

# The American Renaissance

## English 328/American Studies 362-03

Spring 2009  
Pardee 112  
TR 2:45-4:00pm  
1 Unit

Chris Phillips  
[phillipc@lafayette.edu](mailto:phillipc@lafayette.edu)  
330-5450  
Pardee 309  
Office Hours: W 9:30-10:30am,  
TR 11am-12pm & by appt.

The 1840s and the 1850s brought about drastic change in the United States: industrialization, immigration, expansion, and internationalization were just a few of the major phenomena that shaped the US in an age marked globally by revolution and reform movements. This course will explore the decades leading up to the Civil War by examining texts canonical and obscure, literary and political. Major themes will include the development of nationalism and Romanticism, the place of slavery in American life, the interplay between discourses that we now see as distinct (such as science and art), the impact of emerging technologies such as steam and photography on American culture, and the relationship between sound, image, performance, and print in an age strangely familiar to us—and just plain strange. While many of the texts this course will examine are identified as ‘literary,’ we will use interdisciplinary modes of analysis to find multiple uses for those texts, as well as to ask the question of what constitutes the literary. And at the heart of the course is the question: just what *is* the American Renaissance?

### TEXTS

Nina Baym, et al, eds., *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Vol. B, 7th ed. (Norton)  
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Evangeline and Selected Tales and Poems* (Signet)  
David J. Reynolds, *Waking Giant: America in the Age of Jackson* (Harper)  
Jeffrey H. Richards, ed., *Early American Drama* (Penguin)  
Shirley Samuels, ed., *Wadsworth Themes in American Literature: Visions of War* (Wadsworth)  
Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself* [1855 edition] (Dover)  
Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg* (Simon & Schuster)

Shorter texts will also be provided on Moodle as needed.

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, all participants should:

1. Demonstrate facility in incorporating literary and other kinds of evidence into written and oral scholarly arguments;
2. Enhance their skills in the close reading of literate and visual texts;
3. Develop an understanding of and appreciation for various interdependent histories that inform our study of the antebellum period in United States history; and
4. Improve their skills in research and crafting academic essays in literary and American studies.

## ASSIGNMENTS

### Journal Issue Analysis (20% of final grade)

As we will see in this course, much of the development of American literature as a form and a commodity arose not from books but from periodical publication. This assignment is designed to take you into the very pages of those periodicals and give you a taste of the reading experience for the first audiences of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and "Civil Disobedience." Using the library's holdings in antebellum periodicals, select one issue of a journal from years covered in this course (c. 1840-1860); read through the table of contents and at least five or six of what you find are some of the most interesting items in the issue. Write a 4-5pp. double-spaced essay in which you give an analysis of the pieces you read within the context of the issue, as well as the larger conversation of the journal (check editorial statements for help with this) and the conversations we track in this course. After we visit Special Collections, you will present your initial research in an annotated bibliography, including a 1-par. memo describing what you see are the larger conversations occurring between the articles you've chosen. The bibliography/memo is due **Friday, February 13**, and is worth one letter grade of the assignment's total. Be sure to cite using MLA format; essays are due at 5pm on **Friday, February 27**.

### Journal & Literary Analysis (25% of final grade)

Building on your work on the essay described above, in lieu of a midterm you will write a second essay analyzing one primary text from our class reading in the context of the journal issue you chose. While accounting for changes over time is important (if you're analyzing, say, an 1858 journal issue and an 1840 literary text), the point of this essay is to focus on doing two things: 1) write an interpretation of a text through literary close reading; 2) frame your interpretation in a larger context of issues, questions, concerns, and power dynamics that would have impacted the writing and/or reading of that text during its own era. Outside research is allowed, but not required; be sure to cite in MLA format. 5-6pp. essays are due at 5pm on **Friday, March 13**.

### Art Analysis (20% of final grade)

Choose one piece of art (painting, sculpture, decorative, etc.) from our REQUIRED field trip to New York and write an analysis of the piece in light of one of the following: 1) themes and issues from our class discussions; 2) biographical or historical research of that piece's context; or 3) the interpretive frame in which you found that piece (e.g., where was it placed? What was placed near it? How can you put those things in dialogue, or perhaps how are you meant to do so?). The point of this assignment is for you to practice interpreting an a visual within a larger conversation of its material, textual, and/or intellectual history. An initial ~1p. close reading of the image is due by 5pm on **Wednesday, April 8**. Essays are to be 3-4pp. double-spaced (plus image, b&w or color), and due at 5pm on **Friday, April 17**.

