**Introduction to American Studies**

(Az Egyesült Államok társadalmi és politikai kérdései – BBNAN24000 Z2)

Fall 2021 PPCU

*Lecturer:* Beatrix Balogh

*Place and Time:* Z 518, Fridays 10.15-11.45.

*Course type:* Seminar

*Evaluation:* Seminar grade (gyakorlati jegy), see Assessment

*Office hours:* Fridays 12.00-13.00 Z Rm 110/111

Objective: Building on the material of the Introduction to the United States lecture course, this course is meant to provide an introduction to American studies as an academic discipline. Starting from such crucial concepts as “culture” and “criticism”, the course is going to touch upon several key American social and cultural ideas and their manifestations and reflections in various cultural products. We are going to discuss the significance of immigration, the Western frontier heritage, the idea of freedom and the American Dream, slavery and race, American attitudes to government, the political parties, culture war issues and concepts of the American nation. Beyond introductory texts, specific cultural source materials are going to be examined ranging from literature, film, journalism, political communication, visual art and music.

*Assessment:* Your final grade is based on the following elements:

* Your regular preparation and active participation at class, especially at your “focus class” (30%)
* Your written homework/reflections (20%)
* End-term quiz (a series of short essay questions based on class discussions) (25%)
* Home paper/Research report: your critical reflection on and analysis of a chosen American cultural product (25%)

Preliminary schedule of discussion topics:

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| Sep 17 | **Introduction** and goal orientation  What is trending? Identifying **current critical questions**. What is American Studies? Explaining America. The meaning of **critical culture studies**: myth-awareness or myth-busting? Taking a critical view at American institutions. |
| Sep 24 | What makes you American? **Natives, settlers, immigrants**  Myth: A Nation of Immigrants. |
| Oct 01 | Diverging founding myths: God’s kingdom on earth and upward mobility, **The American Dream** and American reality |
| Oct 08 | The frontier, The “Conquest of the **West**” and the rugged individualist  Myths: The Fortier; Manifest Destiny |
| Oct 15 | Revisiting the founding myths, the nation and **US Foreign Policies**: Beacon or Crusader? exceptionalism v strategic interests? Myths: Exceptionalism including Manifest Destiny and City on a Hill. Lessons from the 20-year war in Afghanistan. |
| Oct 22 | “We the People” and “All Men Are Created Equal”: **Concepts of Democracy and Government**; Elephant v Donkey perspectives, Myth: We the People |
| Nov 05 | **The Color Line**: The heritage of slavery in America: statues, segregation, civil rights movement; Race in post-civil rights America: Do Black Lives Matter equally? Revisiting Myth: All Men Are Created Equal |
| Nov 12 | Culture Wars 1: Perspectives on rights and liberties; **Religious values** in American public life: moral issues, abortion, same-sex marriage |
| Nov 19 | Culture Wars II. **Gun** rights or gun control? |
| Nov 26 | Culture Wars III. Liberties or the Common Good? **Pandemic**, Vaccinations, Masks?  Deadline for home paper (research report) is December 5. |
| Dec 10 | End-Term Test (30 mins) Summary: How united is the United States? |
| Dec 17 | Final assessment via individual consultations |

Requirements and Practices:

**Discussion-based** seminar course

* Broach intriguing questions and controversies; Scrutinize narratives, practices and culture products
* Discuss the cause of controversies—and how these are rooted in or run counter to myths
* Learning and gaining new insights takes place through these discussions

**Focus Class (discussion leading presentation)**

* Bring to class a culture product (movie, docu, commercial, poster, cartoon, advert, news report, debate, artwork, literature) that encapsulates or demonstrates a critical question in US society
* Raise discussion questions that would help class learn about US institutions (social, political, cultural), understand recurring debates and their root causes,
* Offer some minimal background information if necessary

**Feedback on set texts**

* write short reflections on assigned texts (articles, movies)

**Home Paper**

* Run brief research to identify relevant academic discussion about your chosen topic
* Apply new insights to analysis of institutions/products
* Summarize findings

**Mid/End Term Quiz** (Short-essay questions)

Prove understanding of core ideals and inherent controversies

**Attendance policy**:

1. The course is instructed in-person. Although we all prepared for a potential switch to online mode, off-campus teaching can only be mandated by the university not opted for by students’ personal preference.
2. Please make your priority to attend in person discussions while we can. If you are bound to miss classes due to illness (or symptoms make you cautious), let the instructor know immediately. Assignments should be turned in notwithstanding. Do not miss a class for an alluring alternative activity. If you miss more than 3 classes without permission, your course may be marked “incomplete”.
3. Wearing a mask is compulsory at all times while on PPKE premises. You can only enter the classroom with your mask on (and hands sanitized). Make sure your mask provides safe covering when engaged in small-group discussions (masks with folds are more likely to remain in place while speaking).