

Introduction to American Studies

English 20553 | Spring 2019
Monday, Wednesday 3:30–4:50 p.m. | Beasley 106

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Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday 2:00–3:30 p.m.

Course Overview

In his 1936 poem “Let America Be America Again,” Langston Hughes wrote, “O, let America be America again— / The land that never has been yet— / And yet must be—the land where *every* man is free.” This course will consider the idea of “America” as an imagined past and promised future that, as Hughes knew, never has been achieved and yet remains embedded in national consciousness. It will introduce you to the field of American studies, which brings together work from across the humanities and social sciences to examine the histories and cultural narratives that constitute the nation. Through literature, film, news media, sermons, comics, and memorials, we will investigate the meaning and making of American culture from the colonial period to the twenty-first century.

Throughout the fall, we will ask how writers, artists, activists, officials, and scholars have defined and claimed “America” and “American.” What and where is America? Who and what is American? Framed by a discussion of what American studies has been, is, and could be, this course will move through five themed units focused on nationalism, transnationalism, exclusion and belonging, blurred identities, and memory. Our readings and conversation will introduce you to a new way of thinking about culture and the work it does in shaping the nation, government, communities, and individual lives.

Learning Objectives

Establish a working knowledge of what the field of American studies has been, is, and could be in the future.

Locate some of the overarching themes and ideas that animate American studies research in the twenty-first century.

Cultivate a transferable set of methodological tools for investigating American culture.

Use the knowledge base and methods of the field to research and write about American cultural forms.

Required Texts

Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time*. 1963. Vintage, 1993.
Lepore, Jill. *The Story of America: Essays on Origins*. Princeton UP, 2012.
Spiegelman, Art. *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History*, Pantheon, 1986.
---. *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began*, Pantheon, 1991.

Readings on Course Website

- Anderson, Benedict. "Cultural Roots." *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, 1983, pp. 9–36.
- . Introduction. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, 1983, pp. 1–8.
- Anderson, Carol. "A History of Disenfranchisement." *One Person, No Vote: How Voter Suppression Is Destroying Our Democracy*, Bloomsbury, 2018, pp. 1–43.
- BlacKkKlansman*. Directed by Spike Lee. Blumhouse, 2018.
- Bourne, Randolph S. "Trans-national America." *Atlantic*, July 1916, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1916/07/trans-national-america/304838/>.
- "The Constitution of the United States." 1787. National Archives, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>.
- Deloria, Philip. Introduction. *Playing Indian*, Yale UP, 1998, pp. 1–9.
- Boym, Svetlana. "Reflective Nostalgia: Virtual Reality and Collective Memory." *The Future of Nostalgia*, Basic, 2001, pp. 49–56.
- . "Restorative Nostalgia: Conspiracies and Return to Origins." *The Future of Nostalgia*, Basic, 2001, pp. 41–48.
- Dickens, Charles. Concluding Remarks to *American Notes for General Circulation*, vol. 2, Chapman and Hall, 1842, pp. 287–306.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. "The Propaganda of History." *Black Reconstruction in America: A History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880*, Harcourt, Brace, 1935, 711–29.
- Dudziak, Mary L. "Coming to Terms with Cold War Civil Rights." *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*, Princeton UP, 2000, pp. 18–46.
- Gaines, Alisha. "A Secondhand Kind of Terror: Grace Halsell and the Ironies of Empathy." *Black For a Day: White Fantasies of Race and Empathy*, U of North Carolina P, 2013, pp. 83–120.
- Hughes, Langston. "Let America Be America Again." 1936. *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, Vintage, 1995, pp. 189–91.
- King, Martin Luther. "The Riddle of the Zoot: Malcolm Little and Black Cultural Politics during World War II." *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*, Free P, 1994, pp. 161–82.
- Knausgaard, Karl Ove. "My Saga, Part 1." *New York Times Magazine*, 25 March 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/01/magazine/karl-ove-knausgaard-travels-through-america.html>.
- Lee, Erika. "The Chinese Exclusion Example: Race, Immigration, and American Gatekeeping, 1882–1924." *Journal of American Ethnic History*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2002, pp. 36–62.
- Luce, Henry. "The American Century." *Life*, 17 Feb. 1941, pp. 61–65.
- Morrison, Toni. "Recitatif." *Confirmation: An Anthology of African American Women*, edited by Amiri Baraka and Amina Baraka, 1983, pp. 243–61.
- Nguyen, Viet Thanh. "Just Memory." *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War*, Harvard UP, 2016, pp. 4–19.
- Pease, Donald E. "A Brief Critical Genealogy of the Fantasy of American Exceptionalism." *The New American Exceptionalism*, U of Minnesota P, 2009, pp. 7–13.
- Tchen, John Kuo Wei. "George Washington: Porcelain, Tea, and Revolution." *Racially Writing the Republic: Racists, Race Rebels, and Transformations of American Identity*, edited by Bruce Baum and Duchess Harris, Duke UP, 2009, pp. 26–43.

