

Introduction to American Studies / Social and Political Issues in the US
(Az Egyesült Államok társadalmi és politikai kérdései – BBNAN24000 D2)
Fall 2026 PPCU

Lecturer: Balogh Beatrix
Time and place: Thursday 12.30-14.00 D312
Course type: Seminar; Evaluation: Seminar grade (gyakorlati jegy), see Assessment
Availability: Tuesday 16.00-17:00 (Office Hours) Rm 102, or by appointment
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Building on the material of the *Introduction to the United States* lecture course, this seminar provides an introduction to American studies as an academic discipline and offers a discussion of current critical social and political questions of the United States—from immigration and culture wars to foreign policy.

Starting from such foundational concepts as “culture” and “criticism”, the course examines key American social and cultural ideas and their manifestations in various cultural products. We will explore the significance of immigration, concepts of the American nation, the Western frontier heritage, the idea of freedom and the American Dream, explicit and implicit racial biases, American attitudes toward government, political parties, and the run-up for the 2026 midterm elections.

In addition to introductory texts, specific cultural source materials—ranging from literature, film, journalism, political communication, visual art and music—are going to be examined

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

- Your regular preparation and active participation at class, especially at your “focus class” (see below schedule)
- Short written reflections on assigned texts and tasksheets—paper-based submissions
- Mid-Term and End-term quizzes (a series of short essay questions based on class discussions)
- Please note that more than 3 absences result in an “incomplete”.

PROPOSED DISCUSSION TOPICS AND SCHEDULE (FINAL SCHEDULE IS SUBJECT TO FOCUS BRIEF PROPOSALS)

	SESSIONS	DISCUSSION TOPICS AND FOCUS BRIEF IDEAS
Sept 10	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.
Sept 14	Immigration and Melting Pot	What makes you American? A Nation of Immigrants? Natives, settlers, immigrants and the Melting Pot. Critical view of current immigration problems , citizenship, demographic change, and the tension between inclusion and exclusion
Sept 24	Frontiers and the Rugged individual	Myth and values rooted in the American West: Frontier, Manifest Destiny, Self Reliance—and how these myths shape and inform current policies and critical social questions (eg healthcare); The West and its Natives ; Environmental Issues
Oct 1	Gerrymandered America	Polarization and parties ; Elephant v Donkey perspectives on critical issues; ideological fault lines, party realignment, populism . Project 2025 and Checks and Balances; States vs Federal Government
Oct 8	Culture Wars I	Perspectives on rights and liberties; Religious values in American public life: moral issues, abortion, same-sex marriage; Freedom of Speech and Press .
Oct 15	Media and Tech	Social media, misinformation, surveillance and the transformation of American public discourse; algorithms and new campaign hacks
Oct 22		Midterm test. Run up for Midterm Elections—campaign issues
Nov 5	Foreign Policy	New Old US Foreign Policies : Beacon or Crusader? Exceptionalism v strategic interests? Reflections on Midterm Elections
Nov 12	Culture Wars II.	Gun rights or gun control? Mass Shootings, Law and Order
Nov 19	The Color Line	structural and individual racial biases and continued divisions, DEI and other equity issues. Briefs can include policy initiatives, case studies, or culture products such as films or ads
Nov 26	Education & American Dream	Why is American losing its education edge? Top-tier universities are losing staff and international students; inequity in general education, controversial policies. Ideals and Realities of the American Dream; social policies
Dec 3		End-term test / Debate Day
Dec 10		Final Review (Individual Consultation)

Requirements and Practices:

Discussion-based seminar course to

- 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 ppt-aided presentation) and Research report

- 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
- Offer some background information if necessary; Connect the case to recurring debates and their root causes
- 3-5-slide ppt-presentation; additional slide displaying your sources (multiple source research required)
- Run brief research to identify relevant academic discussion about your chosen topic and summarize findings

Feedback on set texts

- write short reflections on assigned texts (articles, movies)—assignments and deadlines will be posted to teams

Mid-Term and End Term Tests: Primarily short-essay questions to demonstrate your understanding of core ideals and inherent controversies