This course is devoted to literary expressions and examinations of American life and its animating principles. It highlights certain issues in American experience, lifting up particular problems or questions for special scrutiny; the course will inquire generally about how the American regime (the combination of ideas, institutions, beliefs, and mores) shapes American character for better or worse.

The American experiment was bound up with the assertion of natural rights, and with a sense that this was somehow “nature’s nation,” a people capable of a new beginning and therefore, perhaps, of a more perfect social union. Some writers evoked the vision of an “American Adam,” and a new Eden. At the same time, the very dynamism and progressive spirit of American culture” raised doubts about the harmony between nature and an increasingly technological civilization. Several of the literary works that we will read in this course dramatize the tension between nature and civilization, and consider various responses to it. Do individual and social happiness involve remaining close to nature or leaving it in the pursuit of mastery? Are those ends compatible, or is individual flourishing and personal identity somehow at odds with the perfection of social union? Another fundamental issue for us will be the scar of racial injustice and its lingering effects on the American psyche and society.

**REQUIRED BOOKS**

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*
Herman Melville, *Melville’s Short Novels* (MSN) ed. Dan McCall
Tom Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*

Other required readings will be accessible in my faculty folder on the college server, or distributed as handouts.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

First and foremost, regular attendance and preparation for class discussion. Unexcused absences will lower your grade. Being prepared means more than having read the assignment; you must generate questions and frame issues for class discussion. Each student will have some formal responsibility for leading those discussions during the semester. There will also be periodic quizzes.

The class email list (crn#@rhodes.edu) will enable us to communicate between classes and to share responses to the readings outside of class.

Occasionally we may meet outside of the regular class period for a guest lecture or a movie.

Your grade will be based on:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Examination</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>Class participation, quizzes and</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>miscellaneous writing assignments</td>
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<td>4-5 page paper</td>
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<td>Final examination</td>
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SCHEDULE OF READINGS

January 10  Course Introduction

January 15  Nathaniel Hawthorne “Ethan Brand”; Herman Melville, “The Bell Tower”

January 17  Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Earth’s Holocaust” and “The Birthmark”

January 22  Melville, *Billy Budd*, Chapters 1-19 (MSN, pp. 103-147)

January 24  Melville, *Billy Budd*, Chapters 20- end; and Criticism, pp. 341-360

January 29  *Billy Budd* Criticism, pp. 361-406

January 31  Melville, *Benito Cereno* (MSN, pp. 34-102)

February 5  *Benito Cereno* Criticism, pp. 287-302

February 7  *Benito Cereno* Criticism, pp. 303-340
February 12  Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, Chapters 1-3 (to p.97)
February 14  Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, Chapters 4-11 (pp. 98-250)
February 19  Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, Chapters 12-23 (pp. 251-512)
February 21  Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, Chapters 24-Epilogue (pp. 512-581)
February 28  **Midterm Examination**

*Spring Break*

March 11  Tom Wolfe, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, Chapters 1-16 (pp. 5-333)
March 13  *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, Chapters 17-23 (pp. 334-450)
March 18  *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, Chapters 24-34 (pp. 451-676)

*Easter Recess*

March 25  *I Am Charlotte Simmons* Criticism (handout)
March 27  *I Am Charlotte Simmons* Criticism (handout)
April 1   *White Noise*, Part 1
April 3   *White Noise*, Part 2
April 8   *White Noise*, Part 3
April 10  WN, 331-34; DeLillo, “Silhouette City,” and Newsweek story WN, 342-262
April 15  *White Noise* Criticism: 385-430
April 17  *White Noise* Criticism: 431-516
April 22  Summing Up
April 24  Conclusion