

American Studies/International Studies

AMST A441/INT I441: America in Global Perspective

Course Description

An increasingly critical task for Americans generally is to not only learn about other cultures but to learn about how America is perceived by the rest of the world, why certain images of America persist, and what implications those images have for foreign relations. Americans tend to look at our involvement in world affairs through rose-colored glasses, while in many other parts of the globe, all American actions are viewed with a jaundiced eye as self-interest. In this binary opposition of oddly complementary views, it is either altruism or oil-- and nothing else--that makes America tick. In this course, students will be asked to investigate and complicate this binary interpretation of America as a world citizen from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. The course is intended to make students more aware of global issues and of what it means to be a 'global citizen,' and more understanding of views of America from outside its borders.

The course is arranged into three lecture/seminar modules and one student presentation module, using different disciplinary approaches to examine important aspects of America as a global presence. From cultural studies and historical perspectives, students will read important scholarship on "America as Empire," identify major archetypes of the American 'personality,' and examine the dissemination of, the popularity of, and the validity of these images in globally popular American movies, literature, and cultural phenomena like blue jeans and McDonald's. From a social sciences perspective, students will work together to identify the popular perception of the US in a country of their choice by analyzing public opinion data, editorial opinions, and so on. From a communications and culture perspective, students will examine the ways information is conveyed in news and entertainment media, and examine news coverage of particular topics in the US and abroad. Finally, students will be teamed up for a semester project in which they analyze a specific theme or concept about American identity in the world using the various data and theoretical approaches they have studied in the first two thirds of the semester, and present their findings to the class.

Goals of the class:

Upon successfully completing this class, students should

1. Have a good grasp of the basic history of America as a player on the world stage.
2. Be conversant with theories of globalization, exceptionalism, imperialism, and so on.
3. Be able to discuss, analyze, and criticize various interpretations and applications of these theories.
4. Be more sophisticated consumers of national and international news.
5. Have sharpened writing, debating, and critical thinking skills.

Required Book Purchases:

Cultures of U.S. Imperialism, edited by Donald Pease and Amy Kaplan. (Duke University Press, 1993).
Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: a double-edged sword* (Norton 1997)

Course Schedule:

Module 1: History & Theory: The Question of American Exceptionalism (Weeks 1 thru 3)

Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism*
Crèvecoeur, Letter III “What is an American” from [Letters from an American Farmer](#)
Tocqueville, excerpts from [Democracy in America](#)
Frederick Jackson Turner, “The significance of the Frontier in American history” and
“The West and American Ideals” from [The Frontier in American History](#)
John Winthrop, “City upon a hill” excerpts from [A Model of Christian Charity](#)
WEB Dubois, “The Forethought” and “On our Spiritual Strivings,” from the [Souls of Black Folk](#)
Langston Hughes, [Let America be America Again](#)
Martin Luther King Jr, “[Beyond Vietnam](#)” Address delivered to the Clergy and Laymen
Concerned about Vietnam, at Riverside Church, 4 April 1967, New York City

Module II: Politics & Public Opinion: How Americans See Themselves in the World (weeks 4 thru 7)

Distant Mirrors, Chapters 1 & 2 (pp. 1-26)
Howard Miner, “[Body Ritual among the Nacerima](#)” (1956)
Prof. Lloyd Russow, [If the world were a village of 1000](#) (2000)
New York Times
Noam Chomsky, [The world after Sept. 11th](#) (2001)
The Program on International Policy Attitudes website [Americans and the World: Public Opinion on International Affairs](#)
U.S. Executive Office of the President, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. September 2002. Available at:
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nssall.html>.
Kaplan, Amy “Left Alone with America: The absence of Empire in the study of American culture” and Donald Pease, “New perspectives on US Culture and Imperialism” in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, p. 3-40.
Slotkin, Richard “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West” in *Cultures of US Imperialism*, 164-184
Pease, Donald “Hiroshima, the Vietnam Veterans War Memorial, and the Gulf War: post-national spectacles” in *Cultures of US Imperialism*
Gewertz, Deborah and Frederick Errington. We think, therefore they are? On Occidentalizing the world in *Cultures of US Imperialism*

Module III: Media & Communications: How the World Sees America (weeks 8 thru 12)

The Program on International Policy Attitudes website [World Public Opinion](#)

Brannen, Mary Yoko. "Bwana Mickey: Constructing Cultural Consumption at Tokyo Disneyland," from *Cultures of U.S. Imperialism*, edited by Donald Pease and Amy Kaplan, (Duke University Press, 1993): 617-634

Russell White "Sign of a black planet : hip-hop and globalization" from *Issues in Americanization and culture*

Rubin, Barry & Judith Colp Rubin "The Great Satan" Chapter 7 from *Hating America: A History* (Oxford 2004), 155-186.

[A World Connected](#), Institute for Humane Studies, George Mason University

PBS' [Commanding Heights: the battle for the world economy](#)

[BBC World Service](#)

[The International Herald Tribune](#)

Recommended Reading: The Economist

Module IV: Student Projects (case studies of specific issues) (weeks 13 thru 15)

Students present work in class

Assignments:

Collaborative case study 25%

Debates 25%

Book review 25%

Media analysis 25%

Collaborative Case Studies might look at the reception of a particular American 'product' overseas (anything from Disney to blue jeans to McDonalds to democracy), issues in American foreign policy, reporting (or lack thereof) on a particular country or issue in the US media, differences in media coverage of an issue in US media and select foreign media, the role of the US in governing the internet, or other topics of interest to the student team and appropriate for the themes of the course. Students will work in teams to research, analyze, and report to the class on their chosen topic.

