SYLLABUS
ENGLISH 103A: AMERICAN LITERATURE, 1789-1900

April 2: Benjamin Franklin, Autobiography, Parts 1 & 2
April 7-9: Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass
April 14-16: Herman Melville, Benito Cereno
April 21: Douglass, “The Heroic Slave”*

Paper #1 due April 23

April 28-30: Mark Twain, Pudd’nhead Wilson

Mid-term exam May 5

May 7: Henry David Thoreau, “Resistance to Civil Government”*; James Madison, The Federalist no. 10*
May 12-14: Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Poet”*; Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass: “Song of Myself”; “The Sleepers,” 1; “Song for Occupations,” 1; “Song of The Answerer”
May 19-21: Emily Dickinson, poems & letters*
May 26-28: Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Blithedale Romance

Paper #2 due May 26

June 2-4: Henry James, “The Jolly Corner”*

Final Exam: Tuesday, June 9, 8-11am

Readings followed by an asterisk (*) will be in the course reader, available at the Alternative in I.V. The reader is required.

Requirements: two five-page papers (20% of grade each), a mid-term (20% of grade) and a final exam (30% of grade).

CLASS POLICIES

Section attendance is required. Students will be graded down 1/3 of a grade (e.g., from A to A-) for each unexcused absence. Students with more than five unexcused absences will automatically fail the course. Valid excuses include illness, injury (both with a doctor’s note or copy of a prescription), family emergency and university-related travel (with note from coach / supervisor). Excuses must be provided in a timely fashion.

Late papers will be graded down 1/3 of a grade per class meeting late. Extensions will be granted only if requested at least 24 hours prior to the class meeting at which the paper is due (except in the case of an injury). Valid excuses for an extension are illness, injury and personal or family emergency. Documentation is required at the time of the request. Computer and car problems are not valid excuses. Always back up your data.

Exams: Students will be asked to identify passages from the reading and terms introduced in lecture, and to comment on their significance as well as to write comparative essays on the reading.
TOPICS FOR PAPER #1
(5 pp. double-spaced; due April 23)

Write an essay on one of the following topics:

1. Douglass's *Narrative* offers us the testimony of two of his abolitionist supporters as well as that of Douglass himself. *Benito Cereno* offers another kind of testimony in Cereno’s deposition. Compare the use of supplementary testimony in the two works. How are they related to the main body of the text? Do they support its authority, undermine it, or both? Why does the subject of slavery give rise to these types of testimonial supplementation?

2. Both *Benito Cereno* and “The Heroic Slave” present slavery (and rebellion against it) from the perspective of white participant/observers. Yet here the formal similarities between the two narratives seem to end. Compare the authors’ use of perspective. What are the differences? How does each use his white participant/observer’s perspective to convey his own view of slavery? Why are two such different writers drawn to the same narrative device?

3. Benjamin Franklin and Frederick Douglass saw their life stories as more than mere personal narratives; each aspired to a representative role. How does each understand that role? How is it shaped by the circumstances in which they find themselves? How does it shape and constrain their literary self-presentation?

4. Compare Melville’s use of the theme of nature to Douglass’s in either the *Narrative* or “The Heroic Slave.” Why does nature play so important a role in narratives about slavery? Do the authors use this theme in different or similar ways? Why is the theme of nature so consistently linked with the representation of women and family in both authors?

5. You are Frederick Douglass. Write a review of *Benito Cereno* with an eye to its political significance. Compare Melville’s narrative methods to your own in “The Heroic Slave.” Are Melville’s methods suitable to abolitionism? How would you write the story of the *San Dominick*? Be sure to model your prose style on Douglass’s.

The following criteria are applied in the grading of papers:

**A** Ideas and/or interpretations are original and convincing; argument in well-organized and supported; writing is graceful, clear, concise and grammatical; there are no mechanical errors.

**B** Ideas and interpretations are convincing; argument is well-organized and supported; writing is clear, concise and grammatical; mechanical errors are minimal and insignificant.

**C** Ideas and interpretations do not consistently demonstrate mastery of the material; argument is either disorganized or lacking in textual evidence; writing is not consistently clear though largely grammatical; significant mechanical errors.

**D** Ideas and interpretations suggest fundamental problems understanding the material; argument is disorganized and poorly supported; writing is unclear and often ungrammatical; frequent mechanical errors.

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