

Cultura y Civilización de los Pueblos de Habla Inglesa II

Prof: Anthony Rauld (trauld@yahoo.com)



"We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us. Did you ever think what those sleepers are that underlie the railroad? Each one is a man, an Irishman, or a Yankee man. The rails are laid on them, and they are covered with sand, and the cars run smoothly over them. They are sound sleepers, I assure you. And every few years a new lot is laid down and run over; so that, if some have the pleasure of riding on a rail, others have the misfortune to be ridden upon." Henry David Thoreau

Introduction

The course is a cultural history of the United States in the context of the history of the West more generally. Its main objective is, on the one hand, to introduce the students to some of the main historical events of US history and, on the other hand, to provide students with an understanding of cultural change—and consequently a framework for thinking about and engaging with the historical material. Another key objective of this course is to encourage in the student a sense of responsibility for the development and presentation of course materials—and their articulation within the framework of the course.

What are the Epochs?

Inspired by Martin Heidegger's work on the historical understandings of being that have existed in the West, this course will examine the central cultural *epochs* that have defined the United States, and the West more generally.

Each *epoch* reflected a fundamentally different cultural style (ways of understanding, ways of being, ways of doing, mattering, etc.) altogether and the course explores these different *epochs* collectively as a window, or framework, for engagement with US history.

The cultural epochs that this course will consider are:

The Epoch of the Pre-Socratic Gods.

The Christian Epoch.

The Modern Epoch.

The Technological Age/Post-Modern Epoch.

As the UC Berkeley professor Hubert Dreyfus explains, a phenomenological account of a history focuses "on the way people experience themselves and the sacred, rather than on the rational conceptions they had of themselves and their world" (Dreyfus, 2011).

Significance of the Approach

Each of these *epochs* is fundamentally different; they are not mere stepping-stones in a linear progression from barbarism to civilization, or from the archaic to the modern. One *epoch* does not naturally lead into the next *epoch*. On the contrary, the shift from one *epoch* to another is often marked by a revolution, a complete break with the previous *epoch*.

It sees in our history not unidirectional change—neither forward nor backward—but as a series of different paradigms of cultural practice each of which highlights some aspects of human experience and covers up others. (Dreyfus, 2011)

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The people who lived in different *epochs* actually understood the world around them quite differently; even *we* will have a hard time trying to imagine what it was like to live in an *epoch* that is not our own because we respond to a radically different set of cultural orientations.

Exploring the United States through the window of the *epochs* has many advantages. For one, it avoids projecting our own contemporary cultural understanding onto the past—this undermines the true relevance and meaning of past experiences. By studying the past *epochs*, we also begin to realize that our own contemporary cultural understanding is far from normal or universal.

Class Methodology

Class meetings will consist of introductory lectures, student interventions, class discussions and small group exercises. Lectures will serve to introduce new concepts, contextualize the readings, and to consider specific epochs and epochal developments that arise from the periods under scrutiny. Student interventions will consist of short summaries, and/or formal responses to questions posed in previous sessions, presented to the class in order to engage fellow students—and the instructor—in discussion (the class participation mark will reflect, in part, the student's efforts in this regard). Small group exercises will be carried out from time to time in order to reflect on prior readings, and to encourage critical thinking with respect to the course material. Film screenings and student-led film discussions will also be an integral part of the course. Emphasis will be placed on class participation.

Attendance and Participation

Attendance is essential, and I will check to see if you are here. If you cannot make it for some reason, try to figure out what was covered by asking classmates BEFORE the next class. Attendance means that you are physically present, but also that you are mentally present as well, and this means that you are engaged in the topics and making an effort to participate in the class discussions. Attendance requires that you show professionalism in class. I will assess participation throughout the semester, so if you want to exaggerate your participation, that's fine with me.

Exams and Quizzes

Throughout the semester, you will have a mid-term exam as well as several unit quizzes. You will also have a final exam, which will be cumulative. I will be handing out several study questions when it is pertinent, and you can use this material as a study guide.

Required Readings

There will be one general history textbook that will cover some of the basic historical periods of the US. Excerpts from this book will be available at the photocopy place as part of your *reader* (a collection of additional written materials from different sources). It is crucial that you do the readings before the class time.

Grading Structure

I. Semester [60%]: Mid-Term Exam [50%] + Quizzes [25%] + Class Participation [25%].

II. Final Exam [40%]

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Unit Breakdown

Unit I. Basic Concepts & The Epoch of the Pre-Socratic Gods

Culture as 'the background' and 'world.'

Cultural Style.

The Clearing.

Earth and World.

The Work of Art.

Cultural Reconfigurers.

Cultural Articulators.

Introduction to the epochs.

The Pre-Socratic Greeks and their understanding of being.

Unit II. Christianity

Jesus.

St. Augustine and Plato.

The Aristotle Synthesis (St. Thomas Aquinas).

Dante's The Divine Comedy: How the Medieval World was structured.

The Protestant Reformation: Luther.

The Protestant Ethic and the Rise of Capitalism?

Colonialism.

The New World: The Spanish and English colonial projects.

The Emergence of the Rugged Individual (The Jack of All Trades).

The two societies compared: Virginia vs. New England.

The Rise of Slavery.

Unit III: The Modern Epoch

Descartes.

The Enlightenment.

The English Civil War.

Benjamin Franklin.

The American Revolution.

American Industrialization.

American Transcendentalism.

The Rise of Consumer Society.

The Device Paradigm.

Modernity and Development.

Disciplinary Society.

Unit IV: The Technological Age/ Post-Modern Epoch

The Contemporary Malaise.

The Cold War.

The Counter-Culture Movement.

The Crisis of the 1970's.

The Condition of Postmodernity.

Neoliberalism and Postmodernism.

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Bibliography

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1984 *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Dreyfus, Hubert

2011 *All Things Shining*. New York: Free Press.

Escobar, Arturo

1995 *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Ewen, Stuart

1976 *Captains of Consciousness*. New York: Basic Books.

Frank, Thomas

1997 *Commodify Your Dissent*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.

Gillen, Paul and Devleena Ghosh

2007 *Colonialism and Modernity*. Sydney: UNSW Press.

Harvey, David

1990 *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Cambridge: Blackwell.

Hawke, David Freeman

1988 *Everyday Life in Early America*. New York: Harper and Row.

Kovic, Ron

2005 *Born on the Fourth of July*. New York: Akashic Books.

Norton, Mary Beth

2008 *A People and a Nation: A History of the United States* (8th edition). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Pursell, Carroll (ed.)

1990 *Technology in America: A History of Individuals and Ideas*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Weber, Max

1930 *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Routledge.

Zinn, Howard

2003 *A People's History of the United States*. New York: Harper Collins.

Films and Series

The New World (Terrence Malick)

John Adams (HBO)

Liberty: The American Revolution (PBS, Ellen Hovde)

The Civil War (Ken Burns)

The Untold History of the United States (Oliver Stone)

Hearts and Minds (Peter Davis)

The Day After Trinity (John Else)

The Man Nobody Knew (Carl Colby)

Berkeley in the Sixties (Mark Kitchell)

The Best of Enemies (Robert Gordon and Morgan Neville)

Fahrenheit 9/11 (Michael Moore)

Margin Call (J.C. Chandor)