

Tel Aviv University
The Lester & Sally Entin Faculty of Humanities
The Department of English and American Studies

מבוא לתרבות אמריקה - 0626150001 - Introduction to American Culture
סמסטר ב' תשע"ט 2018-19 Spring Semester

DESCRIPTION AND REQUIREMENT

This course will provide an overview of American Culture based on written texts from the Colonial period to the contemporary scene. Material will be drawn from a variety of genres, among them poetry, the slave narrative, the captivity narrative, autobiography, novel, romance, essay, sermon, and short story. These texts will be placed in the context of historical developments and of other cultural expressions, such as painting, film, and music.

Course Objectives:

- ✓ You will explore American literature as a major component of national culture and examine its role in creating diverse and competing stories of "Americanness."
- ✓ You will become familiar with the major aesthetic trends of American literature from the colonial era to the present, against the backdrop of major historical, social, intellectual, and political transformations.
- ✓ You will be able to link works of literature across the historical timeline by exploring recurring themes, motifs, and formal characteristics.
- ✓ You will practice thinking and working in a group setting.

Primary reading and historical context:

All the short primary texts we will analyze are linked in the syllabus below. Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* is widely available for purchase in bookstores or online. It is important to read the material for each class before the lecture.

For twelve of the classes, you are also asked to view (or, if you prefer, read) a short history lecture that provides the background information for the text we discuss. These lectures are linked on the syllabus below. After viewing or reading each lecture you will be prompted to take a short quiz to demonstrate your command of the material covered. Each student is required to pass at least ten of the twelve quizzes. You can only take each quiz before the relevant class.

To join our Study.com classroom and access these history lectures and quizzes, follow [this link](#). Our classroom code is: red-snake-4271

Students who will not come prepared to class or who will try to read all the material just before the final exam are not likely to perform well or even pass the course.

Group work:

Students in this course will be divided in advance into work groups. You will meet your group in the beginning of the semester and will work together until its end. At the conclusion of each unit (see syllabus below) class time will be devoted to group activity, and each group will work together on a

small project. In preparation for these group activities, you will be required to prepare a short written assignment. Students who will (a) hand in the assignment in advance, and (b) show up to class and participate in the group activity, will receive full credit.

Attendance:

While in such a large class it is difficult to police the attendance of each student, showing up for the lectures is mandatory. In classes devoted to group work attendance will be recorded. Students who miss lectures and group sessions are not likely to pass this course.

Classroom conduct:

In this course we will use a platform called zeetings for the slideshows and interactive class activities. Before our first meeting on February 28th, please go to zeetings.com and sign up.

We ask that you come to class on time and refrain from walking in and out during class. This disturbs your teacher, and it disturbs your classmates.

Graded work:

- (1) Historical context quizzes - as mentioned above, you are required to pass at least 10 of the 12 quizzes (remember that you can only take them before the relevant class) for a total of 10 points of your final grade.
- (2) Group work - for each of the group assignments you will receive 5 points provided you hand in the preparation assignment and participate in the group activity.
- (3) Exam - a final exam covering all lectures, primary texts, and historical context will be given on July 2nd at 9:00. Moed Bet will take place on July 25th at 9:00. The exam is worth 65 points.

Grading summary:

Quizzes on historical context - %10

Group assignments - %25

Final Exam - %65

Academic Dishonesty:

As you know, the English Department takes academic dishonesty very seriously. A student caught plagiarizing or cheating on an assignment, quiz, or exam will receive a failing grade with no possibility of amending the grade. An official letter describing the offense will be placed on his/her permanent record. In some cases, the department will file a complaint with the university disciplinary committee. This can lead to the student being expelled or having to take a leave of a semester or an entire year.

Teaching team:

Prof. Milete Shamir | Office Hours: Thurs 14:00-15:00 Webb 519 | mshamir@post.tau.ac.il

Mr. Ido Keren | Office Hours: Weds 14:00-15:00 Webb 507 | idokrn@gmail.com

Ms. Naama Cohen | naamacohen@gmail.com

CLASS SCHEDULE

February 28th – American Stories

- ✓ Before class, please read New York Times article ["The Unifying American Story"](#) by David Brook, and
- ✓ Watch Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED Talk, ["The Danger of a Single Story"](#).

Unit One: Contact, Settlement, Expansion

March 4th - Contact I

- ✓ Context: [lesson I.1.5 "Christopher Columbus and Native Americans"](#) - read or watch and pass quiz.
- ✓ Text: Read Christopher Columbus, [Letter on His First Voyage](#) and excerpt from [The Third Voyage](#) (1493 and 1498).

March 7th - Contact II

- ✓ Context: [lesson I.2.2 "The Settlement of Jamestown Colony"](#) - read or watch and pass quiz.
- ✓ Text: John Smith, excerpt from [The General Historie of Virginia](#) (1624).
- ✓ Text: Yuchi oral narrative, ["Creation of the Whites"](#) (n.d.).

