

American Studies Theories
(Az amerikanisztika elméletei)
Enikő Bollobás

Aim and content of the course

This is the second of the companion courses introducing the branch of learning called American Studies. By reading selected foundational texts, primarily critical, on topics ranging from the colonial times to the present, and interpreting them in both “old” and “new” Americanist terms, we aim to develop a complex understanding 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 scholarly research.

The course will cover some of the most relevant topics of the field, among them, puritan America, democratic evangelism, religious awakenings, manifest destiny and its alternatives, class in American society, the American dream, gender and individualism, women’s culture, old and new American Studies.

Evaluation

In addition to evaluating how students have acquired knowledges produced in the assigned texts, critical reading and comprehension skills, critical writing skills, and academic writing skills will also be assessed (on the basis of class participation, submitted outlines and summaries, a research paper, 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) submit the required outlines and summaries;
- (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 write five pieces of homework with relation to five critical essays. These will be multilevel outlines (not exceeding three pages) that reveal the argumentative structure of the essays, with brief summaries of the most important theses.

You will need to submit your written homework—in HARD COPIES—in class, before we discuss the relevant text. For pieces of homework submitted later that day, you lose one grade point; for those submitted even later, you lose one grade point each day. If you are absent from the class or if the class is cancelled for any reason, you must still submit your summary: just email me your homework before the class begins (bollobas.eniko@btk.elte.hu), and then leave the hard copy with Erzsébet Szilágyi (office 306) as soon as you can.

Your homework must be prepared according to the latest MLA rules (8th edition, 2016).

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) five pieces of homework, and (3) the final oral exam.

Please note that I will give you a final grade ONLY if you did ALL of 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

Puritan America

Assignment for all:

*Philip F. Gura, “Puritan Origins,” in Rowe, *Concise Companion to American Studies*, 19-35 (pdf)

Evangelical Democracy

Assignment for all:

William G. McLoughlin, “Pietism and the American Character” (pdf)

Homework #1: a formal, multilevel outline of McLoughlin’s rather difficult text (max 3 pages). Concentrate on the first 4 pages: these should take up 50% of your outline (= max. 1,5 pages). Summarize (in an outline form) the rest of the article in max. 1,5 pages. Watch the levels of your outline: larger, more general claims should come higher, while supporting claims should occupy lower-ranking positions.

Religious awakenings

Assignment for all:

*Jay Mechling, “Religious Studies,” in Rowe, *Concise Companion to American Studies*, 92-123 (pdf)

American Exceptionalism

Assignment for all:

Godfrey Hodgson, *The Myth of American Exceptionalism* (pdf)

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Class in classless society

Assignment for all:

*Paul Lauter, Is Class an American Study? Rowe, *Concise Companion to American Studies*, 74-91 (pdf)

Paul Fussell, *Class* (pdf)

Homework #2: a formal, multilevel outline of the Lauter essay (max 3 pages). Specify the main claims, and identify the arguments that support these claims. Try to capture the argumentative structure too. Watch the levels of your outline: larger, more general claims should come higher, while supporting claims should occupy lower-ranking positions.

The Declaration of Independence and its legacy

Assignment for all:

Justin Buckley Dyer, ed., *American Soul—The Contested Legacy of The Declaration of Independence* (chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 12, 15, 25, 26, 29; pp. 3-20, 43-45, 53-58, 98-107, 121-129) (pdf)

The American dream on film

Assignment for all:

Jack Zipes “Breaking the Disney Spell,” in Maria Tatar, ed. *The Classic Fairy Tales*, 332-352 (pdf)

Jerry Griswold, “There’s No Place But Home,” *Antioch Review* (pdf)

Maria Tatar, “Why Fairy Tales Matter: The Performative and the Transformative,” *Western Folklore* (pdf)

The gender of individualism

Assignment for all:

Linda Kerber, “Can a Woman Be an Individual? The Discourse of Self-Reliance” (pdf)

Amy Kaplan, “Manifest Domesticity” (pdf)

Homework #3: a formal, multilevel outline of the Kerber essay (max 3 pages). Specify the main claims, and identify the arguments that support these claims. Try to capture the argumentative structure too. Watch the levels of your outline: larger, more general claims should come higher, while supporting claims should occupy lower-ranking positions.

Women’s Culture

Assignment for all:

Linda Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History” (pdf)

Carroll Smith Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America” (pdf)

Homework #4: a formal, multilevel outline of the Kerber essay (max 3 pages). Specify the main claims, and identify the arguments that support these claims. Try to capture the argumentative structure too. Watch the levels of your outline: larger, more general claims should come higher, supporting claims (that are meant to support those higher claims) should occupy lower-ranking positions.

American Studies, old and new

Assignment for all:

Gene Wise, “‘Paradigm Dramas’ in American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement” (pdf)

Enikő Bollobás, “Fabulae of Old and New: New American Studies and the Postmodern Episteme” (pdf)

Homework #5: a formal, multilevel outline of the Wise essay (max 3 pages). Specify the main claims, and identify the arguments that support these claims. Try to capture the argumentative structure too. Watch the levels of your outline: larger, more general claims should come higher, while supporting claims should occupy lower-ranking positions.

Bonus

Assignment for all:

Gwyn Prins, “On Condis and Coolth” (pdf)

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

Texts

1. *Philip F. Gura, “Puritan Origins,” in Rowe, *Concise Companion to American Studies*, 19-35 (pdf)
2. William G. McLoughlin, “Pietism and the American Character” (pdf)
3. *Jay Mechling, “Religious Studies,” in Rowe, *Concise Companion to American Studies*, 92-123 (pdf)
4. Godfrey Hodgson, *The Myth of American Exceptionalism* (pdf)
- 5.a. *Paul Lauter, Is Class an *American Study*? in Rowe, *Concise Companion to American Studies*, 74-91 (pdf)
- 5.b. Paul Fussell, *Class* (pdf)
6. Justin Buckley Dyer, ed., *American Soul—The Contested Legacy of The Declaration of Independence* (chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 12, 15, 25, 26, 29; pp. 20, 43-45, 53-58, 98-107, 121-129) (pdf)
7. Jack Zipes “Breaking the Disney Spell,” in Maria Tatar, ed. *The Classic Fairy Tales*, 332-352 (pdf)
- 7.b. Jerry Griswold, “There’s No Place But Home,” *Antioch Review* (1987) (pdf)
- 7.c. Maria Tatar, “Why Fairy Tales Matter: The Performative and the Transformative,” *Western Folklore* (pdf)
- 8.a. Linda Kerber, “Can a Woman Be an Individual? The Discourse of Self-Reliance” (pdf)
- 8.b. Amy Kaplan, “Manifest Domesticity” (pdf)
- 9.a. Linda Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History” (pdf)
- 9.b. Carroll Smith Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America” (pdf)
- 10.a. Gene Wise, “‘Paradigm Dramas’ in American Studies: A Cultural and Institutional History of the Movement” (pdf)
- 10.b. Enikő Bollobás, “Fabulae of Old and New: New American Studies and the Postmodern Episteme” (pdf)