grades averaged):	15%
Oral Presentation:	15%
Short Analysis Paper:	15%
Primary source archival sleuthing paper:	15%
Final Research Project:	25%

GRADING CRITERIA AND RUBRIC:

For all papers prepared for this course, the English Department grading rubric for 2000-level and above course applies: <http://www.westga.edu/~engdept/fr/Ruby.doc>. In addition, separate assignment descriptions will state additional grading criteria.

COURSE POLICIES:

Attendance: Regular and timely attendance is MANDATORY. You have four (4) allowed absences. Each additional absence will result in a full letter grade deduction from your final course grade (A to B, B to C, etc.). All absences will be treated the same (i.e. no distinction between excused and unexcused absences). Thus, you do not need to turn in a doctor's note or any excuses for absences, email me, or call me about your absence (except for paper deadlines and oral presentations). Everyone is responsible for signing an attendance list circulated at the beginning of every class meeting. If you arrive late, it is your responsibility to request the attendance list at the end of class. Failure to sign up on the attendance list may be counted as an absence for that day. All absences for official university business (e.g. athletic team events; debate team events) are excused; however, you need to inform me about those absences in advance (e.g. by providing the official team schedule).

Deadlines: Papers are to be submitted in hardcopy, at the beginning of class, on the dates listed in the schedule (see below). If you know you have to be absent for that class, please make arrangements with me ahead of time! Late papers receive a 10% deduction for each day they are late past the deadline. Missed oral presentations will automatically receive a grade of 0 (zero).

Tardiness: Roll will circulate at the BEGINNING of class. Everyone who is late will be noted as tardy. Three (3) "tardies" will result in one (1) absence!

Plagiarism: There are different forms of plagiarism, from blatant theft of entire papers to negligence in acknowledging a source in your writing. However, you will be held responsible for any form of plagiarism—whether intentional or not. Consequences and responses to plagiarism are entirely at the discretion of the instructor, but expect as a minimum a failing grade (F) on the assignment and potentially a failing grade on the entire course (with potentially disciplinary action from the honors' council). Please pay specific attention to the English Department's site on plagiarism: <http://www.westga.edu/%7Eengdept/Plagiarism/index.html>. I expect all out-of-class work to abide by MLA Format (See: MLA Handbook for the Writers of Research Papers) for proper documentation of sources (primary and secondary).

Communication and E-mail Policy/Etiquette: According to university policy, I can only accept and answer emails you send me from your official West Georgia email account. Please make sure that your inbox is not full; check your email daily for any updates or changes. Email etiquette: please observe basic rules of politeness and formality in email messages. These rules include:

- any message must include an address line (e.g. "Dear Dr. Erben" or "Dr. Erben")
- use polite and appropriate language, as well as reasonably edited prose (i.e. complete sentences, correct spelling, no text-messaging lingo, etc.)
- always sign your name
- Please remember that I do have a life outside of the university; thus, allow reasonable time for me to answer your emails.

TECHNOLOGY POLICY: As a general rule, all electronic devices, such as phones, i-pods, tablet computers, etc. must be turned silenced and tugged away in your bag for the entire class. If you urgently have to take care of some kind of business, please step outside of class. If you would like to use electronic devices for taking notes or using the assigned text(s), please talk to me first. Unauthorized use of technology in class (especially if it's not for class business), may result in a dismissal from class for that day (counting as an unexcused absence).

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE: Before you read the following, keep in mind that I wouldn't have to address these issues if they hadn't caused problems in the past—even in upper-level courses.... I expect everyone to be ready to work at the beginning of class. This means in particular having ALL reading materials assigned for that day on hand and ready to use, as well as any tools for note-taking. Sleeping during class may result in dismissal and count as an absence for that day! You MAY bring drinks and/or non-smelly or noisy food to class. Most importantly: Be respectful toward the opinions, ideas, and personal identity of all members of our class!

Individual Help, Office Hours, and Writing Center: The writing center provides individual tutorials for any writing-related problems, but no proofreading service. The center is located in TLC 1201. However, I am not only available during my designated office hours, but am happy to speak to you about assignments and any other questions by appointment.

Americans with Disabilities Act: Students with a documented disability may work with UWG Disability Services to receive essential services specific to their disability. All entitlements to accommodations are based on documentation and USG Board of Regents standards. If you need

course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability or chronic illness, or if you need to make special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please notify your instructor in writing by the end of the second full week of class and include a copy of your Student Accommodations Report (SAR), which is available only from Disability Services. Students are entitled to accommodations if they deliver the SAR to the instructor no later than the end of the second full week of class.

