

English 347: American Literature 1865-1915

Dr. Michael Germana

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Section W01 10:30-11:20 MWF 200 Clark Hall

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Introduction:

When the Civil War came to a close in April of 1865, a new chapter in American cultural history opened and a period of tectonic social and political changes got underway. In this course we will study the major genres, authors, themes, and topics of American literature during the tumultuous period between 1865 and 1915. In the process, we will examine the cultural politics of Reconstruction, the Gilded Age, and the Progressive Era through the lens of American fiction.

Successful completion of this course will satisfy WVU's "W" requirement. It will simultaneously (or alternatively) fulfill the 300-level elective course requirement for English majors.

Required Materials:

To Purchase from the WVU Bookstore:

- James Nagel and Tom Quirk, eds. *The Portable American Realism and Naturalism Reader*
- Cathy N. Davidson and Ada Norris, eds. *American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings by Zitkala-Sa*
- James Weldon Johnson, *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*
- Frank Norris, *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*
- Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Online Resources:

- Readings marked "ereserves" available on .pdf files via electronic reserve:
 - <https://reserves.lib.wvu.edu/>
- "Making of America" periodical databases at Cornell and Michigan, respectively:
 - <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/m/moa/>
 - <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moagrp/>

Course Objectives:

- To understand the development of American cultural history between the Civil War and World War I
- To learn how to find, evaluate, lucidly summarize, and respond critically to peer reviewed scholarly sources

- To develop a thesis about a literary text that is informed by relevant research and support that thesis with evidence from scholarly sources
- To practice the conventions of standard written English and appropriate documentation style

Assignments:

Overview:

As befits a writing-intensive or “W” course, the writing and revising processes constitute a significant portion of your overall work for this class. Each student enrolled in this course will complete four short “*précis* and response” papers of 500+ words in response to self-selected academic articles published in peer reviewed journals, compose a 10-15-page final research essay that explores one or more of the primary course texts in critical and cultural context, and compile a portfolio of thoroughly revised writing that will determine 80% of his or her final grade. **Failure to complete any one of these assignments will constitute failure of the course.** All assignments must be printed in 12-point Times or Times New Roman, double-spaced, and properly documented in either MLA or Chicago style. **Late work will not be accepted unless prior arrangements have been made and approved by Dr. Germana. Emailed assignments will not be accepted at all.**

Précis and Response Papers:

During the semester you will complete four “*précis* and response” papers of 500 words or more. To complete these papers you must use the MLA bibliography in conjunction with online resources like JSTOR, Project MUSE, and/or EBSCOHost to find, read, summarize, and analyze a single work of substantial, peer-reviewed scholarship **on a topic pertaining to any one of the literary texts we will have covered since the previous “*précis* and response” paper was due.** Read: your “*précis* and response” papers must summarize and respond critically to *a substantial work of literary criticism*, meaning an article in a peer-reviewed academic journal or an essay in a published collection, not a biographical sketch, encyclopedia article, or the like.

Each of these papers should begin with a lucid characterization and summary of the argument made by the scholar or scholars whose work you found and carefully read. The challenge here is to condense the scholar’s argument down to one or two paragraphs without oversimplifying it. This *précis* or abstract must then be followed by a critical response from you that engages with and responds to the author of the secondary source. Remember, you’re working toward constructing an argument of your own, so trashing the scholar for his or her writing style isn’t going to get you very far. Consider instead how you might respond as a scholar of equal caliber by asking and answering critical questions like: How has this scholar’s argument influenced your reading of the text? What has he or she overlooked, in your opinion? Etc. The goal in the response is to *demonstrate* how the scholarly source influences your interpretation of the primary text. Finally, you must provide a bibliographic citation of the article you found in either MLA or Chicago format. Tentative grades and suggestions for revision and/or further inquiry will be provided in response to each paper. Your four “*précis* and response” papers, revised for clarity, collective coherence, and argumentative substance, will make up a significant portion of your final portfolio and will, either individually or collectively, form the foundation of your final research essay, details of which are outlined below.

