ENGL 672.600: American Authors and the Civil War
Fall 2014: Tuesdays, 12:45-3:45 pm, 463 LAAH
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Course Description:
This course treats one of the most violent and problematic events that major American authors ever attempted to understand and illuminate in their work. The course will focus on writings of theirs that dealt with the Civil War in direct and indirect ways. The figure of John Brown and the issue of slavery will garner much of the critical attention of the material to be read and discussed. Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Douglass, Whitman, Dickinson, and Louisa May Alcott will receive the most attention, but political documents and popular works appearing in contemporary periodicals will also be examined as part of an overall historicist approach to the topic. The goal of the course will not be to rehearse the various military events that occurred, but rather, the struggles of these literary artists to conceptualize, understand, and address in their writings the pain, suffering, and death that preceded and attended the War.

Texts:
Emerson, selected essays and poems.
Thoreau, selected essays.
Hawthorne, Septimius Felton and selected essays.
Melville, Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War
Douglass, selected addresses
Whitman, Drum-Taps and selections from Specimen Days.
Dickinson, selected poems.
Louisa May Alcott, Hospital Sketches and selected stories.

Course Requirements:
1) Attendance and participation. Your participation need not be brilliant, but should be informed, frequent, thoughtful, and genial. Please do the readings before class and come prepared to contribute to discussion as well as to benefit from it. (20%)
2) Two 750-word reports historical events, figures, and/or issues. These will be presented orally in class as well as turned in as written assignments. Visual aids and handouts are encouraged for the 10-minute oral reports. (10% each)
3) A journal containing your weekly responses to the course material, that is, your first-hand intellectual encounter with the readings, viewings, lectures, and discussions of this course. Your grade will be based upon the evident time and thought you put into your entries. (20%)
4) A 10-page (20-minute) conference paper, based on your research for your term paper (to be read to the class and graded as an oral presentation). (15%)
5) A 20-25-page term research paper on a topic approved by the instructor. Use MLA style, complete with endnotes and "Works Cited." (25%)