

COURSE OUTLINE

1. Course Number and Title: Lit4402, American History through Literature

Prerequisites: None

Credits: 3 hours

2. Course Description: The "discovery" of the New World fostered a literature that celebrated the Americas as a place of innocence; free from the decadence and the tyrannies of Old Europe. To many, America signified the Promised Land, a veritable Garden of Eden, where men recovered their lost innocence; began life anew; recreated themselves; and could live and worship freely.

Based on both Biblical and classical sources, this tradition also shaped Americans' vision of themselves as the "new Adam," a blessed innocent dwelling in a timeless earthly paradise. The American hero became a figure of vast potential, free from the human condition, poised on the threshold of an unexplored destiny.

Only in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century when American writers reflected on the expansion of a prosperous civilization across the continent did this view began to change. They recognized the deep regional divisions and hidden tensions that threatened the nation's destruction. Americans, they believed, would inevitably lose their sense of innocent confidence and, like their European forebears, suffer the ravages of history. Americans were not, after all, immune from the human condition.

3. Course Goals: Students will read with a new perception the classic American literature from its colonial period through Mark Twain's incisive characterization in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* of the differing regional values that ended in the great civil war. These readings will inform and deepen the student's understanding of the American experience. In evaluating that perspective, students will hone their ability to read, think, and write critically and analytically.

4. Course Learning Outcomes Students will demonstrate their understanding of the course subject matter by being able to do the following:

1. Identify the role of mankind's intellectual perception of Nature, which has tended to inform the uneasy relationship between the two, and to distinguish how this perception influenced rightly or wrongly the "visions" of the 'New World;
2. Describe and evaluate the success of Hawthorne's formulation of the importance of convention, as represented by the Puritans, as the means to order and to cultivate creativity, as embodied by Hester Prynne and Pearl, through his great work, *The Scarlet Letter*;
3. Analyze the "republican dilemma," cultivating civic virtue while insuring personal freedom;

4. Compare and contrast the Puritan mission of creating and maintaining a life worthy of their abode in the “New Jerusalem” and the 17th century communitarian alternative life-style experiences characterized in Hawthorne’s *Blithedale Romance*.
5. Resolve the lesson of Cooper’s *Deerslayer* and Turner’s “Frontier in American History” in terms of how Americans must live in an actual America as opposed to its myth and what that means in terms of American ideals and values, particularly in the domestication of the frontier;
6. Analyze the virtue and the failure of the Northern and Southern regions criticism and defense of slavery in terms of their distinct histories and worldviews.
- 7.-8. Explicate the role Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* plays in combining the threads of American literary history from the garden to the frontier. In particular, students will be able to identify how the regional clash of worldviews created different perceptions of a common history and thus a different literature.

5. Course Concepts

1. Visions of the New World

- Christopher Columbus; Thomas More, Utopia Amerigo Vespucci
- Governor William Bradford, History of the Plymouth Plantation; Governor John Winthrop of Massachusetts Bay
- Thomas Hobbes Leviathan; Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, Natural History of Animals; Abbe Guillaume-Thomas Francois de Raynal, Histoire philosophique et politique
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Discourse on the Origin of Inequality among Men; Michel-Guillaume St. John de Crevecoeur, Letters from an American Farmer

2. Sin in the Garden

- The Separatists/Pilgrims; the Puritans; Plymouth; Massachusetts Bay Colony; John Winthrop; Michael Wigglesworth; Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*;

3. The Republican Dilemma

- Charles Brockden Brown, George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison; Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntley*;

4. The Garden Restored

- Communitarian impulse; millennialism perfectibility; transcendentalism; Utopian communities;
- Robert Owen: New Harmony;
- Adin Ballou: Hopedale;
- George Ripley: Brook Farm, Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance*;
- John Humphrey Noyes: Oneida Community;

5. The Garden of the Chattel

- Virginia settlement; Captain John Smith;
- Robert Beverly: *The History and Present State of Virginia*; William Byrd I garden and summer house; “the plantation” as new world garden;
- William Jay Grayson, *Witness to Sorrow*; slavery; cotton economy;
- John Pendleton Kennedy, *Swallow Barn*;
- Divergent moral worldviews, rival economies, rival societies

6. The Ambiguous American Adam

- The Western movement; Thomas Jefferson, Louisiana Territory;
- Frederick Jackson Turner, “*The Significance of the Frontier in American History*”; frontier thesis; pioneer values;

- The impact of the closing of the frontier: James Fenimore Cooper, *The Deerslayer*;
- 7.-8.. Consciousness & History
- Old South/New South; displacement of history by memory; Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*, *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*;
 - Southern literature; rhetorical history; Thomas Nelson Page; George Washington Cable; Robert Penn Warren;

7. **Required Texts:** These are all classics, which you can access online for free or purchase with the scholarship that most interests you. You are not required to buy any special edition or from any particular publishing house.

Brown, Charles Brockden. *Edgar Huntly*. Digireads.com.2007. ISBN10: 1420928961 ISBN-13: 978-1420928969. Or, online at http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&id=K4qjw4vyTIEC&dq=Brown,+Charles+Brockden&printsec=frontcover&source=bll&ots=8hJHUJCH9P&sig=T-7T8TUh9t5wHdAg3pWIGtd_2M8&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=12&ct=result-PPA3,M1

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Blithedale Romance*. New York: Oxford University Press,1999. ISBN-10: 0192836978. Or, online at <http://www.online-literature.com/hawthorne/>

The Scarlet Letter. New York: Bantam Classics, 1981. ISBN-10:0553210092. Or, online at <http://www.online-literature.com/hawthorne/>

Kennedy, John Pendelton. *Swallow Barn; Or, a Sojourn in the Old Dominion*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986. ISBN-10: 0807113220. http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&id=VJAd1eOgQYAC&dq=kennedy,+swallow+barn&printsec=frontcover&source=web&ots=7xFOLMXUWT&sig=olMgUI2-dGt0oE-O06MLyIFG7MM&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=3&ct=result

Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2002. ISBN-10: 0140390464. Or, online at <http://etext.virginia.edu/twain/huckfinn.html>

Recommended Texts

See Recommended Bibliography under Resources in Izio