ENG 3702-002: American Literature Between the Wars: 1865-1914

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The Civil War had a seismic effect on America’s self-image. Prior to 1860, Americans had been taught to think of themselves as exceptional in many ways, and they had grown used to viewing the North American continent as a great blank canvas it was their manifest destiny to inscribe. But after 1865, with the end of the Civil War, the death of over half a million American combatants, the close of a tortured debate over the crime of chattel slavery, and the first assassination of an American president, Americans required a new narrative to tell themselves about themselves. The project of Reconstruction—the re-integration of the old Confederacy into the Union and the transformation of millions of former slaves into full-fledged citizens—spawned the advent of Jim Crow laws in the South as well as new white supremacist movements such as the Ku Klux Klan. The extermination or relocation of millions of Native Americans now complete, the government declared the frontier officially closed, thus ending the giddy race westward upon which so much idealism and ideology had been built. Turning away from the western horizon, more Americans than ever were moving to cities like Boston, New York, and Chicago, where many would be overworked and impoverished in factories and ghettos. And for the first time, America would become an imperial power, gaining territories in the Caribbean and the Philippines and re-fashioning itself after the image of its old European antagonists in the process. In short, Americans living in the decades after the Civil War had as much cause to be unsure about their national identity as to be anxious about their future.

So in certain limited ways, Americans who were alive around the turn of the nineteenth century were not so unlike Americans now living through the turn of the twentieth. We might look to the re-building of lower Manhattan as a metaphor for the reformation of American consciousness, severely fragmented under the pressures of the Clinton impeachment, the inauguration of Bush, the decisive end of the “new economy” of the 1990s and the “irrational exuberance” (Allan Greenspan, Chairman of the Federal Reserve under Presidents Bush I, Clinton, and Bush II) it fostered, and the destruction of the World Trade Center. In short, no one knows exactly what the New York skyline or America’s self-image will look like when the work is complete, but everyone agrees it will not be the same as before.

It will be for future generations of literary historians to show how the challenges and anxieties of post-9/11 America will have shaped the literary expression for which our generation will be presumably be remembered. In this class, it is our task to examine the ways in which Americans writing after the Civil War but before the First World War engaged new, seemingly intractable problems. These problems include: the nature and value of “individualism” in a society that has consolidated itself into cities and factories; the relation between public and private spheres in a democratic society increasingly dominated by corporate capital; the tensions and antagonisms occasioned by unprecedented levels of immigration; the meaning of Darwinistic thought for a culture increasingly divided between the affluent and the poor; and the reconsolidation of white supremacist forces during and after Reconstruction.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS & POLICIES:

Two major essays, the first approximately five pages or 1250 words in length, the second approximately seven pages or 1750 words in length. The first paper is due on October 12 and requires you to formulate an argument about Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth*, using whatever critical approach you like. The main requirement of this first essay is that you devise an approach to some aspect of Wharton’s novel that takes your reader beyond the expected and that does so through a convincing, carefully-constructed argument based on very close reading of the text. See the handout “Writing Arguments About Texts” as part of your preparation for this assignment. The second paper may deal with any other work(s) on the syllabus, and requires you to formulate a closely-crafted argument that takes into consideration historical documents from the era of the work’s publication. For the final paper, students are required to use secondary critical works, and to turn in a one-page project proposal outlining the scope and purpose of the paper by November 16 at the latest. A handout on this assignment will detail these requirements further.

Two examinations, one to be held on October 19, and the other to be held during Finals Week (date and time to be announced). Each of these exams will consist of an objective section designed to assess the closeness of your reading, along with an essay section requiring you to write extended, well-crafted answers to pointed questions about the readings.

Participation in discussion: The course will be conducted primarily as a discussion course (supplemented with occasional lectures from me). As you surely know by now, such a course is only truly successful if a high percentage of students participate; it can be unappealing if the discussion turns into a dialogue between the professor and a small handful of students. To make the discussion run well: 1) you should plan on participating—at least making a comment or asking a question—every day; 2) you should be careful not to dominate discussion (i.e., those of you who are not shy should give other students an opening to participate); 3) you should participate with tact and civility (take other people’s remarks and questions seriously, don’t interrupt, respond courteously, etc.). The grade for participation will depend upon meeting all these criteria. If given, occasional reading quizzes will be brief, designed to encourage everyone to keep up with the reading, and will also help me to determine participation grades.