Debates: students will choose a position on a controversial issue, and form a coherent argument to support their position. Students will argue their position in class. Suggested topics on the United States in comparative world context for pro and con treatment include, but are not limited to:

1. Is American democracy exportable?
2. Does the United States have a moral mission in the world?
3. Immigration today--How desirable?
4. U.S. education in global perspective: How good are we?
5. U.S. health care in global perspective: How good are we?
6. U.S. pop culture: A good thing for the world?

7. U.S. individualism: Positive or negative trait?
8. Is globalization just a worldwide spread of U.S. practices and culture?
9. Is the United States really a model for the world?
10. Does American culture take individualism too far?
11. What does it mean to be a 'superpower'?

Book Review:

Each student will choose one extra book to read during the semester, and will write a book review of that work. The book review will consist of both a summary of the main argument of the book and a critique of the book's strengths & weaknesses, methodology, and so on. Suggested books are below; other books may be suitable and can be used with approval of instructor.

- Abdel-Malek, Kamal. *America in an Arab mirror: images of America in Arabic travel literature : an anthology, 1895-1995* (St. Martin's Press, 2000.)
- Baudrillard, Jean. *America*. (1989)
- Brewer, Thomas, L., *Globalizing America: the USA in World Integration*, (Cheltenham UK and Northampton MA, Edward Elgar, 2000).
- Brooks, Stephen, *As others see us : the causes and consequences of foreign perceptions of America* (Broadview Press, 2006.)
- Campbell , Neil, et al, *Issues in Americanisation and Culture*(Edinburgh: EUP, 2004)
- Chua, Amy *World On Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability* (Doubleday 2002)
- Cowen, Tyler. *Creative Destruction: How Globalization is Changing the World's Cultures* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002)
- Crockatt, Richard. *America embattled : September 11, anti-Americanism, and the global order* (Routledge, 2003).
- DeFleur, Melvin L. *Learning to hate Americans : how U.S. media shape negative attitudes among teenagers in twelve countries* (Marquette Books, 2003.)
- DeVita & Armstrong, *Distant Mirrors: America as a foreign culture* (Wadsworth, 2002)
- Friedman, Thomas *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (Anchor 2000)
- Fullerton, Jami A. *Advertising's war on terrorism : the story of the U.S. State Department's Shared Values Initiative* (Marquette Books, 2006)
- Graham Edward M. *Fighting the Wrong Enemy: Antiglobal Activists and Multinational Enterprises* (Washington DC: Institute for International Economics, 2000)
- Grünzweig, Walter. *The United States in global contexts : American studies after 9/11 and Iraq* (Transaction Publishers [distributor], 2004.)
- Hertz Noreena. *The Silent Takeover: Global Capitalism and the Death of Democracy* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000)
- Holsti, Ole R. *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy* (University of Michigan Press, 2004)
- Huntington Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998)
- Kiesling, John Brady. *Diplomacy lessons : realism for an unloved superpower* (Potomac Books, 2006.)

- Kim, Eun Y. *The yin and yang of American culture : a paradox* (Intercultural Press, 2001.)
- Klein, Naomi. *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*. (Picador 2000)
- Kohut, Andrew. *America against the world : how we are different and why we are disliked* (Times Books, 2006.)
- McElroy, John Harmon. *Divided we stand : the rejection of American culture since the 1960s* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.)
- McGiffert, Carola. *Chinese images of the United States* (Center for Strategic and International Studies, c2005.)
- McPherson, Alan L. *Yankee no! : anti-Americanism in U.S.-Latin American relations* (Harvard, 2003.)
- Mehdi, Mohammad Taki. *Of lions, chained; an Arab looks at America* (New World Press [1962])
- Morris, Stephen D., *Gringolandia : Mexican identity and perceptions of the United States* (Rowan & Littlefield, 2005.)
- Mosler David and Robert Catley. *Global America: Imposing Liberalism on a Recalcitrant World* (Praeger, 2000)
- Nakaya Andrea C., ed. *Does the world hate the United States?* (Greenhaven Press, 2005.)
- Rubin, Barry and Judith Colp Rubin. *Hating America: A history* (Oxford 2004)
- Rugh, William A. *American encounters with Arabs : the "soft power" of U.S. public diplomacy in the Middle East* (Praeger Security International, 2006.)
- Schweitzer, Glenn E., *America on notice : stemming the tide of anti-Americanism* (Prometheus Books, 2006.)
- Shlapentokh, Vladimir. *America : sovereign defender or cowboy nation?* (Ashgate, 2005.)
- Stephan, Alexander, *The Americanization of Europe : culture, diplomacy, and anti-Americanism after 1945* (Berghahn Books, 2006.)
- Sweig, Julia. *Friendly fire : losing friends and making enemies in the anti-American century* (Public Affairs, 2006.)
- Tsygankov, Andrei P. *Whose world order? : Russia's perception of American ideas after the Cold War* (Notre Dame 2004.)
- Watson, James ed. *Golden Arches East: McDonald's in East Asia* (Stanford 1998)

Media Analysis

Each student will choose a particular issue and country to follow in the news during the semester. Students will keep a log of incidents when their issue is reported in the US media and in the comparison country, and what the editorial slant is. After following the issue for several weeks, students will write a synopsis of the differences in US and foreign media in relation to their issue, and how public opinion on the issue compares in the US and abroad. Below is a list of sites which will be helpful for locating the major newspapers in various world regions.

[Middle East Media Sources](#) lists a range of outlets with their national and political affiliations

[People's Daily](#) online (China)

[World Newspapers](#) directory of online media sources

[Reporters without borders](#)

[Directory of online international English newspapers](#)

[Electronic Newspapers of Africa](#) lists papers with their national and political affiliations

[Asia Online Newspapers](#)