

En 236 Syllabus---Spring 2011  
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Off. Hr: Tu & Thurs: 3:30-4:30  
Friday: 10:30-11:30 (& by appointment)  
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En 236--THE IDEA OF THE WEST IN THE AMERICAN IMAGINATION: MYTH AND  
REALITY IN FICTION AND FILM

TEXTS: Tom Lyon--*The Literary West (LW)*; Mark Twain--*Huck Finn*; Faulkner---*The Unvanquished*;  
James Welch--*Winter in the Blood*; Marilynne Robinson---*Housekeeping*. There will be a number of  
handouts in this course (please keep them together in a notebook) and a number of items on reserve (in  
Arnold Bernhard Library).

**PROCEDURES:** Lectures, oral presentations, and class discussion. Oral presentations, two  
papers, mid-term, journal, and final exam. Papers must state a thesis and support it through  
extensive reference to the texts. Secondary sources may be used (quote and document  
them, of course; see me, if you have any questions about this), but should not be  
emphasized. **The papers should be the result of your own examination and synthesis. I'm  
not concerned with how well you can glean critical commentary and reiterate it; I am  
concerned with your own analysis and interpretation (not opinion).** The journals **should not  
be notes on your reading, but rather your impressions of scenes, characters, incidents, ideas,  
and your awareness of recurrent themes, symbols, and writing techniques---elaborating more  
on the questions raised in class and brainstorming for ideas for papers.**

Final grades will be based on the following (approximate):

Oral presentations & class participation----	10 %
1st paper	15 %
Mid-Term	15 %
2nd paper	20 %
Journal	20 %
Final exam	20 %

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**—by the end of the semester, students will have demonstrated the  
**ability to:**

1. read, analyze, and discuss literary works that define and dramatize various aspects of  
the American experience with particular emphasis on those selections that focus on the westward  
movement;
2. understand the impact of the frontier and the west on the development of American  
character and describe the influence of freedom and the "wide-open spaces," including the  
concepts of innocence and experience, on human consciousness;
3. explore myth and reality in the American experience and critically examine the nature  
of mythmaking as it developed in literature from the Puritan period, emphasizing the latter part  
of the 19th century to the present, including Native American literature;
4. make plausible interpretations and articulate informed opinions as a result of their  
analyses of topics related to the issues raised in the first three of these objectives;

5. develop in students the skills of reading, writing, and critical thinking.

**Integrity and Academic Honesty Policy:**

“Integrity is a crucial part of the academic experience. I expect you to be honest with me in all conversations and discussions and to treat fellow students and me with respect. You must observe the University Academic Integrity Policy as found in the Quinnipiac University Student Handbook. You must always do your own work, and you may never plagiarize or cheat on tests or papers. Follow the guidelines attached to this syllabus and any others handed out during the semester. Furthermore, all work you turn in must be completed by you for this specific class. Failure to follow this policy could lead to an “F” in the course, suspension, and even expulsion from the University. By taking the course and by attending Quinnipiac University you agree to these conditions. Please see me at any time with questions.”

**ATTENDANCE—MANDATORY. Absence will result in a lower grade or forced withdrawal. One final note: Faulkner, Welch, and Robinson are difficult! You have to spend time with them, linger over certain passages, reread a lot. If you’re not able or willing to do this, En 236 is not for you. In addition, you will be expected to speak in every class; failure to make a response or to volunteer a comment will result in a 0 for class participation for that day---think of it as a daily quiz. Again, these authors are difficult, but the rewards of analyzing their texts, placing yourself in the situations they create, climbing inside their characters’ heads are mighty and unforgettable.**

**SCHEDULE--All items listed after a date are due on that date and films must be seen prior to the class in which they will be discussed.**

**1st Week--1/25 & 27:** Introduction and overview of course. Early versions of America and the West. Read and discuss Wm. Bradford's "The Mayflower Compact" (1620) in connection with the Puritan Covenant Theology; also John Conron's "Cultivation of the Promised Land;" Crèvecoeur's "What is an American?" from *Letters from an American Farmer* (1781); the West of the captivity narratives; Indians as Devils. Rowlandson’s “Narrative of Captivity” (1682)---all handouts.

**2nd Week--2/1:** Selections from “Lewis and Clark” (*LW*, p. 46)--  
Sarah Winnemucca (p. 65)—

2/3: Discuss handouts from Cooper's *The Prairie* (1827; time period—1805) and *The Deerslayer* (1842; time period--1740-45). Natty Bumppo as rugged individualist and mythic hero--  
Begin--*Huck Finn* (1884).

