

American Studies 201  
CSU Fullerton  
Spring, 2008  
TTh 1-2:15 pm

Professor Elaine Lewinnek  
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and also by appointment  
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## **INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN STUDIES**

In this course we will trace the development of American culture from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present. We will focus on four major case studies, each examining encounters between various Americans from multiple perspectives: first, the encounter between European settlers and Powhatan Indians that has been remembered in various versions of the popular story “Pocahontas;” second, the ways Americans created their own country; third, the encounter of Eastern European immigrants arriving in an industrial city that is represented in the novel *The Jungle*; and, fourth, the encounters of rebellious young adults in 1950s America that is narrated in the memoir *On the Road*. In between these main case studies of Pocahontas, industrialization, and beatniks, we will explore wider issues of American culture over time.

Understanding American culture requires paying attention to sub-cultures and counter-cultures as well as mainstream culture. Understanding culture also requires learning to analyze diverse primary sources. In this course, sources will include letters, paintings, newspapers, novels, poems, photographs, advertisements, advice manuals, material artifacts, music, movies, and memoirs, as we explore the development of American culture and society over time.

Culture, in this course, means both ways of life and activities of leisure, including “high” art as well as “low” art. Culture reflects and also affects identities, influencing the construction of categories of race, gender, class, region, nationhood, and more. Thus, culture itself is political, in the broad sense of culture as power – yet analyzing this power of culture can become quite complex. Throughout this course, we will continually return to the question, how does culture have power?

### **Learning Goals**

This class aims to enhance your understanding of America’s diverse past, to improve your ability to critically analyze historical and cultural evidence, and to help you communicate your interpretations in discussions and writing. American Studies 201 meets General Education Requirement II.B.1, “American History, Institutions and Values.” This course will explore the historical development of American institutions and values, consider the social processes that helped shape American society and politics, and recognize the significance of the contributions of various ethnic and gender groups to American history, politics, and values, within the contexts of culture and resistance.

### **Required Texts**

This course requires two paperback books, both available at the Little Professor Bookstore, 725

N. Placentia Avenue, near the corner of Nutwood and Placentia:

Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle*

Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*

You will also need to buy a brief course packet containing the first five weeks of reading. The packet is available at CopyCo, 2438 Chapman Avenue, near the intersection of Chapman Avenue and State College Boulevard.

## **Grading**

This course will entail a combination of lecturing and class discussion. Plan on arriving at every Tuesday's class having completed that week's assigned reading and prepared with questions and comments.

Nearly every week, there will be a short quiz to assess your immediate understanding of that week's reading, and there are no make-up quizzes – but at the end of the semester I will drop your lowest quiz grade.

After our first two case studies, there will be a short essay of about 3 pages. You may choose from various essay prompts, distributed in class, along with plentiful further writing guidelines. These assignments will assess your ability to understand and analyze material from course readings and discussion; to synthesize course themes, and to write clear essays which are grounded in evidence and express your individual viewpoint.

This course will culminate in a final exam including short identification questions about key terms, documents, and ideas, as well as a take-home essay synthesizing our study of American culture. This exam will be based on both class discussions and readings. To help you prepare for this exam, all course powerpoint images will be available on our Blackboard website under "course documents." Downloading each powerpoint before class will make taking notes far easier.

Your final grade will consider:

Essay 1: 25%

Essay 2: 25%

All Quizzes: 15%

Final Exam: 35%

Grades will be calculated using a standard scale. An A+ is 98-100, A is 93-97, A- is 90-92, B+ is 87-89, B is 83-86, B- is 80-82, C+ is 77-79, C is 73-76, C- is 70-82, D+ is 67-69, D is 63-66, D- is 60-62, and F is anything 59 or below.

While class participation is not directly reflected in your grade, it will be taken into account if your grade is on the borderline. Attendance is vital for the quizzes and to do well on the essays and exams. If you must miss a class, you should check our Blackboard page for that week's resources, obtain class notes from a reliable classmate, and then ask me if you have specific questions. Class time will frequently include analysis of songs, movies, images, and other primary sources that are very difficult to catch up on if you are absent or even daydreaming.

## **Policies**

I will communicate with you by email throughout the semester, so you need to regularly check whatever email account Blackboard has on record for you. Please keep all graded assignments so that any discrepancies can be easily and fairly straightened out. Plus and minus grades will be used. Late work will be penalized one letter grade for each week late, unless you have made arrangements with me beforehand. This course does not include an extra-credit option. Incompletes will be granted only due to exceptional circumstances. Plagiarism – using the words of another author without citing your source – will lead to an F on the assignment and a report to the campus Judicial Affairs Officer. If you have a disability or special need for which you may be requesting an accommodation, please inform me as well as the Disabled Student Services Office as early as possible in the semester.

Whenever you have questions, I encourage you to talk to me, in class, after class, by email, or in my office hours. I look forward to a thoughtful semester exploring American studies.

## **Course Schedule**

WEEK 1 (Jan 22): Introduction to cultural studies. If historians in 2208 wanted to study your life, what sources would they use? Why would they even be interested?

WEEK 2 (Jan 29): First Impressions

Required reading: Jill Lepore, “Our Town” from *The New Yorker* (4/2/2007), in course packet

Week 3 (Feb 5): Representations of Pocahontas

Required Reading: “Chapter 2” primary documents about Pocahontas, in course packet

Week 4 (Feb 12): Analysis of Pocahontas

Required reading: Excerpts from Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America*, in course packet

Week 5 (Feb 19): Becoming American

Required reading: Jill Lepore, “Goodbye, Columbus: When America won its independence, what became of the slaves who fled for theirs?” from *The New Yorker* (5/8/2006), and Jill Lepore, “Vast Designs: How America Came of Age” from *The New Yorker* (10/29/2007), both in course packet.

In-class document: Frederick Douglass, “The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro” (1852)

## **Pocahontas essays are due in class on Feb 21**

Week 6 (Feb 26): Urbanization

Required reading: *The Jungle*, chapters 1-5

Week 7 (March 4): Reform Movements

Required Reading: *The Jungle*, chapters 6-14

Week 8 (March 11): Industrialization of Leisure

Required Reading: *The Jungle*, chapters 15-22

In-class documents: Artifacts of the World's Fair Columbian Exposition (1893)

Week 9 (March 18): Immigration and Racial Formation

Required Reading: Finish *The Jungle*. Focus on chapters 28-31.

Week 10 (March 25): Becoming Modern

In-class documents: Excerpts from Frederick Winslow Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1909) and from the New York Armory Show (1913)

**Industrialization essays are due in class on March 27**

March 31 to April 5 is CSUF's spring break

Required Reading: Begin Part One of *On the Road*

Week 11 (April 8): Nuclear War and Nuclear Families

Required Reading: Finish Part One of *On the Road*

Week 12 (April 15): Bebop and Beatniks

Required Reading: *On the Road*, Part Two

In-class documents: Alan Ginsberg, "Howl" and "America" (1956)

Week 13 (April 22): Cowboys in America

Required Reading: *On the Road*, Part Three

Week 14 (April 29): American Revolutions

Required Reading: *On the Road*, skim Part Four; read Part Five

In-class document: "Berkeley in the Sixties"

Week 15 (May 6): Conclusions and Review

Final-exam take-home essay will be distributed in class

Week 16

**Final exam is Tuesday, May 13, 12:00 – 1:50 pm**