**Introdcution to American Studies: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly**

**Professor:** Dr. Tamrika Khvtisiashvili

**Class hours:** To be determined. Once a week, 90 min. each

**Office hours:** To be determined

**Email:** tamrikak@gmail.com

**Prerequisite**

This course is appropriate for bachelor or masters students. Intermediate level of English language proficiency is preferable.

**Introduction to American Studies: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly**

In this course, we critically examine the idea of “America” and what it means to be an “American.” Access to Americanness is shaped by factors such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, mobility, and second chances —categories which themselves change in meaning over time. American Icons are objects, images, and symbols of identification, which represent the United States and are associated with the idea of America both at home and in the global world. The significance of American icons derives not solely from their own internal qualities, but often from the qualities and ambitions that they have come to represent for others. Through a critical examination of their creation, dissemination, and legacies, this course explores the variety of meanings that these figures and symbols have come to represent. Along with conventional, we will look for examples of icons that disrupt, and challenge traditional narratives.

Throughout the semester we will return again and again to some of the foundational questions:

* What does it mean to be an “American”?
* What are the central myths, promises, and ideas behind the United States?
* How do those icons represent ideas about freedom, individuality, democracy, mobility, second chances, masculinity and femininity, race and class?
* What is “American Exceptionalism,” and how do we explain its staying power in the American imagination?
* How have different people imagined what it means to be an American?
* How do these visions both reflect and help to shape the boundaries that define who belongs within the nation and who gets excluded?
* And given the nation’s historically shifting contours, the projection of US power in today’s world, and the global flows of people, money, ideas, cultural artifacts, and capital, where is “America” to be found today?

Students will interpret various artifacts: essays, literary texts, autobiographies, photographs, films, music, architecture, historical documents, legal texts, etc. The course intends to heighten the proficiency in English language academic skills as well as enhance critical thinking skills, providing richer, more complex and nuanced understanding of American culture.

**Course expectations:**

1. **Weekly Responses to Content** = Responses to the weekly theme in a form of short written or multi-media feedback. The response will identify the main point(s) made by the author(s) of that week’s assigned material, briefly explaining what are the authors trying to say about America?
2. **Discussion Leader** = Each student selects a week in which they wish to serve as the discussion leader for the seminar. Responsibilities include preparing a question or statement that may be used as a basis for class discussion, identifying key points made by the author(s), exploring why those points mattered at the time they were made and why we should think about them today, and organizing seminar time in such a way to encourage discussion. For each meeting, each student will prepare a question or statement that may be used as a basis of discussion for the assigned work.
3. **Participation in the Discussion** = Students participation and respectful attention to others’ participation are the bases of this seminar.

**There will be no exams in this course.**

The course will move thematically, one major narrative at a time. The readings and other materials will be made available 2 weeks ahead of time electronically for different themes. Themes will be selected based on the duration of the course.

**Week 1: From Founding Fathers to the Squad**

**Week 2: Landmarks and Guide Posts**

**Week 3: Immigrant Experience: Everyone’s Welcome, Kind of**

**Week 4: Capitalism as a Commodity**

**Week 5: Gospel to Hippies to Hip-Hop to Hipsters**

**Week 6: Hollywood: How We Escape**

**Week 7: On the Fringes of America: Countercultures**

**Week 8: God for Every Day of the Week**

**Week 9: American Dream: Gender, Race, Class**

**Week 10: Slavery to the Presidency**

**Week 11: Isseus that Keep America up at Night**

**Week 12: America’s Dirty not so Little Secret: reimagening the West**

**Week 13: America’s Big Personalities**

**Week 14: Free Press and Radical Expression of Ideas**

**Week 15: Art in Spite of It All**

**Week 16: Evolution in a Bubble**

**Week 17: America: Me Me Me**

**Week 18: We Revolt!**

**Bibliography For the Course**

Specific readings and other materials from this list will be provided by the instructor 2 weeks ahead of time electronically. Some materials might be added as the coure progresses.

Connley C., 2020, “Why the homeownership gap between White and Black Americans is larger today than it was over 50 years ago”, MSNBC, August 21.

France-Presse A. Stockholm, 2021, “US added to list of ‘backsliding’ democracies for first time”, The Guardian, 22 November.

Gerstle G., “Introduction”, in The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order: America and the World in the Free Market Era.

Glickman, L. “How White Backlash Controls American Progress,” The Atlantic, May 21, 2020.

Hendler G. and Burgett B., Keywords for American Cultural Studies. New York: New York University Press, 2007.

Ingraham C., 2015, “This is the best explanation of gerrymandering you will ever see,” The Washington Post, March 1.

Kaplan A., “Anarchy of Empire” Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.

Kasson J.F., “Amusing the Million: Coney Island and the Turn of the Century” New York: Hill & Wang, 1978.

King M.L Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”

Lepore T., “The Name of War: King Philip’s War and the Origins of American Identity” New York: Vintage Books, 1999.

Lindemann, Danielle J. “Introduction”, in True Story: What Reality TV Says About Us.

Lipsitz G., “American Studies in a Moment of Danger” Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.

Lipsitz G., “How Whiteness Works: Inheritance, Wealth, and Health.” In The Possessive Investment in Whiteness, 105-117 (Chapter 5).

Maddox, L. “Locating American Studies” Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.

Mahon M., 2020, “Rocking and Rolling with Big Mama Thornton,” In Black Diamond Queens: African American Women and Rock and Roll, 29-51, Duke University press.

Maxwell D. and Sonenshine T.D., 2022, “Academic freedom is under assault— we have a sacred duty to protect it.” The Hill, March 29.

Miller P., “Errand into the Wilderness” Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1956.

Nash Smith H., “Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth” Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.

Nebehay, S. “U.N. Expert Decries Near ‘Tyranny’ in U.S. Against Minority Voting Rights.”

Peterson, A. H. 2019, “How Millennials Became The Burnout Generation,” Buzzfeed, January 5.

Powell, M. 2021, “In Texas, a Battle Over What Can Be Taught, and What Books Can Be Read,” New York Times, December 10.

Reynolds L., ed. “Woman in the Nineteenth Century” (Norton Critical Editions only). New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1997.

Roediger D., “The Wages of Whiteness” London: Verso; New Edition, 2007.

Saldívar J.D., “Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies” Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

Shumway, D. R. 2015, “Rock Stars as Icons”, in The Sage Handbook of Popular Music, eds. Andy Bennett and Steve Waksman, 301316, Sage.

Somerville S., “Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture” Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999.

Stanley J., “Anti-Intellectual,” in How Fascism Works, 36-56. Random House.

Takaki R., “A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America” Boston: Back Bay Books; Revised Edition, 2008.

Tensley, B. “America’s Long History of Black Voter Suppression.” CNN Politics.

Timm J.C., 2021, “Aggressive gerrymandering may make elections far less competitive, experts say,” NBC, November 27.

Walsh J., 2017, “49 Years Ago, Harry Belafonte Hosted the Tonight Show—and It Was Amazing”, The Nation, February 16.