### American Renaissance Redux Essay (25% of final grade)

We will spend this semester studying a period known as the American Renaissance, but along the way we will see many different sides to this period, and a number of potential ways to understand and organize it. In lieu of a final exam, you will write a 7-8pp. essay in which you propose a new name for the period, explaining why you think the name is appropriate and providing close readings of 2-3 texts (literary, visual, etc.) that show why your new name fits the period. You are to have a brief meeting with me to discuss your plans for the assignment, and the essay is due by 5pm on **Wednesday, May 13**.

### Class Participation (10% of final grade)

Mandatory. This course is work-intensive, hands-on, and fast-paced. Each member of the class (myself included) is expected to be in class on time and prepared to share in the class activities. Missing more than one class will affect your grade in the course, as will frequent tardiness. Your timely completion of assignments and activities will help ensure that our class stays on pace and productive.

### **Format:**

All writing assignments (except for in-class writing) should include your name, the date, the course title, and (if applicable) your paper title at the top of the first page—I prefer this to separate title pages. All assignments are to be double-spaced, with a 12-pt. Times font and 1” margins. Electronic submissions are to be in Word (.doc) or Rich Text (.rtf) format.

### **Submission guidelines:**

All final drafts are due in .doc format (old MS Word) on Moodle by 5pm on the appropriate date. Be sure to cite quotations or ideas that you get from others—failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, which is a very serious breach of academic ethics. For the college’s policy on academic honesty, please see <http://www.lafayette.edu/academics/honesty.pdf>.

## SCHEDULE

### Week 1

Lydia Huntley Sigourney, selections in *Norton*  
William Cullen Bryant, selections in *Norton*  
David S. Reynolds, 236-275 in *Waking Giant*

### Week 2

Edgar Allan Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher," "Ulalume"  
Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Ambitious Guest"\*  
Henry David Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government"  
David S. Reynolds, 102-113 in *Waking Giant*  
**Visit to Special Collections on Thursday**

### Week 3

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," "Self-Reliance," "The Poet," "The Snow-Storm," "Brahma," "Concord Hymn"\*  
David S. Reynolds, 123-174 in *Waking Giant*  
Garry Wills, Chapter 2 in *Lincoln at Gettysburg*  
**Initial Journal Report due Friday**

### Week 4

Henry David Thoreau, from *Walden*  
David S. Reynolds, 200-235 in *Waking Giant*

### Week 5

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?"  
David S. Reynolds, 174-200 in *Waking Giant*  
**Journal Analysis due Friday**

### Week 6

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Evangeline* (in Longfellow)  
**NO CLASS THURSDAY**

### Week 7

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*  
**Journal/Literature Analysis due Friday**

### Week 8—SPRING BREAK

**NO CLASS**

### Week 9

Anna Cora Mowatt, "Fashion" (in Richards)  
Fanny Fern, selections in *Norton Anthology*  
David S. Reynolds, 275-307 in *Waking Giant*

Week 10

Herman Melville, "Bartleby," "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids"

Rebecca Harding Davis, "Life in the Iron Mills"

David S. Reynolds, 365-384 in *Waking Giant*

**Field trip to New York City Saturday, April 4—REQUIRED**

Week 11

George Aiken, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (in Richards)

Harriet Beecher Stowe, selections from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

George Fitzhugh, from *Cannibals All!*\*

Week 12

Herman Melville, "Benito Cereno"

Mariano Vallejo, from *Recuerdos históricos y personales*\*

**Art Analysis due Friday**

Week 13

Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself" (1855 version; see Whitman), selections in *Norton*

Week 14

*Visions of War* (ed. Samuels)

Garry Wills, Chapters 1, 4, & 5 in *Lincoln*

Abraham Lincoln, selections in *Norton*

Week 15

TBA

**Wednesday, May 13: American Renaissance Redux Essay due**

N.B.— Readings followed by \* are available on Moodle. This schedule is subject to change based on the exigencies of the course. Email notice will be given when possible, and changes will be reflected on Moodle.