

American Studies: Basic Texts
(Az amerikanisztika alapszövegei)
Enikő Bollobás

Aim and content of the course

This is the first of the companion courses introducing the branch of learning called American Studies. By reading selected foundational texts, historical and critical, from the colonial times to the present, we aim to develop a complex knowledge of American culture. In addition, we will practice various scholarly skills over the course, among them, skills in critical reading, critical and scholarly writing, and classroom (oral) presentation.

The course will cover some the most relevant topics of the field, among them, America as a New World, subversion in Puritan America, religion in America, the wilderness and the frontier, American democracy, “sacred texts,” the American dream, American individualism, gender and sexuality, the American family.

Evaluation

In addition to evaluating how students have acquired knowledges produced in the assigned texts, critical reading and comprehension skills, critical writing skills, academic writing skills, and oral presentation skills will also be assessed (on the basis of class participation, one oral presentation, and the final oral exam).

Course requirements

Students are required to

- (1) read the assigned texts for each class session and participate in class;
- (2) give one oral presentation;
- (3) do the final oral exam.

1. You have to come prepared by reading the assigned texts and actively participate in class discussions. Expect to be called to give summaries or assessments of reading assignments in class. Asking relevant questions pertaining to the texts is also part of this requirement.
2. You will have to give one 15 minute oral presentation of a book over the semester. Be sure to read the book several times, prepare a detailed, multi-level outline for yourself so that you will understand its argumentative structure, and present the main claims in class. Contextualize the book, so that you would be able to explain its novelty. You will have to speak freely, and not read out your (or somebody else's) full sentences. Your notes, therefore, should not consist of complete sentences, rather the outline you came up with. Present to us only what you understand—your audience will not understand anything from your reading out of complete sentences that you yourself did not fully comprehend. Bring a short (one page) outline of the presentation that you will distribute in class. Check all the words, including their several meanings (everyday and scholarly) and pronunciation, before the presentation.
3. The final oral exam will cover all the assigned texts as well as class discussions.

Grades shall be based on (1) class participation, (2) presentation+outline, and (3) the final oral exam.

Please note that I will give you a final grade ONLY if you did ALL these assignments.

All readings will be available electronically. Students will have to bring the assigned texts to class, preferably with their annotations—underlinings and marginal comments—that show they have read and understood the readings. Remember what Irving Howe claimed, “serious study of a text requires a pencil in hand.” Annotations will help students identify, during class discussion, the most important claims and theses, and the general argumentative structure of the text.

Schedule of classes and assignments

Orientation

America as a New World

Assignment for all:

John Winthrop, “A Modell of Christian Charity” (1630)

John Cotton, from *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (1636)

Homework: read into the origins and main tenets of Protestantism; covenant of grace vs. covenant of works

Subversion in Puritan America

Assignment for all:

David D. Hall, “Introduction,” *The Antinomian Controversy*, 3-23 (pdf)

“The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson at the Court at Newtown,” “The Trial of Anne Hutchinson, 1637” (pdf)

Homework: check the meaning and relevance of antinomianism

Presentation:

Alison Games, *Witchcraft in Early North America* (pdf)

Religion in America

Assignment for all:

*Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean, “In God We Trust—Religion in American Life,” *American Cultural Studies*, 106-133 (pdf)

Presentations:

John A. Hostetler, *The Amish* (print)

Pink Dandelion, *The Quakers* (pdf)

James Emmett Ryan, *Imaginary Friends (the Quakers)* (pdf)

Enikő Bollobás, “United in Separation: On the Common Roots of Pennsylvanian and Transylvanian Anabaptists” (pdf)

The Wilderness and the Frontier

Assignment for all:

Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (pdf)

Homework: read about the background of the assigned text

Presentations:

Shane Mountjoy, *Manifest Destiny* (pdf)

Kris Fresonke, *West of Emerson* (print)

American democracy

Assignment for all:

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (pdf)

Presentations:

Bölöni Farkas Sándor, *Utazás Észak-Amerikában* (library)

Manisha Sinha and Penny Von Eschen, *Contested Democracy* (pdf)

