

CENTRE FOR CANADIAN, US & LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY

Course level	: MA
Course Title	: Introduction to American Society
Course Type	: Optional
Course Teacher	: Dr. Saumyajit Ray
Credits	: 4
Contact hours	: 4 per week

Course objectives

This course intends to introduce students broadly to the United States as a society and to American ideas, institutions, culture, and social problems that are and continue to be typically American.

As important as how the world perceives America is the question of how Americans look at themselves and what measures they take—political, social, and economic—to preserve the United States as an “exceptional” nation in the post-modern world. It is important to understand both.

Learning outcomes

Classroom instruction will be directed at

1. Helping students develop knowledge of America as a diverse and complex society with its own institutions and distinct culture, yet a “nation of immigrants” like no other.
2. Giving students a “sense” of America, and, along with it, a broad idea of what Americanisms mean in the social and political sciences;
3. Inculcating in them the understanding that politics in America, because of the nature of American society, is not merely a struggle for power but a concerted attempt to acquire freedom, equality, and justice for all Americans.

Evaluation Methods

Term paper (25%); performing arts (25%); End Semester Examination (50%). The term paper topics and the movies for review (two per student) are to be decided by the course teacher.

A note about performing arts:

Option 1 (theater): Students are required to divide themselves into suitable groups and stage plays in the group theater format. A maximum of three plays are allowed per batch. Only American group theater plays or their Indian adaptations are allowed to be staged.

Option 2 (musical performance): Students are required to perform two songs from two different genres, subject to the availability of suitable musical instruments. They are required to choose from the following American musical genres: pop, hip-hop, rock, rock & roll, jazz, Blues, country, R&B, soul, Negro Spiritual.

Course Content

Unit I: American Dream

1. The American Idea
2. The New World: What is new?
3. Society and government

Unit II: The religious basis of American society: The Protestant ethos

1. “To worship God in our own way”: The First Amendment
2. The Great Awakenings: The evangelical alternative to the mainline churches
3. “One Nation under God”: The Christian panacea to social conflict

Unit III: The economic basis of American society: The capitalist ideal

1. Free enterprise and consumerism
2. Welfare state, not socialism
3. “Cut taxes, cut welfare”

Unit IV: Immigrant America

1. A “nation” of immigrants
2. *E pluribus unum*: Assimilation in America
3. “Aliens go back”

Unit V: Race, racism, and racial conflict

1. The “peculiar” institution
2. “Separate but equal”
3. “Free at last”

Unit VI: American popular culture

1. Hollywood
2. Broadway; Group theater & Method acting
3. Television

Unit VI: Select social issues in America

1. Liberal issues: Gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation; racism; healthcare; job losses; gun violence; environment; infrastructure; homelessness
2. Conservative issues: Homosexuality, divorce, abortion, and teenage pregnancy; school prayer; illegal immigration; taxes; size of government; gun rights
3. Legislation and case laws

Unit VII: American nightmare

1. Violence and arson (Watts riots)
2. Assassinations (JFK, MLK, RFK)
3. Foreign policy disasters (Vietnam)
4. Presidential intrigue and inappropriate behavior (Watergate, Iran-Contra, Monica Lewinsky)
5. Terrorism and national security (9/11)

Suggested Readings

Textbooks

1. Bender, Thomas. 2006. *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History*. New York, NY: Hill and Wang
2. Haralambos, Michael & Martin Holborn. 2008. *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*. London: Collins
3. Huntington, Samuel P. 2004. *Who are We? America's Great Debate*. New Delhi: Penguin Books
4. Kazin, Michael and Joseph A. McCartin (eds.). 2006. *Americanism: New Perspectives on the History of an Ideal*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.
5. Lipset, Seymour Martin. 2003. *The First New Nation: The United States in Historical and Comparative Perspective*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers
6. Walzer, Michael. 1994. *What It Means To Be An American: Essays on the American Experience*. New Delhi: Affiliated East-West Press Pvt. Ltd.

References

7. Ackerman, David M. (ed.). 2001. *Prayer and Religion in the Public Schools*. New York, NY: Novinka Books.
8. Ashabranner, Brent K. 1993. *Still a Nation of Immigrants*. New York, NY: Cobblehill Books.
9. Ashby, LeRoy. 2006. *With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture since 1830*. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky

10. Bailey, Richard W. 2012. *Speaking American: A History of English in the United States*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
11. Bergad, Laird W. and Herbert S. Klein. 2010. *Hispanics in the United States: A Demographic, Social, and Economic History, 1980-2005*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
12. Bernstein, Carl and Bob Woodward. 1974. *All the President's Men*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, Inc.
13. Bingle, Jennifer. 2011. *Homelessness in America Today*. New York, NY: The Rosen Publishing Group, Inc.
14. Buhle, Paul. 2013. *Marxism in the United States: A History of the American Left*. Brooklyn, NY: Verso Books.
15. Crunden, Robert M. *A Brief History of American Culture*. Armonk, NY: North Castle Books.
16. Cullen, Jim (ed.). 2013. *Popular Culture in American History*. Second Edition. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
17. Cullen, Jim. 2003. *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
18. Ewing, Katherine Pratt (ed.). 2008. *Being and Belonging: Muslims in the United States since 9/11*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
19. Farmer, Brian R. 2006. *American Political Ideologies: An Introduction to the Major Systems of Thought in the 21st Century*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.
20. Gair, Christopher. 2007. *The American Counterculture*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
21. Gavit, John P. 1922. *Americans by Choice*. New York, NY: Harper & Bros.
22. Gerstmann, Evan. 2008. *Same-Sex Marriage and the Constitution*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
23. Gordon, Milton M. 1964. *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
24. Hagopian, Patrick. 2009. *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.
25. Harper, Charles L. & Kevin T. Leicht. 2016. *Exploring Social Change: America and the World*. Sixth Edition. New York, NY: Routledge.
26. Hewitt, Christopher. 2003. *Understanding Terrorism in America: From the Klan to al Qaeda*. New York, NY: Routledge.
27. Higham, John. 1988. *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
28. Hill, Clint and Lisa McCubbin. 2013. *Five Days in November*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, Inc.

29. Hulsether, Mark. 2007. *Religion, Culture and Politics in the Twentieth-Century United States*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

30. Jacobs, Lawrence and Theda Skocpol. 2012. *Health Care Reform and American Politics: What Everyone Needs to Know*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

31. Kaiser, Robert Blair. 2008. “R.F.K. Must Die!”: *Chasing the Mystery of the Robert Kennedy Assassination*. Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press.

32. Kelly III, James P. (comp. & ed.). 2004. *Christianity, Democracy, and the American Ideal*. Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press.

33. Kleck, Gary. 2009. *Point Blank: Guns and Violence in America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine Transaction.

34. Klobuchar, Lisa. 2008. *The Iran-Contra Affair: Political Scandal Uncovered*. Minneapolis, MN: Compass Point Books.

35. Knight, Robert H. 1998. *The Age of Consent: The Rise of Relativism and the Corruption of Popular Culture*. Dalls, TX: Spence Publishing Company.

36. Levine, Rhonda F. (Ed.). 2006. *Social Class and Stratification: Classic Statements and Theoretical Debates*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

37. Lind, Michael. 2012. *Land of Promise: An Economic History of the United States*. New York, NY: Harper.

38. Madsen, Deborah L. 1998. *American Exceptionalism*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi.

39. McKechnie, Gary. 2009. *USA 101: A Guide to America’s Iconic Places, Events, and Festivals*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society

40. McMurrer, Daniel P. & Isabel V. Sawhill. 1998. *Getting Ahead: Economic and Social Mobility in America*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.

41. Merton, Robert King. 1968. *Social Theory and Social Structure*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

42. Meyer, David S. 2014. *The Politics of Protest: Social Movements in America*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

43. Mitman, Gregg. 1992. *The State of Nature: Ecology, Community, and American Social Thought*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

44. Olson, Keith W. 2003. *Watergate: The Presidential Scandal that Shook America*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.

45. Orrenius, Pia M. and Madeline Zavodny. 2010. *Beside the Golden Door: U.S. Immigration Reform in a New Era of Globalization*. Washington, DC: The AEI Press.

46. Painter, Nell Irvin. 2006. *Creating Black Americans: African-American History and Its Meanings, 1619 to the Present*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

47. Portes, Alejandro and Ruben Rumbaut. 1990. *Immigrant America: A Portrait* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

48. Posner, Richard A. 1999. *An Affair of State: The Investigation, Impeachment, and Trial of President Clinton*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

49. Rank, Mark Robert, Thomas A. Hirschl & Kirk A. Foster. 2014. *Chasing the American Dream: Understanding What Shapes Our Fortunes*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
50. Ray, Saumyajit. 2010. *America's Common Bond: Why English Should be the Official Language of the United States*. New Delhi: Reference Press.
51. Reppetto, Thomas A. 2005. *American Mafia: A History of Its Rise to Power*. New York, NY: Henry Holt & Co.
52. Rivera, Geraldo. 2009. *HisPanic: Why Americans Fear Hispanics in the U.S.* New York, NY: Celebra.
53. Rossel, Seymour. 1995. *Let Freedom Ring: A History of the Jews in the United States*. West Orange, NJ: Behrman House, Inc.
54. Schuck, Peter, H. and James Q. Wilson (eds.). 2008. *Understanding America: The Anatomy of an Exceptional Nation*. New York, NY: PublicAffairs.
55. Schwarzmantel, John. 1998. *The Age of Ideology: Political Ideology from the American Revolution to Post-Modern Times*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
56. Simpson, David. 2006. *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
57. Smith, Andrew F. 2004. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
58. Valocchi, Stephen. 2010. *Social Movements and Activism in the USA*. New York, NY: Routledge.
59. Vaughan, Donald and Eric Peterson. 2011. *American Festivals: 100s of Hometown Celebrations*. Lincolnwood, IL: Publications International Ltd.
60. Wald, Kenneth D. and Allison Calhoun-Brown. 2011. *Religion and Politics in the United States*. Sixth Edition. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers
61. Weber, Max. 2003. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc.

N.B.: This is not an exhaustive list. Relevant journal articles will be made available during the course of teaching as and when required.