One last note on participation: Participating well doesn’t simply mean talking a lot—it means frequently making comments showing that you are engaged in a process of careful, close reading. Idle talk—the kind that simply does not indicate close engagement with the materials we’ll be studying—does not help move the conversation forward, and hence does not help one to gain a high score for participation.

I want to be utterly clear about this: Good participation does not require you to come to class knowing all the “answers,” but it does require you to understand certain things about a text. For instance, one cannot participate competently if one does not understand the events that make up the plot of a work of fiction, or the literal argument of an essay. When we meet to discuss our readings, I will assume that everyone understands the literal level of “what happened” in the text; from this elementary level of understanding the words on the page, we will aim toward a more fulfilling grasp of the text’s place in the period we’re studying.

Final Grades will be determined by this formula:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>1st paper (5 pp.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
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<td>2nd paper (7 pp.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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Attendance will be taken at each class. I allow every member of the class to take two personal days for whatever purpose required—illness, family loss or emergency, car problems, personal difficulties, whatever—without penalty. After a student exceeds this number of allotted absences, however, they will be
considered overcut. Overcutting by one absence (i.e., being absent three times) will result in a lowering of the final grade by a letter grade; being absent four times will lower the final grade by two letter grades; and being absent five times will result in a lowering of the final grade by three letter grades. In no case may a student accumulate more than five absences and still pass the course. In cases of prolonged illness, students should seek a medical withdrawal.

Students who tend to show up for class a few minutes after it has started should find a professor who is into that and take their course instead. This professor is bothered by it and reacts badly.

**Students are responsible for reading all of the material on this syllabus on the date assigned whether or not the work is actually discussed on that date.** Students are cautioned that many of the readings are lengthy. I urge you to begin these readings as soon as possible. Occasionally, I will pass out brief, photocopied materials not represented on the syllabus; these are to be read by the next class.

**Late papers** will be penalized one half letter grade for each day they are late. I am not unbending in this policy in the case of extreme circumstances, but in order to be granted an extension, students must contact me at least two days before the paper’s due date.

**Academic honesty:** Students are of course responsible for knowing Eastern Illinois University regulations and policies regarding academic honesty. Plagiarism, even if unknowing or accidental, can result in your failing the course and in further action by the university. Please note the English Department’s statement on plagiarism:

> Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism — “The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one’s own original work” (Random House Dictionary of the English Language) — has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignments, of a grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.

If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, feel free to ask me to clarify. Also, please make a point of noting the following: I will not tolerate any form of academic dishonesty in this course. If I come to suspect misconduct of any kind, I will become dogged about rooting it out, and if my suspicions are confirmed, I will dispense appropriate penalties.

**Lastly:** Some of the materials studied in this course may be offensive to some people. The assignment of any given text or image does not indicate an endorsement of the ideas and attitudes expressed therein.

A particular word is perhaps warranted here regarding an inclusion in our last unit of study, the HBO television series *Deadwood*, produced by David Milch. *Deadwood* contains explicit sexuality and violence, and its dialogue is undoubtedly the most profane yet aired on television. It is also one of the most critically-acclaimed television shows in history, a lyrically-written and carefully researched depiction of life in a South Dakota mining camp circa 1876. We will be watching three episodes of Deadwood because it is worthy of us—that is, because it can help us to carry on our discussion of the literary and national culture of the United States in challenging ways. However, students who feel they cannot watch *Deadwood* because of its disturbing content may contact me in advance, and I will assign a substantial piece of reading in its place. The screenings of *Deadwood* will take place at 8 pm in a classroom on the third floor of Coleman Hall.
READING SCHEDULE
(items may be added or amended)