Assignments and Course Expectations

Assignments:

Daily Reading Quizzes	15%
Participation and Preparedness	15%
Cultural Artifact Presentation	20%
Midterm Paper	25%
Take-Home Final Exam	25%

Grading Scale:

A	93–100%	C	73–76%
A-	90–92%	C-	70–72%
B+	87–89%	D+	67–69%
B	83–86%	D	63–66%
B-	80–82%	D-	60–62%
C+	77–79%	F	0–59%

Course Expectations: This is a reading- and writing-intensive course. To succeed, you will need to devote a significant amount of time to actively reading the course material. Your final grade will be based on a combination of factors, including your scores on daily reading quizzes, your preparation for and participation in class discussions, your keyword presentation, and your midterm paper and take-home final exam. The latter account for half of your grade, so achieving an A or B in this course will depend in large part on your ability to produce thoughtful, original, well-organized, and argument-driven writing about the material we read and discuss. I cannot emphasize enough, however, that investing time in the smaller assignments will feed your success on these larger projects.

Participation and Preparedness: The success of this class depends on your engaged and lively participation in it. Please come to class having read the assigned readings and taken careful notes that you can then draw on in formulating and sharing ideas with your peers. At the end of every meeting, you will complete a self-evaluation sheet in which you will assess your own participation and preparedness for that day's meetings and provide a brief rationale for the score you have assigned yourself, on a scale of 1 to 10. While I will try to honor your self-evaluations, I reserve the right to raise or lower your scores based on my own observations.

Scores of 9 or 10 are reserved for those who arrive on time having read and taken notes on all of the assigned materials, bring those materials and notes to class with them, make thoughtful contributions to class discussion, behave respectfully toward their classmates, and do not become distracted by technology.

Scores of 7 or 8 are recommended for those who arrive on time having read most of the assigned materials but may not have taken reading notes, make contributions to class discussion that may be tangential or not grounded in the readings, behave respectfully toward their classmates, and do not become distracted by technology.

Scores of 5 or 6 are recommended for those who arrive on time or a little late having read some of the assigned materials but have not taken reading notes, do not contribute substantially to class discussion, behave respectfully toward their classmates, and may become distracted by technology.

Scores of 1–5 are recommended for those who arrive late having read little of the assigned materials, do not voluntarily contribute to class discussion, and may become distracted by technology.

Policies

Attendance: Regular attendance is critical to your success in this course, not only because you receive a participation grade—and it is difficult to participate when you are not there—but also because the midterm paper and final exam will draw directly on the conversations we have in class. If you will be absent from class for a medical or family emergency, please contact me ahead of time so that I can send you any materials from that day’s meeting.

Submitting Your Work: Please submit your midterm paper and final exam as .doc or .docx files through the course website. Papers should be double-spaced in twelve-point font with one-inch margins. Format your references using MLA style. If you are unfamiliar with MLA style, please consult the latest edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*.

Plagiarism: As defined by the university, plagiarism is “the appropriation, theft, purchase or obtaining by any means another’s work, and the unacknowledged submission or incorporation of that work as one’s own offered for credit. Appropriation includes the quoting or paraphrasing of another’s work without giving credit therefore.” To avoid committing plagiarism, acknowledge and document all of your sources in your written work. If you are ever unsure whether something constitutes plagiarism, please check with me first.