You are encouraged but not required to organize your research around a developing theme over the course of the semester.

Final Research Essay:

The final research essay (10-15 pages) should be your crowning achievement in this course. A detailed description of this assignment will be provided around midterm, but the gist is pretty straightforward. You must generate and develop a thesis—an arguable assertion—that is informed by your secondary research and support this thesis with evidence from the primary source or sources you choose to examine. **No fewer than five secondary sources are required.** You may use any of the articles you analyzed in your “*précis and response*” papers, but be forewarned: simply plunking your analysis of the secondary source(s) from these documents into your paper whole cloth is ill advised if not reckless. As you might expect, the revision process is necessary here, too. Also, you will need to supplement your research with additional secondary sources to more fully support the topic you choose. I will be happy to assist you in this process, just so long as you ask me for help sooner rather than later.

The final research essay offers you a chance to develop one or more of the topics you explored in the “*précis and response*” papers. So, for example, a “*précis and response*” paper on Frank Norris’s references to the gold standard might turn into a broader exploration of the author’s critique of U.S. economic policies in *McTeague*. The options are almost limitless, so you are encouraged to meet with me at any point in the semester to discuss your argument and possible methodologies.

Don’t worry about possible overlap with the “*précis and response*” papers. Building a usable archive is what doing research is all about, so you shouldn’t feel guilty about tapping into your own archive for the final research essay. You should also feel free to light out for new territory and leave your previous work behind should inspiration strike. You are not limited to the topics explored in your “*précis and response*” papers.

A rough draft of this essay will be due immediately prior to the Thanksgiving recess, so be prepared! Like with your “*précis and response*” papers, I will return these drafts to you with suggestions for revisions during the week of student conferences I have scheduled after the break.

Portfolio:

Final grades will be primarily determined by portfolio. The portfolio you hand in at the end of the semester will contain a brief critical introduction to the portfolio (1-2 pages), **revised** copies of the four “*précis and response*” papers, and the final draft of the required 10-15-page final research essay. What matters most, in the end, is the quality of the work contained in the portfolio. In other words, if you received a tentative grade of 75% on one of your “*précis and response*” papers, but you then clearly revised and improved upon the content and delivery of this essay in your portfolio, then your portfolio grade will reflect the improvement. **Note: you are strongly advised to make revisions to your “*précis and response*” papers as the semester progresses.** It is much easier to make minor changes along the way than wait until the last minute to make major changes at that time.

Participation:

You are expected and required to keep up with the reading and come to class prepared to discuss the reading due for each class meeting. Venturesome claims and critical observations about the authors we will read are always welcome, but participation in the class discussions may also mean asking questions about the form, content, or significance of what you’ve read on any given day. If you found a passage confusing or a narrative technique obfuscating, undoubtedly others will have shared your experience and will appreciate any questions you ask about them. See “Contact Information” below for information about how you may use Twitter to participate more fully, both during and outside of class.

Schedule of Revision:

- **“précis and response” paper one:** due September 12; returned September 19
- **“précis and response” paper two:** due September 24; returned October 1
- **“précis and response” paper three:** due October 10; returned October 17
- **“précis and response” paper four:** due October 31; returned during your scheduled student conference (conferences start November 2 and end November 7)
- **final research paper introduction/thesis:** due November 12; returned during peer review on November 14
- **final research paper draft:** due November 16; returned during your scheduled student conference (conferences start November 26 and end November 30)
- **revised draft of final research paper:** due December 3 (for peer workshop)
- **revised final portfolio:** due December 5 (for peer workshop)
- **final portfolio:** due December 7

Grading System:

Final portfolio consisting of critical introduction, revised “précis and response” papers, and final research paper:	80%
Participation:	20%

All assignments will be graded on a 100-point scale with grade ranges as follows:

+	100-98	+	89-88	+	79-78	+	69-68		
A	97-92	B	87-82	C	77-72	D	67-62	F	59-0
-	91-90	-	81-80	-	71-70	-	61-60		

Evaluation Criteria for Portfolio:

A (90-100): Each of the documents contained in the portfolio demonstrates perceptive and thoughtful responses to the assignments. They are well organized with excellent development of ideas, and they reflect the writer’s command of appropriate rhetorical strategies. The prose is vigorous and fresh, and the writer is clearly in control of the standard conventions of academic writing.