Sheldon Whitehouse, *Captured: The Corporate Infiltration of American Democracy* (pdf)

“Sacred Texts”: Declarations and Speeches

Assignment for all:

The American Declaration of Independence (pdf)

Declaration of Sentiments (pdf)

Sojourner Truth, “Ain’t I a Woman?” (pdf)

Louis Kossuth, “Democracy, the Spirit of the Age” (pdf)

Abraham Lincoln, “Gettysburg Address” (pdf)

Homework: read about the background of each assigned text

Presentation:

Leon Litwak et al., *Without Sanctuary* (print)

The American Dream

Assignment for all:

Jim Cullen, *The American Dream—A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation* (pdf)

Presentations:

A Nation on Wheels—The Automobile Culture in America Since 1945

The Suburb Reader

J. Emmett Winn, *The American Dream and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (pdf)

watch films together

American Individualism

Assignment for all:

Peter L. Callero, “Individualism: The Power of a Myth,” in *The Myth of Individualism*, 13-38 (pdf)

Presentation:

B. F. Skinner, *Walden Two*

George Orwell, *1984*

Gender and sexuality, the American family

Assignment for all:

*Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean, “Gender and sexuality: ‘to break the old circuits,’”

American Cultural Studies, 203-230 (pdf)

Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*

Presentations:

film series: *Madmen*

Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance* (pdf)

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct—Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (pdf)

Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House* (print)

Keywords

Assignment for all:

Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler, *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* (pdf)

Wrapping up

Final oral exam (starting at 9 a.m.)

Texts

- 1.a. John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity" (1630) (pdf)
- 1.b. John Cotton, from *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (1636) (pdf)

- 2.a. David D. Hall, "Introduction," *The Antinomian Controversy*, 3-23 (pdf)
- 2.b-c. "The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson at the Court at Newtown," "The Trial of Anne Hutchinson, 1637" (pdf)
- 2.d. Alison Games, *Witchcraft in Early North America* (pdf)

- 3.a. *Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean, "In God We Trust—Religion in American Life," *American Cultural Studies*, 106-133 (pdf)
- 3.b. William A. Noll, *America's God—From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (pdf)
- 3.c. John A. Hostetler, *The Amish* (print)
- 3.d. Pink Dandelion, *The Quakers* (pdf)
- 3.e. James Emmett Ryan, *Imaginary Friends (the Quakers)* (pdf)
- 3.f. Enikő Bollobás, "United in Separation" (pdf)

- 4.a. Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (pdf)
- Shane Mountjoy, *Manifest Destiny* (pdf)
- 4.b. Reread Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (pdf)
- 4.c. Read (and bring) Robert Frost, "The Gift Outright" (pdf)
- 4.d. Kris Fresonke, *West of Emerson* (print)

- 5.a. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (pdf)
- 5.b. Manisha Sinha and Penny Von Eschen, *Contested Democracy* (pdf)
- 5.c. Sheldon Whitehouse, *Captured: The Corporate Infiltration of American Democracy* (pdf)

- 6.a. The American Declaration of Independence (pdf)
- 6.b. Declaration of Sentiments (pdf)
- 6.c. Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I a Woman?" (pdf)
- 6.d. Louis Kossuth, "Democracy, the Spirit of the Age" (pdf)
- 6.e. Abraham Lincoln, "Gettysburg Address" (pdf)
- 6.f. Leon Litwak et al., *Without Sanctuary* (print)

- 7.a. Jim Cullen, *The American Dream—A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation* (pdf)
- 7.b. J. Emmett Winn, *The American Dream and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (pdf)

- 8.a. Peter L. Callero, "Individualism: The Power of a Myth," in *The Myth of Individualism*, 13-38 (pdf)
- 8.b. George Rupp, *Beyond Individualism* (pdf)

- 9.a. *Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean, "Gender and sexuality: 'to break the old circuits,'" *American Cultural Studies*, 203-230 (pdf)
- 9.b. *Michael S. Kimmel, "The Gendered Family," *The Gendered Society*, 127-174 (pdf)
- 9.c. Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance* (pdf)
- 9.d. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct—Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (pdf)

- 10.a. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler, *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* (pdf)