

AMERICAN CULTURE: MYTHS AND REALITIES

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Subject: American society, chiefly, but not only, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and its problems, including democracy in an industrial order, the city, class stratification, and racial conflict.

Course Description: This course invites you to examine the origin and influence of some enduring myths in American culture. We will study concepts and figures widely believed to be exemplary representations of American culture to learn about their evolution, cultural impact, and controversies they created. Among other subjects, we will examine the legacy of Martin Luther, Christopher Columbus, Pocahontas, and George Washington. We will also study such enduring cultural concepts and icons as the “city upon a hill,” *e pluribus unum*, Manifest Destiny, and the Gospel of Wealth.

Principles of Tolerance: As a student in this course, you are not required to agree with ideas found in our readings or expressed by your professor. You will, however, be asked to make an effort to understand the significance of the works we read and understand some of their enduring interpretations. If you cannot read such works for any reason (religious, personal, or any other) you may have to make a decision not to join this course. Should you have any concerns about this issue, we have to resolve them during the first week of classes.

Course Objectives: Upon completion of this course, students should be able to: 1) Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship among various myths about America and the realities of American experience; 2) Discuss and write about ways that Americans working in at least two genres of cultural production (literary, visual, rhetorical, musical, etc.) have created, identified, and commented upon various American myths and realities; 3) Craft an evidence-based argument which reflects the interdisciplinary method and philosophy of American Studies.

As a General Education course, AMS 231 fulfills the Social Scientific Analysis requirement. Upon completion of a Social Scientific Analysis-designated course, students should be able to: 1) Discuss and write about the role of institutions, groups, and individuals in society; 2) Discuss and write about human behavior and thought in its political, economic, social, cultural, and/or geographic context; 3) Demonstrate the use of the fundamental methodologies of the social sciences, such as, hypothesis development, data collection and analysis, and the critical evaluation of evidence.

About Your Professor: Alexander Moudrov is a researcher in early American culture and transatlantic studies. He received a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from The Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Apart from his dissertation, “The Rise of the American Culture of Sensationalism: 1620-1860,” he published essays on various aspects of early American culture and such authors as George Thompson, Oscar Wilde, Plato, and Vladimir Nabokov. He held teaching appointments in literature, history, and American Studies at Queens College, Montclair State University, New Jersey City University, and The College of Staten Island.

This is an **online course**. All activities are conducted online through Blackboard. You are expected to have access to a computer, the internet, Blackboard, and your email account listed on Blackboard as your contact. Tablets and smartphones are not sufficient to complete the required assignments.

ASYNCHRONOUS ONLINE COURSES: BASIC CONSIDERATIONS | This asynchronous online course does not require you to participate in live video sessions. Lectures are delivered as either podcasts or PDFs through Blackboard. Each week you are expected to read assigned texts and complete two or three assignments by set deadlines. While asynchronous courses allow students to have some control over their schedules, those who take such courses are expected to be unfailingly diligent and punctual in their work. Your progress in this course depends entirely on your ability to keep up with the readings and submit the assignments on time. This course is not suitable for those who cannot work without supervision and have a tendency to rely on excuses not to complete assignments on time.

ATTENDANCE, INVOLVEMENT, OFFICE HOURS | The course is conducted fully online. While you are not required to come on campus specifically to attend this class, you are expected to visit our course's website on Blackboard regularly, read the assigned lectures and primary sources, and submit written assignments by set deadlines. If you experience any difficulty with the course or would like to discuss our readings, you are encouraged to email me to set up a virtual meeting via Blackboard Collaborate. Try not to wait too long to address any issue that prevents you from doing well in the course. The longer you wait to address your concerns, the less likely you can do well in the course.

TECHNOLOGY | To function in the course, you must secure access to 1) a reliable computer, not a tablet or a smartphone, 2) your college email account, 3) Blackboard, and 4) a reliable internet access. If you experience difficulties of technical nature, you must contact the Help Desk at CSI (2A-306D / 718-982-3695). All communication in this course must be conducted through your college email.

REQUIRED TEXTS | All required materials will be made available electronically for free as PDFs. If you require accessible (machine-readable) versions of the required texts due to, for example, a disability, you have to purchase the assigned texts on your own. Contact your professor for references to assigned texts.

POLICY ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY & ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USE | Every submission in this course must be your own original work, created for this course. If your submission was created by AI writing software (ChatGPT, for example) or paraphrased from the text created by someone else without proper citations, it will be treated as a case of plagiarism. Your professor reserves the right to set up a meeting with you and ask follow up questions about any of your submissions in order to grade your work accurately. Students who violate the university's academic integrity policy, particularly by submitting plagiarized essays and discussion posts, will be investigated and typically prevented from passing the course.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES | If you require special accommodations due to a disability or some persistent medical issue, you can contact [the Center for Student Accessibility](#) (1P-101) in the beginning of the semester or when your medical condition demands it. Please refrain from talking about your medical issues directly to your professor, who is neither trained nor authorized to view your medical records (including notes from your doctor). Your professor can review only directives from the Center for Student Accessibility if you obtain them in a timely fashion. Keep in mind that such formal requests can be used only for special accommodations for future assignments and not as justifications to redo or makeup past assignments.

LEGAL | Students enrolled in this course must obtain the professor's permission to share the lectures posted on Blackboard with anyone, including other students, college staff, and faculty.

Grades are given for students' actual work, not their ability to do it or excuses not to do it. Even if you are an exceptionally bright student, your course grade will be based only on the work the professor receives from you by nonnegotiable deadlines. Out of fairness to other students who complete their work on time, late assignments will not be accepted under any circumstances. Your assignments, which are described in more detail on Blackboard, fall under the following categories:

GUIDING QUIZZES | 13% | Each week features a guiding quiz. While it requires no preparation, it guides you through the materials assigned for a particular week and allows you to receive credit for it. You are allowed to miss or fail one quiz without penalty.

TESTS | 37% | Almost each week, you will take a multiple-choice test to demonstrate your familiarity with the assigned materials. You are allowed to miss or fail two tests without penalty. If you complete all tests with passing grades (over 60), you will receive extra credit.

DB (DISCUSSION BOARD) POSTS | 50% | Each week, you will have to submit a written response to questions based on the assigned materials (by Thursday, 11:59 p.m.) and respond to another student's submission (by Sunday, 11:59 p.m.). You will receive one grade for these activities each week (4% of your course grade). You are allowed to miss or fail two weeks of DB submissions without penalty. If you complete all DB assignments with passing grades (over 60), you will receive extra credit.

The following list is a simple outline of our course. For details about our assignments and relevant announcements, always rely on Blackboard. Possible changes in our schedule will be announced on Blackboard and by email. All readings are available on Blackboard.

WEEK 1 (AUGUST 28 - SEPTEMBER 3)
AMERICAN CULTURE: MYTHS AND REALITIES

Online Lecture: Survey of the subject and our readings; challenges of analyzing primary sources.

WEEK 2 (SEPTEMBER 4 - 10)
THE BIBLE IN AMERICAN IMAGINATION

Online Lecture: The Bible and Its Legacy. **Primary Sources:** Excerpts from the Book of Exodus and the Gospel According to Matthew.

WEEK 3 (SEPTEMBER 11 – 17)
THE REFORMATION

Online Lecture: The Reformation and its Impact on American history. **Primary Source:** John Calvin's *The Necessity of Reforming the Church* (1543). **Additional Reading:** Wallbank's *Civilization: Past & Present* (Chapter 12).

WEEK 4 (SEPTEMBER 18 – 24)
CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

Online Lecture: Europeans' perception of the New World; early American travel narratives. **Primary Sources:** Christopher Columbus' Letter to Lord Rafael Sanchez (1493) and Amerigo Vespucci's *Mundus Novus* (1503).

WEEK 5 (SEPTEMBER 25 – OCTOBER 1)
CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS
(CONT'D)

Reading: Heike Paul's *The Myths That Made America* (Chapter 1).

WEEK 6 (OCTOBER 2 - 8)
POCAHONTAS IN TRANSATLANTIC IMAGINATION

Online Lecture: Pocahontas in Transatlantic Imagination. **Primary Sources:** John Rolfe's "Letter to Thomas Dale" (1614). **Additional Reading:** Heike Paul's *The Myths That Made America* (Chapter 2).

WEEK 7 (OCTOBER 9 – 15)
THE PILGRIMS AND "A CITY UPON A HILL"

Online Lecture: Puritanism and Colonization. **Primary Sources:** The Massachusetts Body of Liberties (1641).

WEEK 8 (OCTOBER 16 - 22)
FAITH AND REASON IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Online Lecture: The Enlightenment in Europe and American colonies; the Great Awakening. **Primary Sources:** *Some Account of the Early Part of the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge* (ca. 1730) and Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* (1784).

WEEK 9 (OCTOBER 23 - 29)
THE REVOLUTION: NEW VISIONS OF AMERICA

Online Lecture: The Revolution and its Ideals. **Primary Sources:** The Inaugural Addresses of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson.

WEEK 10 (OCTOBER 30 - NOVEMBER 5)
AMERICAN CIVIL RELIGION

Primary Sources: "The Star-Spangled Banner" (1814) and The Pledge of Allegiance (1892, 1954). **Reading:** Robert Bellah's "Civil Religion in America."

WEEKS 11 (NOVEMBER 6 - 12)
THE US CONSTITUTION

Primary Sources: The US Constitution.

WEEK 12 (NOVEMBER 13 - 19)
MANIFEST DESTINY

Online Lecture: Manifest Destiny as a Concept: Origins and Impact on American Culture. **Primary Sources:** Clappe's *The Shirley Letters*.

WEEK X (NOVEMBER 20 - 26)
THANKSGIVING BREAK

There are no activities scheduled for this week. It is recommended that you take time to look into the remaining assignments for this course.

WEEK 13 (NOVEMBER 27 - DECEMBER 3)
URBAN AMERICA

Online Lecture: This section focuses on American cities, which grew rapidly in the nineteenth century. **Primary Sources:** New York: 1820-65 (a documentary).

WEEK 14 (DECEMBER 4 - 10)
THE GOSPEL OF PROSPERITY

Online Lecture: The Cult of Wealth in the US. **Reading:** Heike Paul's *The Myths That Made America* (Chapter 7).