

The University of Texas at El Paso

Department of English

American Non-Fiction and Poetry to 1900: Literatures of Exploration, Captivity, Encounter
English 4316 (CRN: 26969)
[T/R 1:30 -2:50 p.m., via Zoom](#)

Spring 2021

[Office Hrs: Mon/Wed., 2:00-3:00 p.m., via Zoom; and otherwise via appointment](#)

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This course thematizes early American literatures of exploration, captivity, and encounter vis-à-vis two major recent critical trends that have remapped the topographies of Americanist scholarship. On one hand, we will investigate what is often referred to as “spatial turn” in Americanist historiography—a broad critical orientation that encompasses transnational, transatlantic, hemispheric, and regionalist approaches to critical studies that aspires to supplant, or at least to modify, the traditional nation-state model of cultural studies that is foundational to the field. On the other, we will explore the critical tools of performance studies—particularly as refracted through studies of indigenous cultural practices and embodied discourse—and apply the methods and perspectives of each to a wide range of fascinating texts and performance modes that document Euro-American encounter with Native America and with the North American wilderness. In this particular survey of American non-fiction and poetry, our goal will be to uncover and follow the discursive traffic between literature, bodies, economies, scenarios of performance, and modes of representation that contribute to the evolving storylines of early America. Other topics include: marvelous honeybees and un-killable grizzly bears; cannibalism, plagues, monsters, and invisible bullets; Welsh Indians (and other racial fantasies); romantic dreams and doomed undertakings; sign language, embodied oratory, and Native resistance; love and loss; conquest and rebellion; massacres, starvation, suicide, and the importance of pretending to know what you’re doing.

Course Format:

This is a fully-online course that combines synchronous course sessions on Zoom (on Tuesdays and Thursdays during scheduled sessions) with a weekly online writing and discussion component conducted on an asynchronous basis. For those of you new to online coursework, have no fear. As you will see from our Schedule of Readings below, each week is organized by date in the manner of a conventional in-person literature course, with a set of readings designated for Tuesday, and another designated for Thursday. We will meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays via Zoom, at the Meeting Place linked at the top of the page. Each week, an alternating group of students will also take the lead in an online Discussion Forum by offering up some short reflections on that week’s reading assignment. So our primary coursework will take place in two separate venues, but they will intersect in meaningful ways on an ongoing basis. In addition to these components, there will be two scheduled exams (a midterm and a final, both administered via Blackboard), and a mid-semester and final research paper (also submitted via Blackboard).

Required Texts:

Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, *The Narrative of Cabeza de Vaca*, Ed. Rolena Adorno and Patrick Charles Pautz (U of Nebraska Press) ISBN: 9780803264168
 Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, Ed. Vincent Carretta (Penguin Classics) ISBN: 0142437166

Black Hawk, *Life of Black Hawk, or Mâ-ka-tai-me-she-kià-kiàk* (Penguin Classics) ISBN: 9780143105398

Thomas Harriot, *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (Dover) ISBN: 9780486210926

Sayre, Gordon, Ed. *American Captivity Narratives*. Boston: Bedford-Riverside, 2000. ISBN: 0395980739

Susan Shelby Magoffin, *Down the Santa Fe Trail and into Mexico*, Ed. Stella M. Drumm (U of Nebraska P) ISBN: 0803281161

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Ed. Jean Fagin Yellin (Harvard-Belknap) ISBN: 0674002717

Schedule of Readings (to be completed by corresponding date). Items marked “(B)” will be placed, in .pdf format, on the course Blackboard site for you to download and/or print:

Lsn.	Date	Assignment
1	Jan. 19	Histories, Archives, and Performance Introductions. Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, “Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West” / The Couple in the Cage: A Guatinatei Odyssey (Fusco and Paula Heredia)
2	Jan. 21	Bodies, Texts, and Archives of “the Contact Zone” Walt Whitman, from <i>Democratic Vistas</i> (B); Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone” (B); Diana Taylor, “Acts of Transfer” (B)
3a	Jan. 26	Columbus for “Future Designers, Comprehenders” Christopher Columbus, from the <i>Diario</i> (B); Letter to Luis de Santangel/Gabriel Sánchez (B); Walt Whitman, “Prayer of Columbus” (B)
4a	Jan. 28	Castaways, Conversion, and Hospitality Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, <i>La Relación</i> (1-95)
5b	Feb. 2	Cabeza de Vaca, cont’d (95-176)
6b	Feb. 4	Exploration and Capitalism Thomas Harriot, <i>A Briefe and True Report of the New Lands Found in Virginia</i> (Introduction; 1-33)
7a	Feb. 9	Invisible Bullets and Miraculous Plagues Harriot, cont’d (34-end)
8a	Feb. 11	Criminals, Renegades, and Saviors Harriot, cont’d; Garcilaso de La Vega (the Inca), from <i>La Florida</i> (in Sayre, 59-82)
9b	Feb. 16	American Epic: Constructing the Conquest of New Mexico From Gaspar Perez de Villagrà, from <i>The History of New Mexico</i> (through Canto XV) (B)
10b	Feb. 18	Oñate’s Legacies Villagrà, cont’d. (Canto XV-end); John Sherrill Houser, “The Equestrian”

