

English 203:  
Introduction to American Literature

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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 six overlapping eras of particular import to the American imaginary: Puritan, Contact, Revolutionary, Slavery, Jim Crow, and present-day eras.

### Proposed assignments:

- Coursespaces Discussion 30%
- Essay 30%
- Participation 15%
- Final 25%

### Proposed reading list:

- *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) Mark Twain
- *Intruder in the Dust* (1948) William Faulkner
- *Beloved* (1987) Toni Morrison
- *The Round House* (2012) Louise Erdrich
- (short elections from other texts will be made available through coursespaces)