March 11th - Puritans I

- ✓ Context: [lesson I.2.5 "The Puritans and the Founding of the New England Colonies"](#) - read or watch and pass quiz.
- ✓ Text: John Winthrop, excerpts from ["A Modell of Christian Charity"](#) (1630).

March 14th - Puritans II

- ✓ Text: Mary Rowlandson, excerpts from ["A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson"](#)(1682).

March 18th - UNIT ONE GROUP ACTIVITY

March 21st - No class

Unit Two: Democracy, Capitalism, and the American Self

March 25th - Enlightenment I

- ✓ Context: [lesson I.3.1 "The American Enlightenment"](#) - read or watch and pass quiz.
- ✓ Text: Benjamin Franklin, from [The Autobiography, Parts One and Two](#) (1771-90).

March 28th - Enlightenment II

- ✓ Context: [lesson I.4.3 "The Declaration of Independence"](#) - read or watch and pass quiz.
- ✓ Text: Thomas Jefferson, excerpt from [The Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson](#) (1821).
- ✓ Text: Phillis Wheatley, ["Letter to Reverend Samson Occum"](#) (1774).

April 1st - Transcendentalism I

- ✓ Context: lesson I.8.1 ["American Renaissance: Uniquely American Art, Literature and Culture"](#) - read or watch and pass quiz.
- ✓ Text: Walt Whitman, ["The Sleepers"](#) (1855).

April 4th - Transcendentalism II

- ✓ Context: [lesson I.8.4 "Economic Developments in the North"](#) - read or watch and pass quiz.
- ✓ Text: Henry David Thoreau, ["Economy" and "Where I lived, and What I Lived For" from Walden](#) (1854).

April 8th - Resistance

- ✓ Text: Herman Melville, ["Bartleby, the Scrivener"](#) (1853).

April 11th - GUEST SPEAKER: G. B. TRAN

- ✓ Text: Excerpts from *Vietnamerica* (2011).

April 15th - UNIT TWO GROUP ACTIVITY

April 16th to 27th - No class

Unit Three: Slavery and Race

April 29th - The Slave Narrative

- ✓ Context: [lesson I.8.7 "Slavery in America"](#) read or watch and pass quiz.
- ✓ Text: Frederick Douglass, selections from [Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave](#) (1845): Prefaces, Chapters 1-3, 6-7, 10-11.

May 2nd - Domesticity and Abolitionism

- ✓ Text: Harriet Beecher Stowe, from [Uncle Tom's Cabin: chapters 1-5, 8-9, 25-6, 40](#) (1851). You can read the plot summary of the whole novel [here](#).
- ✓ Text: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, ["Declaration of Sentiments"](#) (1848).

May 6th - From Slavery to Race

- ✓ Context: [lesson II.3.7 "African-Americans in the Progressive Era"](#) read or watch and pass quiz.
- ✓ Text: Booker T. Washington, from ["The Atlanta Exposition Address"](#) (1895).
- ✓ Text: W.E.B. Dubois, ["Of Our Spiritual Strivings"](#) (1903).

May 9th - No class.

May 13th - The Harlem Renaissance

- ✓ Text: A selection of poems by Langston Hughes.
- ✓ Text: Listen to a selection of Blues songs.

May 16th - UNIT THREE GROUP ACTIVITY

Unit Four: Gender, Consumerism, Modernity

May 20th - Realism and the New Woman

- ✓ Context: [lesson II.3.8 "Women's Suffrage & Early Feminism"](#) read or watch and pass quiz.
- ✓ Text: Kate Chopin, ["The Story of an Hour"](#) (1894) and ["A Pair of Silk Stockings"](#) (1897).

May 23rd - No class.

May 27th - Consumerism and Modernism I

- ✓ Context: [lesson II.5.1 "1920s American Culture"](#) read or watch and pass quiz.
- ✓ Text: F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), chapters 1-4.

May 30th - Consumerism and Modernism II

- ✓ Text: F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), chapters 5-end.

Unit Five: Transnational America

June 3rd - Assimilation v. Multiculturalism

- ✓ Context: [lesson II.2.8 "Immigration in Industrial America and the Rise of Nativism"](#) read or watch and pass quiz.
- ✓ Text: Mary Antin, from *The Promised Land* (1912).
- ✓ Text: Grace Paley, ["The Loudest Voice"](#) (1959). You can listen to Paley read the story [here](#) (from 10:00).

June 6th - The Western v. Borderlands

- ✓ Text: Watch ["The Searchers" \(1956\)](#).
- ✓ Text: Gloria E. Anzaldua, from [Borderlands/La Frontera](#) (1987), pp. 1-19 (chapters 1 and 2).

June 10th - America, post 9/11

- ✓ Text: Evelyn Shakir, ["I Got My Eye on You"](#) (2007).

June 13th - CONCLUDING GROUP ACTIVITY