
John Allison
Eastern Illinois University

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STUDIES IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE:

VIOLENCE, IDENTITY, AND COMMUNITY

SPRING 2007

INSTRUCTOR: John Allison
Coleman: 3552 (316F)
E-Mail: jballison@eiu.edu
Phones: 581-6978 (office); 348-0269 (home)

OVERVIEW: Much of our literature is steeped in violence. This fact should come as no surprise since nearly all, if not all, societies enforce conformity through the threat and application of violence. Too, psychologists and anthropologists from Sigmund Freud to Rene Girard stress the violent origins of society itself. But in addition to this universal context, nineteenth-century American writers shared a history of conquest, slavery, and revolution. American writers living during the second half of the nineteenth century also shared the context of a war that claimed more lives than any other war in which American soldiers have served. We will examine relationships among violence, identity, and community as represented in our literature. As we do so, we will necessarily address a wide range of related topics, including race, gender, ethnicity, conformity, nonconformity, scapegoating, and authority.

OBJECTIVES:

To study and discuss selected works of "classic" American literature;

To consider ways in which the works shed light on relationships among violence, identity, and community;

To encourage interdisciplinary study of literature, history, philosophy, psychology, and anthropology;

To stress mastery of subject matter for continuing research and teaching;

To foster clear and correct expression of ideas and evidence in writing.
REQUIREMENTS:

Midterm: The midterm will include two parts. For part one, you will select two of four items as the basis of two essays of about 500 words each. For part two, you select one of three items as the basis for one of essay of about 1000 words (20%);

Critical Essay: The critical essay will include 12-15 pages of argument, as well as documentation and other matter (45%);

Oral Presentation: The oral presentation (about 15 minutes) will focus on critical and/or theoretical approaches to one or more of the scheduled works (10%)

Final: The final will be structured like the midterm, but more weight will be placed on the final since it will be somewhat more comprehensive than the midterm (25%).

GRADING: When I evaluate your work, I will consider content (depth, evidence, reasoning), organization, and expression (coherence, style, grammar, mechanics). While content is most important, an essay can fail if it is radically deficient in any of these areas.
TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF READING

1. Week of January 8
   -Introduction to the Course; Preliminaries: Background, Texts and Resources

2. Week of January 15: Martin Luther King’s Day

3. Week of January 22
   -The Last of the Mohicans

4. Week of January 29
   -The Pionners

5. Week of February 5

6. Week of February 12
   -The Scarlet Letter (85)

7. Week of February 19
   -The Blithedale Romance (439)

8. Week of February 26
   -Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass; Melville, Moby-Dick (xxxvii-lii, 1-105);
   Take-home Midterm Distributed

9. Week of March 5
   -Take-home Midterm Due; Moby-Dick (106-277)

SPRING BREAK
10. Week of March 19

-Finish *Moby-Dick*, "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (1)

11. Week of March 26

-"Bartleby, the Scrivener" (1), "Benito Cereno" (159)

12. Week of April 2

-*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

13. Week of April 9

-Crane, "Maggie: A Girl of the Streets" (1) and "The Blue Hotel" (251)

14. Week of April 16

-Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* (115)

15. Week of April 23

-Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor* (287); Evaluation of Instruction; Take-home Final Distributed