11a	Feb. 23	The Prototypical Captivity Narrative Mary Rowlandson, <i>The Sovereignty and Goodness of God</i> (in Sayre, ed., 127-52)
12a	Feb. 25	Rowlandson, cont'd (152-76)
13b	Mar. 2	Captivity, Testimony, Enslavement Olaudah Equiano, <i>The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself</i> (1-61)
14b	Mar. 4	Equiano, cont'd (62-145)
15a	Mar. 9	Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa? Equiano, cont'd. (146-236)
16	Mar. 11	MIDTERM
	Mar. 15-19	SPRING BREAK
17b	Mar. 23	Captivity, Masculinity, and the Revolutionary Impulse James Smith, <i>An Account of the Remarkable Occurrences in the Life and Travels of Col. James Smith</i> (1799) (in Sayre, 258-295)
18b	Mar. 25	Smith, cont'd (Sayre, 296-346); scene from <i>The Patriot</i> (Dir. Roland Emmerich)
19a	Mar. 30	Nationalist Explorations <i>The Journals of Lewis and Clark</i> (selections) (B)
20a	Apr. 1	<i>The Journals of Lewis and Clark</i> , cont'd; letters from Jefferson, et. al., on the occasion of the death of Meriwether Lewis (B)
21b	Apr. 6	Black Hawk's War and Captive Authorship Black Hawk, <i>Life of Black Hawk, or Mâ-ka-tai-me-she-kià-kiàk</i> (1833) (Introduction-49)
22b	Apr. 8	Native Sovereignty and Political Dissidence <i>Life of Black Hawk</i> (49-end)
23a	Apr. 13	Indigenous Graveyards and the Plight of Romantic Feeling William Cullen Bryant, "Thanatopsis" (B); William Cullen Bryant, "The Prairie" (B); Lydia Maria Child, from "Letters from New York" (Letter XXXVI) (B)
24a	Apr. 15	Gender, Trade on the Santa Fe Trail, and the U.S./Mexico War Susan Shelby Magoffin, <i>Down the Santa Fe Trail and into Mexico</i> (1-69 [through "Friday morning 31 st of July"])
25b	Apr. 20	Magoffin, cont'd (70-126)
26b	Apr. 22	Magoffin, cont'd (70-126)

27a Apr. 27 **Slavery, Sentiment, and the Loophole of Captivity**
Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) (1-68)

Online Paper Workshopping – Meet in Zoom Class Session

28a Apr. 29 Jacobs, cont'd (76-142)

29b May 4 Jacobs cont'd (143-203)

Online Paper Workshopping – Meet in Zoom Class Session

30b May 6 Last Day of Class: Re-Dialing the Compass

May 11 Final Paper Due on Blackboard, 11:59 p.m.

A Final Exam will be administered on a date and time to be announced by the University

Course Requirements:

Reading of required texts. The reading load for this course is substantial; it is therefore important that you stay current in your work. Additionally, many of these texts can be quite challenging to read; to really understand them, you will need to read them more than once. As Thoreau said, reading “in a high sense” is “not that which lulls us as a luxury and suffers the nobler faculties to sleep the while, but what we have to stand on tiptoe to read and devote our most alert and wakeful hours to” (*Walden*, “Reading”). Let us be readers on Thoreau’s model. Practically speaking, this means re-reading, underlining, making marginal notes, writing provocative questions and observations to bring with you to class, and actively connecting ideas and techniques between the texts we read.

Attendance and Participation (10%): Although I will lecture frequently—usually for some introductory portion of our Zoom session—your ongoing participation is vital to your learning and to the success of the course for all. Come to our sessions prepared to share your questions and observations, with your readings completed, open, and ready to consult. The more involved you are on a weekly basis—in online reading journal responses, in full group discussion, and in breakout sessions—the more you will learn and enjoy. Faithful attendance is an important component of this, and is expected. Please be advised that, upon your sixth unexcused absence from our Zoom sessions, you will either be dropped from the course (i.e., prior to the University drop deadline of April 1st), or will fail the course (after April 1st). In keeping with standard departmental policy, absences are only excusable in cases of documented family or medical emergency.

