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### **ENG 586 Studies in American Literature, 1860-1920.**

**Catalog description:** In this course, students apply current theory and research to an analysis of the works, writers, movements, and genres of American literature from 1860-1920.

#### **The Study of Local Color Writers**

##### **Course Description**

This course will focus on Local Color or regional writers in American Literature. The local color writers, particularly after the Civil War, saw the necessity of devising a literary agenda to advance a political one and found in local color writing a successful formula for this program, especially during the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction era, roughly from 1870-1920. Local Color Writers focus on the character, dialect, customs, and other features of specific regions in America. Influenced by Southwestern and Down East humor, between the Civil War and the end of the nineteenth century, this mode of writing became dominant in American Literature. Furthermore, this literary movement contributed to the reunification of the country after the Civil War and to the building of national identity toward the end of the nineteenth century.

##### **Nature and Scope**

The purpose of this course will be to gain a deep understanding of the diversity of the works of the Local Color Writers. This genre enabled Local Color Writers to explore and criticize different aspects of society. In other words, the emphasis on society and the limitations it imposes will be examined. This course will also examine how the public function of these writers was not just to mourn lost cultures but to purvey a certain story of contemporary cultures and the relations among them. In chronicling the nation's stories about its regions and mythical origins, local color fiction through its presence, and later its absence, contributed to the narrative of unified nationhood that later nineteenth-century America sought to construct. Students will examine how Local color fiction stresses isolation and otherness, but also makes, however uneasily, a case for the nation's ability to reconcile and accept divergent regional identities. Writers who could not claim membership in the nation's dominant cultural scheme could, through the attraction of local color, use the genre to gain a sympathetic hearing for sectional or minority views and values. Southern writers found local color fiction a convenient tool for the expression of racial paternalism. This course will allow the student to see not only Local Color became America's first national literature of race, it also became a powerful tool through which American women could develop a distinctive, even heroic vision of lives too often pejoratively labeled "ordinary" and "small time." Through local color fiction, women writers could critique

their placement in a paternalistic hierarchy made possible by the exploitation of both racial and gender difference.

### **Requirements and evaluations:**

- Complete the readings on the reading list and complete additional research and reading as necessary to complete the writing assignment.
- As the students progresses through the readings, for each meeeting day, they will bring to class two questions for class discussion about the assigned readings. 20% of total grade.
- Each student will present orally on one or more of the scheduled scholarly readings. 20% of grade
- The novel, *The Californians*, will be read outside of other assigned readings. A four page response paper, showing the elements of local color and its unique region will be due, June 20. 20% of total grade
- A comprehensive paper, the topic chosen in consultation with the instructor, will be turned in June 27 to demonstrate the overall understanding and assessment of Local Color Writers. 40% of the total grade

### **Texts:**

I have ordered relatively inexpensive versions of the books. If you already own an edition of the book, feel free to use it. Some of the short stories are available on the internet, but I thought you might want to own copies of everything and also to have additional works by these writers.

Gertrude Atherton *The Californians* Biblio Bazaar 1434643670

George Washington Cable *Old Creole Days* Biblio Bazaar 1434621154

Charles W. Chestnutt *The Conjure Woman* Duke University Press 0822313871

Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* Avon 0380002450

Emily Dickinson *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading ed.* Trilateral 0674018249

Mary E. Wilkins Freeman *A New England Nun* Penguin Classics 0140437398

Bret Harte *Bret Harte's Gold Rush* Heyday Books 0930588886

Sarah Orne Jewett *A White Heron and Other Stories* Dover 0486408841

Harriet Beecher Stowe *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Barnes & Noble 1593081812

Mark Twain *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* Prestwick House, Inc. 1580495834

### **COURSE POLICIES:**

You are expected to attend class and be punctual. Some assignments will be done during class time, and if you miss class, you will not be able to complete them. Excessive absences will affect your final grade. If you have to leave class early, please let me know and sit near the door that day, so you won't disturb your classmates. I expect you to not disturb or distract your fellow students. The Code of Student Conduct and Discipline, Section 5 explains the university's expectations about student behavior.

Members of this class are subject to this code.

Please turn your cell phones off or on vibrate during class time as ringing phones are distracting to your classmates and me.

Students are expected "to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experience both in and out of the class room. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subjected to disciplinary action." Code of Student Conduct and Discipline, Section 5.3, as printed in the student guidelines.

Students who are absent from class for observance of a religious holy day will be allowed to make up a test or other class assignment scheduled for that day within one week of returning to class. Students with disabilities that affect their academic performance are expected to arrange conference times with me so that appropriate strategies may be considered to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities

are not impaired. Students with disabilities are responsible for contacting the Director of the Counseling Center as chair of the Committee for Continuing Assistance for Disabled Students to register their status. The phone number is 936-294-1720.

If over the course of the semester something happens which will require an extended absence, you should contact the Dean of Students' Office, who will contact your professors. The phone number is 936-294-1781.

Information on the course, including grades and assignments, are posted on Blackboard. I expect you to check Blackboard regularly for updates.