B (80-89): Each of the documents contained in the portfolio fulfills the assignment and shows evidence of clear thought and good planning. Each essay is well organized with good supporting details. The writing is fluent, and there are only minor errors in the mechanics that do not interfere with reading.

C (70-79): Each of the documents contained in the portfolio fulfills the assignment. The writing of each essay is adequately developed, clear, and coherent with relatively few errors in usage and mechanics, but the writer fails to demonstrate any particular strength which would distinguish above-average work.

D (60-69): Each of the documents contained in the portfolio fulfills its respective assignment but exhibits major problems in writing. Each essay may have difficulty with the presentation of ideas (e.g., lack of a clear thesis, weak organization, poor development of ideas, or inappropriate diction, poor spelling) or be marred by enough errors in the mechanics of writing to seriously distract the reader.

F (59 or below): Each of the documents contained in the portfolio is so poorly presented that it fails to fulfill the assignment. Each essay fails to present basic ideas, either because of poor organization and lack of clarity or because the writing reflects a lack of control over the basic conventions of standard academic usage.

0: Any one of the documents contained in the portfolio represents dishonest work by the student, principally the use of ideas or writing that are clearly not one's own work. Refer to the West Virginia University Undergraduate Catalog for the University policy on Academic Dishonesty.

Attendance Policy:

Because participation counts for 20% of your grade you have to show up and contribute. Also bear in mind that some days (e.g., workshop days) count more than other days since your classmates will depend on you more to help them fulfill their assignments. You can miss up to five non-workshop, non-assignment-due dates without penalty. Choose your five days judiciously. Subsequent absences will drop your participation grade one letter grade per day. **A failing grade for the course will be recorded for any student with ten or more absences.**

If you are more than five minutes late for class, you will be counted absent.

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is the (mis)representation of someone else's work as your own. It may be direct (e.g., not documenting a quoted source) or indirect (paraphrasing ideas, thoughts, etc. without due credit). In either case, neglecting to acknowledge sources for outside material is a serious offence and may result in failure for the assignment and possibly the course. Please see me if you are not sure about how to use or acknowledge certain materials.

Social Justice Statement:

West Virginia University is committed to social justice. I concur with that commitment and expect to maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. Our University does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veterans' status, religion, sexual orientation, color or national origin. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration.

If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Disability Services (293-6700).

Additional Resources:

The WVU Writing Center is committed to helping students become better writers. For more information about the Writing Center, including its hours, how to make appointments, and additional resources, visit their webpage at http://www.as.wvu.edu/english/writing_center/

The Downtown Library also hosts a term paper clinic throughout the semester. Scheduling details TBA.

Contact Information:

If you have questions about the course or concerns you would like to share privately with me, please contact me via email at Michael.Germana@mail.wvu.edu. **But please do not write to ask me for lecture notes or to request a summary of what you missed on any given day.** If you miss class and need class notes, ask one of your classmates.

You are also invited and encouraged—but not required—to follow me on Twitter at @michael_germana. If you already have a Twitter account but want to keep your personal account private, you can always create a second one solely for academic use. If you're new to the medium (like I am), don't hesitate to join if it enables you to participate more fully in the class dialogue. Once you've created your account, go to twitter.com/michael_germana and click the "Follow" button. Then send me a salutation tweet that includes the hashtag #ENGL347W in your message. This will enable you and your classmates to identify one another by searching for this hashtag and, if desired, follow one another—I leave this choice entirely up to you. **When we tweet about this course, we will use the hashtag #ENGL347W.**

Course Calendar:

August:

20 M Introduction/s

The Cultural Politics of Reconstruction and the Limits of Romanticism

22 W S. Weir Mitchell, "The Case of George Dedlow" *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1866, pp. 1-11
(Making of America-Cornell)

