

Professor Leslie Petty
Office Hours: MW 1-2 pm; TTh 3:15-4:15, and by appt.
Palmer 313
843-3981
pettyl@rhodes.edu
Spring 2015

English 262-01: Survey of American Literature

The concept of the "American Dream" has always been integral to the nation's identity, even before the narrator of the first American novel, *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) declared, "we are the most perfect society now existing in the world. Here man is free; as he ought to be." In English 262, we will examine how this potential for perfection (often gauged by material success) through freedom is the tantalizing yet ultimately unattainable promise that drives most American writers. Thus, while this is a survey of American literature, it will be organized thematically (and chronologically) to consider how successive generations of Americans have grappled with the "Dream." We will read a widely diverse set of texts and students will be asked to consider how each articulates a vision of American possibility that contributes to the nation's literary tradition as well as to its sense of identity.

Required Reading

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life* (Norton Critical Edition)
F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (Scribner)
Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (Modern Classics)
Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (Penguin)
Several scanned documents located in the Eng 262 file in Prof. Petty's public folder

Assignments

Essay #1 (5 pages)	20%
Essay #2 (5 pages)	20%
Group Responses	15%
Midterm	15%
Final Exam	20%
Participation	10%

We will discuss these assignments more fully during the course of the semester. PLEASE NOTE: You cannot receive a passing grade for this course unless you complete all major assignments.

Participation

This course is a seminar and requires the active and engaged participation of every member of the class. Make sure you read each day's assignment carefully and come to class with questions or comments to bring to the discussion. Often the most productive questions pinpoint what is difficult or confusing about a particular reading.

Attendance Policy

You are expected to be in class every day. Being "present" doesn't just mean physically being in the room; you are to be alert and prepared. Anyone not alert (i.e. sleeping, reading the paper, working a crossword, etc.) will be counted absent, as will anyone clearly not prepared to participate. If you must miss class, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed and what, if anything, you need to make up. **After 3 absences (for any reason), you will lose 1/3 letter grade for each subsequent absence. If you have more than 6 absences, you will fail the course.** Chronic tardiness will count towards absences.

Assignment Submission Policy

Essays are due at the time and date indicated on the syllabus. Late papers will be penalized a letter grade per day, including weekends. Except in the case of documented illness or family emergency, papers more than a week late will receive a zero. If you believe you have a legitimate reason for missing a due date, talk to me beforehand to make alternative arrangements. Also, please note that essays and other formal written assignments must be typed, double-spaced with an inch margin, stapled, and adhere to MLA standards in both layout and documentation. See me if you have questions about MLA or need further information.

A Note about Plagiarism

Every assignment that you submit must be your original work, written specifically for this class, and it must clearly and properly cite any sources you used in writing it. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please do not hesitate to ask. I am bound by the honor code to turn in any work I suspect of being plagiarized to the honor council, and I will not have a conversation with you before doing so. Therefore, if you study with someone else from the class, make sure that you understand the material well enough on your own that you don't merely reproduce "canned" (and therefore similar) answers. When it comes to essays, it is best to approach me with any concerns before the assignment is submitted. If you plagiarize an essay or other assignment, in part or whole, you will fail the course in addition to any punishment meted out by the Honor Council. Please see the English Department policies attached to this syllabus for a further elaboration of the course plagiarism policy.

Reading Schedule

January

Thurs. 15 Introductions

“THE MOST PERFECT SOCIETY NOW EXISTING IN THE WORLD”: ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

Tues. 20 COURSE FOLDER: John Winthrop “A Model of Christian Charity,” (1630) J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, “What is an American?” from *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782)

Thurs. 22 COURSE FOLDER: Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography*, Part One (27-80)

Tues. 27 COURSE FOLDER: Franklin, *The Autobiography*, Part Two (81-98); Phillis Wheatley, selected poems
Group 1

Thurs. 29 COURSE FOLDER: Washington Irving, “Rip Van Winkle”
Group 2

February

Tues. 3 COURSE FOLDER: Caroline Kirkland, *A New Home, Who'll Follow?* (selections); Cherokee memorials
Group 3

“AMERICA IS A POEM IN OUR EYES”: ANTEBELLUM OPTIMISM

Thurs. 5 COURSE FOLDER: Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance”
Group 4

Tues. 10 COURSE FOLDER: Henry David Thoreau, “Resistance to Civil Government” selections from *Walden*
Group 5

Thurs. 12 COURSE FOLDER: Walt Whitman, selections from “Song of Myself,” “On Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”
Group 6

Tues. 17 Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*
Group 7

Thurs. 19 Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*

Fri. 20 Essay #1 Due by 4:00 pm outside my office door

Tues. 24 COURSE FOLDER: Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (selections); Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (selections)
Group 1

Thurs. 26 COURSE FOLDER: Herman Melville, "Bartleby, The Scrivener"
Group 2

March

Tues. 3 COURSE FOLDER: Rebecca Harding Davis, "Life in the Iron Mills"

Thurs. 5 Midterm

Tues. 10 SPRING BREAK

Thurs. 12 SPRING BREAK

"LIKE BOATS AGAINST THE CURRENT": SLOWLY WAKING FROM THE DREAM

Tues. 17 COURSE FOLDER: Henry James, "Daisy Miller"
Group 3

Thurs. 19 Finish discussion of "Daisy Miller"
COURSE FOLDER: Charles Chesnutt, "The Wife of His Youth"
Group 4

Tues. 24 COURSE FOLDER: Zitkala Sa, "Impressions of an Indian Childhood"
(selections)
Group 5

Thurs. 26 COURSE FOLDER: Sui Sin Far, "Mrs. Spring Fragrance," "The Inferior Woman"
Group 6

Tues. 31 F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*
Group 7

April

Thurs. 2 EASTER BREAK

Tues. 7 F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*
Group 1

Thurs. 9 F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

Mon. 13 Essay #2 due outside my office door by 4 pm

Tues. 14 COURSE FOLDER: Anzia Yezierska, “The Fat of the Land,” “Soap and Water”
Group 2

Thurs. 16 COURSE FOLDER: Langston Hughes, “Theme for English B,” “Harlem”
Group 3

“A MAN IS NOT A PIECE OF FRUIT”: MID-CENTURY DRAMA AND THE DREAM

Tues. 21 Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*
Group 4

Thurs. 23 Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*
Group 5

Tues. 28 Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*
Group 6

Thurs. 30 Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*
Group 7

Final Exam: Friday, May 8 @ 1:00 pm