University Disabilities Statement: Texas Christian University complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 regarding students with disabilities. Eligible students seeking accommodations should contact the Coordinator of Student Disabilities Services in the Center for Academic Services located in Sadler Hall, 1010. Accommodations are not retroactive, therefore, students should contact the Coordinator as soon as possible in the term for which they are seeking accommodations. Further information can be obtained from the Center for Academic Services, TCU Box 297710, Fort Worth, TX 76129, or at (817) 257-6567.

Reading Schedule and Deadlines

Date	Readings	Deadlines
Week 1	What Is American Studies?	
Monday, Jan. 14	Syllabus Hughes, “Let America Be America Again” (in class)	
Wednesday, Jan. 16	“The Constitution of the United States” (website) Lepore, <i>The Story of America</i> (“We the Parchment”)	Cultural artifact presentation assigned

Week 2	Nationalism	
Monday, Jan. 21	No class (Martin Luther King Day)	
Wednesday, Jan. 23	Anderson, Introduction to <i>Imagined Communities</i> and “Cultural Roots” (website)	
Week 3		
Monday, Jan. 28	Lepore, <i>The Story of America</i> (Introduction, “A Nue Merrykin Dikshunary”)	
Wednesday, Jan. 30	Du Bois, “The Propaganda of History” (website)	
Week 4		
Monday, Feb. 4	Lepore, <i>The Story of America</i> (“The Way to Wealth,” “His Highness”)	Midterm paper assigned
Wednesday, Feb. 6	Pease, “A Brief Critical Genealogy of the Fantasy of American Exceptionalism” (website) Luce, “The American Century” (website)	Midterm paper proposal due Sunday, Feb. 10 at 5 p.m.
Week 5		
Monday, Feb. 11	Conferences	
Wednesday, Feb. 13	Conferences	
Week 6	Transnational America	
Monday, Feb. 18	Tchen, “George Washington: Porcelain, Tea, and Revolution” (website)	
Wednesday, Feb. 20	Bourne, “Trans-national America” (website)	
Week 7		
Monday, Feb. 25	Lepore, <i>The Story of America</i> (“Pickwick in America”) Dickens, Concluding Remarks to <i>American Notes</i> (website)	
Wednesday, Feb. 27	Knausgaard, “My Saga, Part 1” (website)	Midterm paper due Friday, Mar. 1 at 5 p.m.
Week 8		
Monday, Mar. 4	Dudziak, “Coming to Terms with Cold War Civil Rights” (website)	
Wednesday, Mar. 6	King, “A Time to Break the Silence” (website)	
Week 9		
Monday, Mar. 11	No class (spring break)	
Wednesday, Mar. 13	No class (spring break)	
Week 10	Exclusion Acts	
Monday, Mar. 18	Lee, “The Chinese Exclusion Example” (website)	
Wednesday, Mar. 20	Anderson, “A History of	

	Disenfranchisement” (website)	
Week 11		
Monday, Mar. 25	Baldwin, <i>The Fire Next Time</i> (“My Dungeon Shook,” “Down at the Cross” [1–47])	
Wednesday, Mar. 27	Baldwin, <i>The Fire Next Time</i> (“Down at the Cross” [47–106])	
Week 12	Blurred Lines	
Monday, Apr. 1	Deloria, Introduction to <i>Playing Indian</i> (website)	
Wednesday, Apr. 3	Gaines, “A Secondhand Kind of Terror” (website)	
Week 13		
Monday, Apr. 8	<i>BlackKlansman</i>	
Wednesday, Apr. 10	Morrison, “Recitatif” (website)	
Week 14	The Politics of Remembering	
Monday, Apr. 15	Nguyen, “Just Memory” (website)	
Wednesday, Apr. 17	Boym, “Restorative Nostalgia,” “Reflective Nostalgia” (website)	
Week 15		
Monday, Apr. 22	Spiegelman, <i>Maus I</i>	
Wednesday, Apr. 24	Spiegelman, <i>Maus II</i>	
Week 16		
Monday, Apr. 29	Lepore, <i>The Story of America</i> (“To Wit”) SPOTs (please bring a laptop or tablet to class)	
Wednesday, May 1	Final review	Final exam assigned Final exam due Sunday, May 5 at 5 p.m.