ENGLISH 429A (Spring 2019, CRN 21278) 
20th-Century American Fiction to WW2

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Course description:

- Immigrants vs. “real Americans”
- Cosmopolitan elites vs. rooted folk
- Democratic idealism vs. the power of money
- Family values vs. women’s independence
- Isolationism vs. global responsibility
- New media, new music challenging cultural authority
- The legacy of slavery and the enduring problem of the color line
These critical issues dividing Americans today were prominent a hundred years ago during what literary
and cultural critic Van Wyck Brooks described as “America’s coming of age” phase. An important sign of
the United States’s ascendency to a global superpower during the first half of the twentieth-century was
the emergence of a number of internationally-acclaimed writers who put American literature on the
world literary map. We will read major novels by six of these outstanding authors with a focus both on
each novel’s artistic virtues and the ways each engages with and represents the perennially divisive
issues above.

**Proposed assignments:**

- 5 short, free-writing responses to controversies raised by the novels (10%)
- 2 short, close-reading exercises (20%)
- 1 research essay (30%)
- Final exam (40%)

**Proposed reading list:**

- Edith Wharton, *The Custom of the Country* (1913; Broadview)
- Willa Cather, *My Ántonia* (1918; Norton)
- F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925; Broadview)
- Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929; Simon & Schuster)
- Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Harper Perennial)