

Introduction to American Studies

(Az Egyesült Államok társadalmi és politikai kérdései – BBLAN09000)
Preliminary Syllabus_Beatrice Balogh Fall 2022 PPCU Part-Time Program

Lecturer: Beatrice Balogh, balogh.beatrice@btk.ppke.hu

Time and Place: October 8, Saturday 13.15-17.15 D 317, November 11. Friday 14.30-18.45 D 317, November 26, Saturday 13.15-17.15 D 317.

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 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 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.

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

(Should in-person teaching be suspended, the course will be concluded with an online End Term Quiz (Short-essay questions) to prove your understanding of core ideals and inherent controversies discussed during the previous sessions and in the assigned literature)

Preliminary schedule of discussion topics:

Session 1, Oct 8 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 question.
Taking a critical view at American institutions.
Topic 1. What makes you American? Natives, settlers, immigrants. Immigration and the *American Dream*
Topic 2. *The frontier*, The “Conquest of the West” and the *rugged individualist*;
Manifest Destiny

Session 2, Nov 11 The founding myths, the nation and **US Foreign Policies**: Beacon or Crusader? Exceptionalism v strategic interests?
“We the People” and “All Men Are Created Equal”: Concepts of Democracy and Government. Lessons from the 2022 Midterm Elections.
Culture Wars I: Perspectives on rights and liberties; Religious values in American public life: moral issues, abortion, same-sex marriage

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

Session 3, Nov 26 **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*; **Culture Wars II**. Gun rights or gun control? Liberties v the common good.

By November 1: 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 **December 1**.

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 while we can. 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 only one of the in-person teaching days.
- Please consult the university website or communication for updates on mask mandate.