**3rd Wk--2/8:** *Huck Finn*; oral presentations: Huck-- Tom--  
Grangerfords/Sheppardsons-- Jim--  
Duke and King— river values/land values--  
Boggs/Sherburn--- essay by Leo Marx--

2/10: *Huck Finn*; finish oral presentations

**4th Wk–2/15:** Begin Jack Schaefer's novel *Shane* (1949). Discuss chapter 1 (*LW*, 177-83) + last chapter (handout)--- Also, the Homestead Act-- and the history of homesteaders/ranchers in Jackson Hole, Wy--- Discuss George Stevens's *Shane* (1953). **NB—the film must be seen before class.**  
Shane--- Joe-- Marion--- Riker---  
Homesteaders--- Wilson--- Images/symbols---

**2/17:** Finish discussion of film emphasizing the mythic and symbolic dimensions of the characters, especially Shane.

**5th Wk–2/22:** **Begin Faulkner; see video before class--*Land Into Legend* (# 882)---on reserve at the main desk of the library.** Revenge, Retribution, and the theme of Initiation and Growth to Maturity. Distribute Handouts. Begin *The Unvanquished* (1936), "Ambuscade"--

2/24: **Thesis statement and points of support for 1st paper due—take an aspect of the western myth that we've covered in the readings and analyze it in one of the selections. NB: follow the model of Alberti's paragraph on "Painting".**  
Continue *The Unvanquished*--"Retreat,"--- "Raid"---

**6th Wk–3/1: Journals due (1<sup>st</sup> half).** "Riposte in Tertio"--- "Vendee"---

3/3: **1st paper due.** "Skirmish at Sartoris"--- "An Odor of Verbena."

**7th Wk–3/8:** Finish Faulkner. **Return 1st papers---to be corrected and returned to me by 3/22.**

3/10: **FIRST TEST ---All material thus far, including texts, films, and handouts.**

3/13—3/20---QU SPRING BREAK

**8th Wk–3/22:** Return 1<sup>st</sup> papers to me and then review Mid-Term Tests. Begin discussing the influence of Realism and Naturalism in literature. Stephen Crane, "The Blue Hotel" (Google)--- "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky"(Google)---

3/24: Jack London--"All Gold Canyon" (*LW*, 93)-- Begin "The West of the Pioneer and Homesteader;" "Intro to Part VI," including selections from Stewart's *Letters from a Woman Homesteader* and Willa Cather's *My Antonia*, (*LW*, p.123)---

**9th Wk. Tu. 3/29: See the film *Heartland* (1979) before class.** Discuss: Mrs. Stewart--- Mr. Stewart--- homesteading--- Symbols/images---

Thur 3/31: Closing of the West: Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893)(Handout)--- "The Ways West"  
(Handout)-- Begin James Welch---*Winter in the Blood* (1974), 1<sup>st</sup> chap.

**10th Wk. Tu 4/5 & Thurs. 4/7:** Narrator (1<sup>st</sup> half)-- (2<sup>nd</sup> half)--  
Airplane man--- Wife- Teresa---  
Lame Bull---- Grandmother -- Yellow Calf--

**11th Wk. Tu 4/12:** Begin Women in the New West: M. Robinson's---*Housekeeping* (1980).  
Grandfather (Edmond)--- Sylvia-- Helen (mother) and sister---  
Sylvie--- Lucille--- Ruth---  
Townpeople--- Landsc & Envir--- Images and symbols--

Thur 4/14: **See film *Housekeeping* (1987) before class.** Discuss both film and book.

**12th Wk. Tu 4/19:** Begin Sam Shepard's "True West" (1980) (*LW*, 248). Writer (Austin)---  
Desert Rat (Lee) --- Agent (Saul)--- Mom---

Thurs 4/21-- Finish "True West". **T. S. and pts. of support for 2nd paper due---Take one of the established myths of the 19th century and show how a modern (20<sup>th</sup> century) writer/filmmaker undermines or demythologizes it.**

**13th Wk. Tu 4/26:** Native American writers and native traditions.---N. Scott Momaday --  
"Introduction" (*LW*, 208), Luther Standing Bear--"Nature" (*LW*, 145)---  
and Leslie Silko--"The Man to Send Rain Clouds" (Handout)---

Thur 4/28: **See Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992) before class.** Discuss film.  
Wm. Munny--- Schofield Kid--- Ned---  
Role of women--- Sheriff Daggett--- English Bob---  
Beauchamp (dime novelist)--- my essay---  
**Final paper due—no later than Friday Noon.**

**14<sup>th</sup> Wk. Tu 5/3:** Begin literature as a reflection of environmental concerns. E. Abbey--"The  
Great American Desert" (*LW*, 226)--- C. Bowden--"Afterword"  
(*LW*, 350)---

Thurs 5/5: Rick Bass--"Days of Heaven" (*LW*, 384)---  
Larry McMurtry's "How the West Was Won or Lost" (on Reserve)---  
**Journals Due (2<sup>nd</sup> half)---no later than noon on Friday.**

**FINAL EXAM--All material of semester: texts, films, handouts, reserve items.  
CHEERS & BLESSINGS!**

**Dates by which the films have to be seen:**

*Shane*—2/15

*Faulkner*---2/22

*Heartland*---3/29

*Housekeeping*---4/14

*Unforgiven*---4/28