Credit Hour Policy: The University of West Georgia grants one semester hour of credit for work equivalent to a minimum of one hour (50 minutes) of in-class or other direct faculty instruction AND two hours of student work outside of class per week for approximately fifteen weeks. For each course, the course syllabus will document the amount of in-class (or other direct faculty instruction) and out-of-class work required to earn the credit hour(s) assigned to the course. Out-of-class work will include all forms of credit-bearing activity, including but not limited to assignments, readings, observations, and musical practice. Where available, the university grants academic credit for students who verify via competency-based testing, that they have accomplished the learning outcomes associated with a course that would normally meet the requirements outlined above (e.g. AP credit, CLEP, and departmental exams).

University of West Georgia Honor Code: At the University of West Georgia, we believe that academic and personal integrity are based upon honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. Students at West Georgia assume responsibility for upholding the honor code. West students pledge to refrain from engaging in acts that do not maintain academic and personal integrity. These include, but are not limited to, plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, aid of academic dishonesty, lying, bribery or threats, and stealing. The University of West Georgia maintains and monitors a confidential Academic Dishonesty Tracking System. This database collects and reports patterns of repeated student violations across all the Colleges, the Ingram Library, and the School of Nursing.

Additionally, you are responsible for safeguarding your computer account. Your account and network connection are for your individual use. A computer account is to be used only by the person to whom it has been issued. You are responsible for all actions originating through your account or network connection. You must not impersonate others or misrepresent or conceal your identity in electronic messages and actions.

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

All changes are at the discretion of the instructor and will be announced in class and posted on my website. Important: All assignments, including readings, are to be completed for the date listed in the schedule!

Please Note: In the event UWG closes due to inclement weather, you should continue your out-of-class assignments according to this schedule. FYI—University policy regarding severe weather and emergency closings is posted at http://www.westga.edu/police/index_2277.php and official announcements about class and/or examination cancellations will be made only by the President and/or the Department of Public Relations.

DATE	TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS	ASSIGNMENTS AND DEADLINES
Tue 1/6	Intro to Course/Syllabus	
Thu 1/8	In-class video: <i>The Librarians</i> (key themes, terms and questions in the study of secret societies/conspiracies)	
Tue 1/13	Theme: The Brotherhood of the Rosy-Cross, The Rosicrucian Manifestoes, and the Search for Secret Knowledge Read: Selections on CourseDen	
Thu 1/15	Cont. Rosicrucian Manifestoes	
Tue 1/20	Theme: Anne Hutchinson, “Monstrous Births,” and the Detritus of New England Puritanism Read: Selections on CourseDen	
Thu 1/22	Cont. Anne Hutchinson	
Tue 1/27	Theme: Salem Witchcraft and the Hysteria of the Occult Read: Selections on CourseDen	
Thu 1/29	Cont. Salem Witchcraft; Video (in-class): <i>Three Sovereigns for Sarah</i>	
Tue 2/3	Read: Arthur Miller, <i>The Crucible</i> (complete text)	
Thu 2/5		Student oral presentations: Groups 1, 2, and 3
Tue 2/10	Theme: The Blue Room—Sacred Sex and the Moravian Church Read: Selections on CourseDen	
Thu 2/12	Cont. Moravian Church	
Tue 2/17	Theme: Benedict Arnold, John André, and the Abraham Woodall Spy Ring In-class video: selections from AMC’s series <i>Turn</i>	Short Analysis Paper due.
Thu 2/19	Cont. Revolutionary War Spies; Read: selections on CourseDen	
Tue 2/24	Theme: The Bavarian Illuminati and the Breakdown of the Early American Republic Charles Brockden Brown, <i>Wieland</i>	
Thu 2/26	Cont. <i>Wieland</i>	Journal due

		(midterm grade)
Tue 3/3	Cont. <i>Wieland</i> and Illuminati	
Thu 3/5		Student Oral Presentations: Groups 4, 5, and 6
Tue 3/10	Video (in-class): <i>National Treasure</i>	
Thu 3/12	Cont. <i>National Treasure</i>	Archival Sleuthing paper due.
Tue 3/17	SPRING BREAK	
Thu 3/19	SPRING BREAK	
Tue 3/24	Theme: The Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings Scandal Read: Annette Gordon-Reed, <i>An American Controversy</i>	
Thu 3/26	Preview (at home or in library); discussion in class: <i>Jefferson in Paris</i>	
Tue 3/31	No class/Honor's Convocation	
Thu 4/2	Intro to Final Research Paper	Student Presentations 7 and 8
Tue 4/7	Theme: Aaron Burr and the First Plot to Destroy the Union Read: Selections on Aaron Burr on CourseDen	
Thu 4/9	Cont. Aaron Burr	Student Presentations 9 and 10
Tue 4/14	Workshop, final paper	
Thu 4/16	Workshop, final paper	
Tue 4/21	Final "Exam" meeting time: 2:00-4:30pm	Student Presentations 11 and 12; Journal due (finals grade).
Thu 4/23		Final paper due by 5pm in my email inbox (perben@westga.edu)