- 24 F Constance Fenimore Woolson, “Rodman the Keeper” (Nagel and Quirk pp. 47-71) (originally published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, March 1877, pp. 261-277, and therefore also available via Making of American-Cornell website)
- 27 M George Washington Cable, “The Story of Bras-Coupé” from *The Grandissimes* (ereserves)
- 29 W Mark Twain, “A True Story, Repeated Word for Word as I Heard It” *Atlantic Monthly*, November 1874, pp. 591-594 (Making of America-Cornell)
- 31 F Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Chapters I-XVIII

September:

- 3 M **Labor Day—class does not meet**
- 5 W **research methods overview—class meets in room 136 of the Downtown Library**
- 7 F Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Chapters XIX-XXXII
- 10 M Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Chapters XXXIII-Chapter the Last
- 12 W **précis and response one due**
Regionalism, Local Color, and the Shifting Shape of the American Cultural Landscape
- 14 F Bret Harte, “The Luck of Roaring Camp” (Nagel and Quirk pp. 8-17) + “Plain Language From Truthful James” *Overland Monthly*, September 1870, pp. 277-278 (Making of America-Michigan)
- 17 M Hamlin Garland, “Up the Coolly” from *Main-Travelled Roads* (ereserves)
- 19 W Zitkala-Sa, “Impressions of an Indian Childhood” + “The School Days of an Indian Girl” (Zitkala-Sa pp. 68-103)
- 21 F Zitkala-Sa, “The Soft-Hearted Sioux” + “The Trial Path” (Zitkala-Sa pp. 118-131)
- 24 M **précis and response two due**
Gender, Race, and Class in American Realism
- 26 W Henry James, “The Real Thing” (Nagel and Quirk 233-254)
- 28 F William Dean Howells, “Editha” (Nagel and Quirk 412-424)

October:

- 1 M Mary Wilkins Freeman, “The Revolt of ‘Mother’” (Nagel and Quirk 208-222) + Sui Sin Far, “Mrs. Spring Fragrance” (Nagel and Quirk 438-448)
- 3 W Charles Chesnutt, “The Sheriff’s Children” (Nagel and Quirk 170-185) + Kate Chopin, “Désirée’s Baby” (Nagel and Quirk 269-274)
- 5 F James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, Chapters 1-3
- 8 M James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, Chapters 4-11
- 10 W **précis and response three due**
Naturalism and its Contradictions
- 12 F Jack London, “To Build a Fire” (Nagel and Quirk 537-551)
- 15 M Stephen Crane, “The Open Boat” (Nagel and Quirk 466-487)
- 17 W Hamlin Garland, “Under the Lion’s Paw” (Nagel and Quirk 487-499)
- 19 F Theodore Dreiser, “Curious Shifts of the Poor” (Nagel and Quirk 499-508) + “The Second Choice” (Nagel and Quirk 551-568)
- 22 M Frank Norris, *McTeague*, Chapters 1-9
- 24 W Frank Norris, *McTeague*, Chapters 10-12
- 26 F Frank Norris, *McTeague*, Chapters 13-19
- 29 M Frank Norris, *McTeague*, Chapters 20-22
- 31 W **précis and response four due**

November:

- 2 F **student conferences—class does not meet**
- 5 M **student conferences—class does not meet**
- 7 W **student conferences—class does not meet**
- 9 F **research day—class meets in the Downtown Library**
- 12 M **final research paper introduction/thesis due—bring enough copies for the entire class, including your professor**
- 14 W **peer review of final research paper introductions/theses**
- 16 F **first draft of final research paper due—bring only one copy to turn in**
---Thanksgiving Recess---
- 26 M **student conferences—class does not meet**
- 28 W **student conferences—class does not meet**
- 30 F **student conferences—class does not meet**

December:

- 3 M **peer review of revised final research paper draft—bring one copy of revised essay**
- 5 W **peer review of revised final portfolio—bring one copy of each of the revised documents in your portfolio**
- 7 F **final portfolio (critical introduction + revised précis and response papers + completed final research essay) due + course evaluations**