I: The Turn from Romance: Mark Twain and the Realist Novel

TUESDAY 8/22: Introductions, Course Overview
THURSDAY 8/24: Mark Twain, "Fenimore Cooper’s Literary Offences"
                 Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, pp. 28-50
TUESDAY 8/29: Huck Finn, pp. 50-133
THURSDAY 8/31: Huck Finn, pp. 133-216
                William Dean Howells, “Novel-Reading and Novel Writing”
                Ambrose Bierce, “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge”

II: Race, Race Consciousness, Double Consciousness

TUESDAY 9/5: Plessy v. Ferguson, United States Supreme Court opinion (e-reserve)
              Kate Chopin, “Desirée’s Baby” (e-reserve)
THURSDAY 9/7: Charles Chesnutt, “The Goophered Grapevine”
              Chesnutt, “The Wife of His Youth”
              Joel Chandler Harris, “The Wonderful Tar-Baby Story”
              Harris, “Mr. Rabbit Grossly Deceives Mr. Fox”
TUESDAY 9/12: Booker T. Washington, chaps. 1 & 14 from Up From Slavery
              George Bellows, Both Members of This Club (painting—in-class viewing)
              W. E. B. Du Bois, chaps. 1 & 3 from The Souls of Black Folk
THURSDAY 9/14: Thomas Dixon, selections from The Clansman (e-reserve)
                In-class viewing: from G. W. Griffith, The Birth of a Nation
TUESDAY 9/19: Sarah Orne Jewitt, “The Foreigner”
              Charles Schreyvogel, Defending the Stockade (painting)
              Frederick Remington, The Fight for the Waterhole (painting)
THURSDAY 9/21: Pauline Hopkins, Contending Forces, pp. 1-165
TUESDAY 9/26: Hopkins, Contending Forces, pp. 166-286
THURSDAY 9/28: Hopkins, Contending Forces, pp. 287-402

III: The Literature of the Leisure Class: Edith Wharton and Henry James

TUESDAY 10/3: Thorstein Veblen, chaps. 3 & 4 from The Theory of the Leisure Class
               (e-reserve)
               Edith Wharton, The House of Mirth, pp. 25-118
THURSDAY 10/5: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, chapters 1-4 from Women and Economics
TUESDAY 10/10: Wharton, *House of Mirth*, pp. 201-264
Kate Chopin, "The Story of an Hour" (e-reserve)

THURSDAY 10/12: Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, pp. 264-305
***FIRST PAPER DUE BEGINNING OF CLASS 10/12***

TUESDAY 10/17: Henry James, *Daisy Miller*
James, "The Real Thing"
James, *The Beast in the Jungle*

THURSDAY 10/19: ***MIDTERM EXAMINATION***

IV: Bodies Politic: The New Woman

TUESDAY 10/24: Begin Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, chaps. 1-15
John Singer Sargent, *Madam X*
Sargent, *Lady Agnew of Lochnaw* (paintings—in-class viewing)

THURSDAY 10/26: Continue Chopin, *The Awakening*, chaps. 16-30

Chopin, "At the 'Cadian Ball"
Chopin, "The Storm"

THURSDAY 11/2: Sarah Orne Jewett, "A White Heron"
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper"
Emma Goldman, "Marriage and Love" (e-reserve)

V: The Gold Standard, Democracy, *Deadwood*

TUESDAY 11/7: Jack London, "The Law of Life"
Stephen Crane, "The Open Boat"

THURSDAY 11/9: Crane, "The Blue Hotel"
Crane, "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky"

TUESDAY 11/14: Andrew Carnegie, "The Gospel of Wealth" and "The Advantages of Poverty" (e-reserve)
Black Elk, from *Black Elk Speaks*
Hamlin Garland, "Under the Lion's Paw"

William Jennings Bryant, Speech to the Democratic National Convention of 1896 (e-reserve)

***FINAL PAPER PROPOSALS DUE BEGINNING OF CLASS 11/16***

8 pm: *Deadwood*, season 1, episode 4, "Here Was A Man"

11/21-11/23: THANKSGIVING BREAK


8 pm: *Deadwood*, season 3, episode 26, “I Am Not The Man You Take Me For”

TUESDAY 12/5: No class meeting

THURSDAY 12/7: Open discussion, wrap-up, etc.

***FINAL PAPERS DUE BEGINNING OF CLASS 12/7***