

## Introduction to American Studies

(Az Egyesült Államok társadalmi és politikai kérdései – BBLAN09000)  
Preliminary Syllabus\_Beatrice Balogh Fall 2025 PPCU Part-Time Program

*Lecturer:* Beatrix Balogh, balogh.beatrix@btk.ppke.hu

*Time and Place:* September 5, October 3, October 17, Fridays 14.30-18.45 D 309.

*Course type:* Seminar; *Evaluation:* Seminar grade (gyakorlati jegy)

**Objective:** Building on the material of the Introduction to the United States lecture series, this course is meant to enhance awareness and understanding of current and perennial social, political, and cultural patterns in the United States and 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 will briefly discuss the significance of immigration, the Western frontier heritage, the idea of freedom and the American Dream, 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 examined ranging from literature, film, journalism, political communication, visual art, and music.

Requirements and Practices:

**Discussion-based** seminar course

- broaching intriguing questions and controversies; Scrutinizing narratives, practices, and culture products
- pitting ideals against reality; Discussing 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

**Assignments and Home Paper**

- Weigh (scholarly) arguments and explanations
- Summarize relevant findings
- Apply new insights to analysis of institutions/products

**Deadlines: By September 21:** Propose a specific cultural product (we will define culture product in class) that you plan to “bring to focus” (**presentation on either October 3 or October 17**) and further research/analyze by the end of the semester. Deadline for this will be set in class. You will also complete smaller written assignments/task sheets that will be dispatched through email and posted to our Teams. Deadline of completion will be stipulated in the dispatch/on the task sheet.

Preliminary schedule of discussion topics:

- Session 1, Sept 5     Introduction: What is American Studies? Explaining America. The meaning of critical culture studies: myth-awareness or myth-busting?  
What’s trending? What is a culture product? Current critical questions.  
Taking a critical view at American institutions.  
What makes you American? Melting Pot or Mosaic? Natives, settlers, immigrants.  
**Immigration and the American Dream**  
**The Frontier**, The “Conquest of the West” and the *rugged individualist*; *Manifest Destiny*
- Session 2, Oct 3     **Culture Wars I:** Religious values in American public life: moral issues, abortion, same-sex marriage  
**Culture Wars II.** Gun rights or gun control? Liberties v the common good.  
“We the People”: Concepts of **Democracy and Government**. Perspectives on **Rights and Liberties**. **Election** cycle and stages. Blue, Red and Battleground states. Voting bloc myth. Redistricting/Gerrymandering (Texas v California) Project 2025  
**!!! / Focus Class 1: student talks and discussion leading**

Session 3, Oct 17    **Continuities:** The founding myths, the nation, and **US Foreign Policies:** Beacon or Crusader? Exceptionalism v strategic interests?  
**The Color Line:** Race in post-civil rights America

**!!! / Focus Class 2: student talks and discussion leading**

**Important dates again:**

**By September 21:** Propose a specific cultural product (we will define culture product in class) that you plan to analyze by the end of the semester.

Deadline for Research Report is 12pm **November 16 (sure would be nice to have this done ahead of the finals season, but we will finalize in class)**

*Attendance and Assessment:*

- Your final grade is based on the following elements: Your regular preparation and active participation at class, especially at your “focus class”; Your written reflections; Your critical reflection on and analysis of a chosen American cultural product (Research report and the summary of findings).
- Please make your priority to attend in person discussions. If you are bound to miss classes due to illness (or symptoms make you cautious), let the instructor know immediately. Reflections or other assignments should be turned in notwithstanding. The TVSZ allows you to miss no more than one in-person teaching day.