

Introduction to American Studies

English 20553 | Spring 2019

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Course Overview

In 1842, Charles Dickens landed in Boston Harbor. Twenty-nine years old and the most famous living writer in the English-speaking world, Dickens bound through the Boston streets, thrilled to be in the United States for the first time. “Here we are!” he greeted a throng of well-wishers at the Tremont Hotel. But his warm feelings toward his hosts didn’t last long. He found American slavery abhorrent, American manners crude, and American politics malicious. “This is not the Republic I came to see,” he wrote a friend in Britain. “This is not the Republic of my imagination.”

This course is about the nation that Dickens imagined, the nation that disappointed him, and how Americans, then and now, live with the distance between the America they imagine and the America they know. It is an introduction to American studies, a field that brings together thinkers from all different backgrounds—historians, ethnic studies scholars, activists, political scientists, sociologists, regular Joes, and disillusioned British novelists—to investigate the social and cultural life of the United States. Through fiction, film, political speeches, popular music, and comics, we will consider how a diverse cast of Americans have defined and claimed, and redefined and reclaimed, the nation as their own. From the inscrutable diaries of George Washington to the ugly precedent of the Chinese Exclusion Act to Henry Luce’s declaration of an “American century,” this course invites us to, like Dickens, take in the United States anew, bad manners and all.

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. "A Time to Break the Silence." *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, HarperCollins, 1991, pp. 231–44.
- Knausgaard, Karl Ove. "My Saga, Part 1." *New York Times Magazine*, 25 Mar. 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, Grading, and Policies

Assignments:

Reading Quizzes	15%
Participation and Preparedness	15%
Presentation	20%
Midterm Paper	25%
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%

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, January 14	Syllabus Hughes, “Let America Be America Again” (in class)	
Wednesday, January 16	“The Constitution of the United States” (website) Lepore, <i>The Story of America</i> (“We the Parchment”)	Presentation assigned
Week 2	Nationalism	
Monday, January 21	No class (Martin Luther King Day)	
Wednesday, January 23	Anderson, Introduction to <i>Imagined Communities</i> and “Cultural Roots” (website)	
Week 3		
Monday, January 28	Lepore, <i>The Story of America</i> (Introduction, “A Nue Merrykin Dikshunary”)	
Wednesday, January 30	Du Bois, “The Propaganda of History” (website)	
Week 4		
Monday, February 4	Lepore, <i>The Story of America</i> (“The Way to Wealth,” “His Highness”)	Midterm paper assigned
Wednesday, February 6	Pease, “A Brief Critical Genealogy of	Midterm paper proposal due

	the Fantasy of American Exceptionalism” (website) Luce, “The American Century” (website)	Sunday, February 10 at 5 p.m.
Week 5		
Monday, February 11	Conferences	
Wednesday, February 13	Conferences	
Week 6	Transnational America	
Monday, February 18	Tchen, “George Washington: Porcelain, Tea, and Revolution” (website)	
Wednesday, February 20	Bourne, “Trans-national America” (website)	
Week 7		
Monday, February 25	Lepore, <i>The Story of America</i> (“Pickwick in America”) Dickens, Concluding Remarks to <i>American Notes</i> (website)	
Wednesday, February 27	Knausgaard, “My Saga, Part 1” (website)	Midterm paper due Friday, March 1 at 5 p.m.
Week 8		
Monday, March 4	Dudziak, “Coming to Terms with Cold War Civil Rights” (website)	
Wednesday, March 6	King, “A Time to Break the Silence” (website)	
Week 9		
Monday, March 11	No class (spring break)	
Wednesday, March 13	No class (spring break)	
Week 10	Exclusion Acts	
Monday, March 18	Lee, “The Chinese Exclusion Example” (website)	
Wednesday, March 20	Anderson, “A History of Disenfranchisement” (website)	
Week 11		
Monday, March 25	Baldwin, <i>The Fire Next Time</i> (“My Dungeon Shook,” “Down at the Cross” [1–47])	
Wednesday, March 27	Baldwin, <i>The Fire Next Time</i> (“Down at the Cross” [47–106])	
Week 12	Blurred Lines	
Monday, April 1	Deloria, Introduction to <i>Playing Indian</i> (website)	
Wednesday, April 3	Gaines, “A Secondhand Kind of Terror” (website)	
Week 13		
Monday, April 8	<i>BlackKlansman</i>	

Wednesday, April 10	Morrison, "Recitatif" (website)	
Week 14	The Politics of Remembering	
Monday, April 15	Nguyen, "Just Memory" (website)	
Wednesday, April 17	Boym, "Restorative Nostalgia," "Reflective Nostalgia" (website)	
Week 15		
Monday, April 22	Spiegelman, <i>Maus I</i>	
Wednesday, April 24	Spiegelman, <i>Maus II</i>	
Week 16		
Monday, April 29	Lepore, <i>The Story of America</i> ("To Wit") SPOT's (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.