

English 354: The Rise and Fall of American Empire

The past hundred years have been called “the American Century” because the United States has evolved from a provincial, isolationist nation into a global superpower. This course will use literature to discuss America’s rise and potential decline as a hegemon and major social upheavals that have changed life in America.

Professor

David A. Davis
Office: 118 Groover
Office Hours: MF 10-11 & 2-3 and
by appointment
Email: davis_da@mercer.edu
Phone: (478) 538-6471



The Great White Fleet, an emblem of America’s global military might, 1907

Course Objectives

- To read and discuss novels by American writers.
- To explore the relationship between literary works and their historical and social context by focusing on the issues of imperialism, global conflict, civil rights, gender equality, economic expansion, and globalization.
- To learn fundamental techniques for literary research and criticism.
- To cultivate essential skills in reading comprehension, analysis, and critical thinking.
- To practice oral and written communication.

Course Requirements & Grading Policies

English 354 is a discussion-based course that uses a modified seminar format. Your success in this course depends upon attending every session prepared to contribute to our mutual understanding of the text. Attendance constitutes 19% of your course grade. Attendance grades are computed according to the following scale:

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|-----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|---------|
| Absence | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| Grade | 100 | 97 | 93 | 85 | 75 | 60 | 40 | 20 | 0 | failure |

Entering class after attendance has been taken will count as a tardy, and three tardies will count as an absence. Missing class for a verifiable family emergency, participation in a university-sanctioned athletic event, or religious holidays will not result in a deduction from your final grade, but it is your responsibility to inform me of your absence.

During the semester I will administer seven unannounced quizzes that will cover the reading assigned up to the day of the quiz. Quizzes constitute 21% of your course grade. You may replace up to two quizzes by writing replacement assignments. The replacement assignment requires that you write a seven hundred word synopsis of the reading assignment due the day of the missed quiz. Replacement assignments should be submitted on the day of the second class meeting after the missed quiz. Any missed quizzes beyond the two replacement assignments will factor into your quiz grade as a zero.

Your other assignments will allow you to practice your interpretive skills and to develop a significant level of expertise on the literature. You will deliver an eight-minute presentation on a book related to the day's reading assignment. The presentation will constitute 10% of your course grade. One week after your presentation, you will submit an eight-hundred word review of the book you presented. The review will constitute 10% of your course grade. You will contribute to a group product that explores the connection between literature and social events that will constitute 15% of your grade. Your most significant assignment will be a research-based interpretive assignment, which will constitute the remaining 25%.

Papers will be submitted to my email, davis_da@mercer.edu, by 6:00 pm on the due date. I will grade the paper electronically in Microsoft Word and return it with embedded comments. Papers will be returned to the initiating address, so be sure to send the paper from your own email account.

You may rewrite and resubmit a written assignment after it has been graded. Revised papers should be submitted at the beginning of the class meeting immediately after original papers have been returned. Revised papers should be accompanied by a self-critical analysis that explains how the paper has been improved. In cases of revision, the revised grade will be added to the original grade and averaged into the overall paper grade. Keep in mind that revising means more than correcting minor errors. In fact, a cursory revision could result in a lower grade. Papers submitted after the due date will automatically receive an F, but they may be revised to improve the final grade.

The students of Mercer University have a long tradition of honorable conduct, and I expect all students in this class to continue that tradition. Cheating, plagiarism, or other acts of academic misconduct will result in prosecution from the honor court, who may censure, suspend, or expel a guilty student. If you ever have any concerns about plagiarism, please consult me, and I will be happy to discuss your situation confidentially.

Students with a documented disability should inform the instructor at the close of the first class meeting or as soon as possible. If you are not registered with Disability Services, the instructor

will refer you to the Student Support Services office for consultation regarding documentation of your disability and eligibility for accommodations under the ADA/504. In order to receive accommodations, eligible students must provide each instructor with a Faculty Accommodation Form from Disability Services. Students must return the completed and signed form to the Disability Services office on the 3rd floor of the Connell Student Center. Students with a documented disability who do not wish to use accommodations are strongly encouraged to register with Disability Services and complete a Faculty Accommodation Form each semester. For further information please contact Disability Services at 301-2778 or visit the website at http://www.mercer.edu/stu_support/swd.htm.

In an ongoing effort to improve the quality of instruction, each student enrolled in this course is required to complete an end-of-semester course evaluation, to be administered on blackboard during the last week of class. Students failing to submit the evaluation by December 11 will be assigned the grade of "Incomplete," which will automatically turn into an "F" if the evaluation is not submitted by the midterm of the very next semester.

As a final note, I realize that you are busy and that unexpected crises sometimes arise, but as a general rule I do not give extensions on any assignments. I also do not excuse absences. If you have a major emergency or extended illness, you should contact Associate Dean Ed Weintraut to intervene on your behalf. I do not ever give extra credit assignments.

Course Schedule

| | |
|-------------|--|
| January 11 | Introduction |
| January 13 | John Dos Passos, <i>1919</i> , 1-54 |
| January 16 | King Holiday |
| January 18 | Dos Passos, 55-116 |
| January 20 | Dos Passos, 117-181 |
| January 23 | Dos Passos, 182-232 |
| January 25 | Dos Passos, 233-275 |
| January 27 | Lamar lecture |
| January 30 | Dos Passos, 276-375 |
| February 1 | Ralph Ellison, <i>Invisible Man</i> , 1-70 |
| February 3 | Ellison, 71-150 |
| February 6 | Ellison, 151-230 |
| February 8 | Ellison, 231-317 |
| February 10 | Ellison, 318-408 |
| February 13 | Ellison, 409-478 |
| February 15 | Ellison, 479-581 |

| | | |
|-------------|--|--------------------------|
| February 17 | William Styron, <i>Sophie's Choice</i> , 1-88 | |
| February 20 | Styron, 89-177 | |
| February 22 | Styron, 178-245 | |
| February 24 | Styron, 246-330 | |
| February 27 | Styron, 331-399 | |
| February 29 | Styron, 400-517 | |
| March 2 | Styron, 518-599 | |
| March 5 | Spring Break | |
| March 7 | Spring Break | |
| March 9 | Spring Break | |
| March 12 | Alix Kates Shulman, <i>Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen</i> , 1-78 | |
| March 14 | Shulman, 79-129 | |
| March 16 | Shulman, 130-199 | |
| March 19 | Shulman, 200-274 | |
| March 21 | John Updike, <i>Rabbit Redux</i> , 1-86 | |
| March 23 | Updike, 87-140 | |
| March 26 | Updike, 140-194 | |
| March 28 | Updike, 195-248 | |
| March 30 | No class | |
| April 2 | Updike, 248-294 | |
| April 4 | Updike, 295-353 | |
| April 6 | Good Friday | |
| April 9 | Jonathan Safran Foer, <i>Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close</i> , 1 | |
| April 11 | Foer | |
| April 13 | Foer | Paper abstract |
| April 14 | Lanier Prize | |
| April 16 | Foer | |
| April 18 | No class | |
| April 20 | Foer | Outline and Bibliography |
| April 23 | Foer | |
| April 25 | Foer | |
| April 27 | Draft workshop | |

Course Assignments

Presentation

You will give an eight-minute presentation on an assigned book related to the day's class discussion. After class on the day of your presentation, I will give you a brief critique on the four key criteria of a presentation: structure, content, delivery, and interest. A good presentation

has a clear structure with a discernible beginning, middle, and end. You should deliver your presentation effectively with a clear voice, direct eye contact, and confident body language. Most importantly, your presentation should be interesting, since your classmates have to listen to it—whether they want to or not.

Book Review

Seven days after your presentation, you will submit an eight hundred word review of your book. Your review should demonstrate significant analysis of the text, it should cite sources in MLA style, and it should include a list of about five sources for further information. Keep in mind for the entry that you are an expert writing for a general audience.

Group Product

You will collaborate with a small group of classmates to create a product that describes the relationship between a major cultural phenomenon and twentieth-century American literature. The format can be electronic or textual, but it should include images, it should discuss at least five works of literature, it should give attention to social history, and it should have at least 5,000 words of analytical text. Each member of the group will also write a reflection paragraph explaining their contribution to the product.

Interpretive Research Essay

The theme for this year's American Literature Association meeting in San Francisco is "After the American Century." They are looking for sociological, theoretical, or aesthetic considerations of social change depicted in American literature since 1900.

They request 500 word abstracts by April 21, and 3,000 to 3,500 word papers are due May 3. They seek essays that argue a unique and provocative thesis, engage a vibrant scholarly conversation, use sources responsibly and accurately, and aggressively interpret one or more texts.