Weekly Critical Reflections and Responses (25%, graded cumulatively): During the first week of the semester, the class will be divided into two groups: Critical Reflection Group “A” and Critical Reflection Group “B.” By noon Friday on alternating weeks, it will be the job of the individuals in each group to post a short, one-page critical reflection (roughly 250-300 words) on ONE of the readings we have completed and discussed in that week’s class sessions. You can do this either *before* we discuss that reading in class (this is a great way to prep for class), or *after* (this works great to ponder further on something that’s been discussed that week, or to bring up something from the readings that didn’t make it into our class discussion). Before or after, it’s up to you—just make sure you have your reflection by noon Friday of that week at the latest. It will then be the job of individuals in the alternating group to read these critical reflections and post a thoughtful reply to one of them by 11:59 p.m. on the Monday of the week following. This will begin in the second week of the course. So, for example, if you are in Critical Reflection Group “A,” you will write your first one-page critical reflection on one of the readings

from January 26th or 28th, and post your entry by noon on Friday, January 29th. If you are in Critical Reflection Group “B,” your job will be to read through these entries sometime over the course of the next three days, and post a thoughtful response to at least one of them by Monday, February 1st, at 11:59 p.m. For the week of Feb 2-4, the roles will be reversed, and so on.

In your **Critical Reflections**, you needn’t discuss every text assigned (some days have several), nor do you need to discuss your chosen text comprehensively. Instead, your job is to find some aspect of a text you find interesting and important, show us why you find it to be so, and offer it up for discussion, interpretation, and analysis. Use the Critical Reflections to articulate the questions and ideas you develop in the course of your reading, and to reflect on the developing themes of the class—always taking care to respond specifically to relevant passages from the text. Although somewhat informal, these entries are expected to consist of deliberative, thoughtful paragraphs that are free of grammatical error. In these reading journal entries, you must:

- **Introduce** and **contextualize** the topic under review, briefly. A sentence or two is fine. What have you observed that begs closer scrutiny? How might exploring it promise to open up a deeper understanding of the text in question?
- **Incorporate** a minimum of one quotation in your discussion. Quoted passages are the centerpieces of academic argument, the evidence we use to develop our interpretations and analysis. If you find it helpful to do so by way of comparison, you are welcome to include quotations from, or references to, other texts from the syllabus we’ve explored already. But these should be offered in the service of your interpretation of the principal text under review.
- **Offer some provisional reflections** about the meaning and significance of the particular passages you’ve chosen to discuss. How, and why, is the passage (or passages) you’ve chosen important? What can a reader gain by seeing the text as you see it?

In turn, good **Responses** will strive to add further insight and elaboration to the original points made; one should not seek out arguments to rebut, but rather claims to develop, amplify, and extend. Granted, some differences of opinion are inevitable—but responders should always maintain a tone of civility and respect for the writers and opinions to whom and to which they are responding. Try to respond to someone different each week if you can.

Midterm Essay & Final Essay (15%; 20%): A medium-length critical essay (4-6 pages) will be due on March 23rd, and a longer Term Paper (7-10 pages) will be due on Monday, May 11th. I will provide more information on this as the class unfolds, but you may write on any topic that bears relevantly on our work in the course. I will also have suggestions for you, depending on your interests. Please feel free to talk to me during my office hours to help develop ideas. MLA bibliographical guidelines are to be followed.

Midterm Examination & Final Examinations (15%; 15%): Details to follow.

A Note on Online Etiquette and Decorum: Let us try to offer respect and good cheer to one another, in all of our online exchanges—both in our written exchanges on Blackboard, and in our real-time interactions via Zoom. Discussing things online can sometimes feel distant and alienating, but we can do much to overcome that simply by observing the same small customs of public etiquette and civility we employ in the classroom under normal circumstances. So, for example, when you are in a breakout session with your peers, be sure to introduce yourself and refer to other folks by name. Follow up on other people’s comments and questions in large-group discussion, just as you would in a regular face-to-faceclass, and give credit when you hear something smart. These things may seem small, but they make a big difference. In addition, in our Zoom sessions be sure to have your camera turned on for the duration of our class sessions. It’s ok if you want to employ a virtual background, but it’s important that we all see

one another and know that we're all on the same page, working towards a common goal. Many thanks in advance.