English 203: American Literature
Fall 2021

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Course Description:
Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—
Let it be that great strong land of love
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

—Langston Hughes

This course approaches American Literature through the idea of a dream. What was “the dream the dreamers dreamed” and how can literature help to define and critique it? What is the relationship between narrative conventions (such as narrator, character, plot, setting, etc.) and the construction/critique of social categories, national values, and assumptions about place and property? How do literary and stylistic elements (such as tone, diction, imagery, motif, etc.) contribute to or comment on national discourse? Rather than taking a traditional chronological approach, this course is organized in units around five overlapping dreams of particular import to the American imaginary: Puritan Nightmares, Frontier Fantasies, Revolutionary Dreams, Freedom Dreams, and Dreams Deferred.

Proposed Assignments:
- Discussions (25%)
- Essay (15%)
- Essay or Unessay (20%)
- Participation (15%)
- Final (25%)

Proposed Authors:
- Gloria Anzaldúa
- Louise Erdrich
- Nathaniel Hawthorne
- Toni Morrison
- Mark Twain
- And others…

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