

Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in American History and Literature

Course supervisor: David L. Robbins, PhD

Instructors: prof. David Robbins, PhD, Blanka Maderová, PhD, Mgr. Marcela Janíčková,

Recommended number of ECTS credits: 6

Class meets once a week for 3 hours (lecture and seminar).

Annotation:

An overview of American cultural history from the perspective of its racial and ethnic minorities. The course examines the notions of ethnicity, cultural diversity, and the "other" in the U.S. present and past. It focuses on the problematic struggle of various disempowered, marginalized "minorities" in American society to gain recognition as full and equal members of a society that claims to be a haven for all oppressed from the rest of the world -- a society that prides itself on its openness, pluralism, and equality of opportunity. We shall see that, rather than attacking the hypocrisy of this society, minorities have now and again chosen to appeal to the fairness of the very people who exclude them. It is quite surprising that the speakers of the disempowered have, historically, been the most hopeful, most ardent proponents of the country's ideals. We shall examine the rhetoric of their attack on -- or appeal to? -- the "majority" and the majority's response.

Grading procedure:

Evaluation is based on 1 comparative essay on a topic discussed with an instructor (8 pages, spacing 1,5, font Times New Roman p.12).

Attendance:

Two absences are permitted. If you are absent more times, you will be asked to write a paper to make up for the class(es) missed.

Learning outcomes:

- 1) Provide students with basic historical and conceptual familiarity regarding relevant ethnicities/races/genders in U.S. cultural sphere(s).
- 2) Provide students with awareness of the issues regarding interactions of these ethnicities/races/genders both diachronically and synchronically, and regarding specific cultural, sociological economic, and political factors conditioning those interactions.
- 3) Help students develop empathetic and sympathetic awareness of the subject positions of individual and groups within the ethnicities/races/genders to be discussed.
- 4) Help students develop their analytic and problematizing skills in thinking about and discussing issues of ethnicity, race, and gender in the U.S. – and , by extension, their openness to discussion these issues in similarly nuanced terms in other cultural arenas.

Course Content:

- 1) Ideological foundations of American society I.
R.W. Emerson: "Circles"
excerpts from A. de Tocqueville: Democracy in America [1835 and 1840]
- 2) