

Professor Daniel A. Nathan
AM 332, Global Perspectives of the U.S.
TLC 307, TTh 3:40-5:00
Office: TLC 330 (580-5023)
Office Hours: TTh 1:00-2:30 & by appt.
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Course Description & Objectives

This course assesses and puts in historical context specific global perspectives on and representations of the United States, its citizens and culture. Its guiding presupposition is that sometimes other people see the U.S. more clearly (or at least very differently) than Americans do, and that those perspectives can teach us important things about ourselves and the rest of the world. Furthermore, taking into account the wide-ranging effects of globalization and the 9/11 terrorist attacks, it is particularly important to consider carefully how people from around the world understand the United States, and how and why their perceptions have been developed, sustained, and modified.

Employing an interdisciplinary methodology that draws on history, foreign policy, sociology, journalism, art, autobiography, film, and the Internet, we will consider how the United States appeared to Europeans in the eighteenth century, from a distance and from these shores, and how others since then have made sense of the United States, with an emphasis on the twentieth century and the post-9/11 cultural moment.

The course does not embrace a “coverage” model that strives to be comprehensive (as if that is possible given this subject). Rather, it examines select themes—the preferred national narrative of the U.S. as a place of freedom, opportunity, democracy, and multicultural pluralism; different forms of anti-Americanism; and uneasy ambivalence—and analyzes some of the different ways in which they have been articulated.

The course provides students with many opportunities to sharpen analytical, research, writing, and oral presentation skills. In the process, students will cultivate the ability to:

- formulate productive, appropriate questions
- examine assumptions
- read critically
- think historically
- practice interdisciplinarity
- collect and analyze different kinds of evidence
- reach conclusions based upon that evidence
- make connections among ideas
- acknowledge complexity and ambiguity
- communicate ideas in writing and verbally

As the course is a seminar, students will participate in class discussions, centering upon considerations of the assigned readings (texts should be brought to class). Discussions are collective endeavors that demand everyone’s preparation, attendance, and participation. Learning to participate in a discussion involves social and intellectual skills that are an essential part of one’s education. These include: listening to others and learning to absorb and synthesize their remarks; learning to respond constructively and analytically to others’

“In this era of globalization, American studies scholars are in step with scholars of history, literature, geography, anthropology, and those across the disciplines who perceive the need to go beyond the paradigm of the nation as the basic unit of knowledge. In American studies, this means seeing American history and culture in a variety of international contexts and comparative perspectives, at its many borders and not from a single mythical center.”

—Amy Kaplan, *American Literary History*, 2005

“There is a pro-American world out there, in Europe in particular but elsewhere as well. It is just waiting for an America it can respect as well as admire.”

—Eric Alterman, *The Nation*, 2003

ideas; learning to develop and articulate positions of one's own; responding to criticism; and learning to modify or discard an argument as one comes to see another, more satisfactory one. Students are expected to come to class eager to share their ideas about the topics under consideration and to question our readings and one another.

At the end of the course, students will have an enriched sense of global perspectives of the United States; will be more critically alert and have grappled with some difficult methodological issues; will have researched a specific set of global perspectives on the United States; and will (hopefully) be more sensitive to cultural differences and better citizens of the world.

Books

David Cohen, *Chasing the Red, White, and Blue*

Philip R. DeVita and James D. Armstrong, *Distant Mirrors: America as a Foreign Culture*, 3rd ed.

Oscar Handlin and Lilian Handlin, *From the Outer World: Perspectives on People and Places,*

Manners and Customs in the United States, as Reported by Travelers from Asia, Africa, Australia, and Latin America

Andrew Kohut and Bruce Stokes, *America Against the World: How We Are Different and Why We Are Disliked*

Andrew Ross and Kristin Ross, *Anti-Americanism*

Note: there are also other readings (including reports from the Pew Global Attitudes Project, which are online at <http://pewglobal.org/>).

Film

Roger Weisberg, *Road Scholar*

Requirements

Course requirements include three papers (the first two will be 3-5 pages, the third will be 10-12 pages), two presentations, active class participation and in-class writing assignments. You must complete all assignments in order to pass this course. The break down of grades is as follows:

First Individual Presentation	10%	
Second Individual Presentation	15%	
First Paper	15%	(due October 9)
Second Paper	20%	(due November 1)
Third Paper	25%	(due December 6)
Class Participation	15%	(which will include in-class discussions, writing assignments, and attendance)

Attendance & Participation

Because the success of the course depends upon your participation, attendance is mandatory. Three or more absences will adversely affect your final grade; six or more absences and you will fail the course. Active participation requires that you attend class regularly, that you come to class prepared (i.e., having carefully read and thought about the assigned material), and that you share your perspectives, ideas, and questions.

Special Needs

Anyone who has a disability which may require some modification of seating, testing, or other class requirements should see me after class or during my office hours so that we can make appropriate arrangements.

Reading Schedule

- 9/6: Introductions, goals, policies, reading/screening schedule
- 9/11: Feinberg, "What Students Don't Learn Abroad"
Pells, "American Historians Would Do Well to Get Out of the Country"
- 9/13: Alterman, "USA Oui! Bush Non!"
Pew Global Attitudes Project, "America's Image Slips, But Allies Share U.S. Concerns Over Iran, Hamas"
Zakaria, "Beyond Bush"
- 9/18: Honour, *The New Golden Land* excerpts
- 9/19: Honour, *The New Golden Land* excerpts
- 9/25: de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* excerpts
- 9/27: de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* excerpts
- 10/2: Pierson, *Tocqueville in America* excerpts
- 10/4: Dickens, *American Notes* excerpts
- 10/9: No Class
- 10/11: Handlin and Handlin, *From the Outer World*, 1-208
- 10/16: Handlin and Handlin, *From the Outer World*, 209-399
- 10/18: Handlin and Handlin, *From the Outer World*, 400-482
- 10/23: DeVita and Armstrong, *Distant Mirrors*, xi-xvi, 32-137
- 10/25: DeVita and Armstrong, *Distant Mirrors*, 139-196
- 10/30: International Faculty, Staff, and Student Panel
- 11/1: Weisberg, *Road Scholar* (film)
- 11/6: Cohen, *Chasing the Red, White, and Blue*, ix-217
- 11/8: Cohen, *Chasing the Red, White, and Blue*, 218-292
- 11/13: Rinder, *The American Effect* excerpts
- 11/15: Ross and Ross, *Anti-Americanism*, 1-17, 47-122
- 11/20: Ross and Ross, *Anti-Americanism*, 125-270
- 11/22: No Class—Thanksgiving
- 11/27: Kohut and Stokes, *America Against the World*, ix-161
- 11/29: Kohut and Stokes, *America Against the World*, 162-225
- 12/4: Pew Global Attitudes Project, <http://pewglobal.org/>
- 12/6: Lévy, *American Vertigo: Traveling America in the Footsteps of Tocqueville* excerpts
Keillor, "On the Road Avec M. Lévy"
- 12/11: Conclusions and course evaluations
- 12/20: Final Exam (oral presentations), 1:30-4:30 PM, TLC 307

Screening Schedule

- 10/31: *Road Scholar* 301 TLC, 7:00 PM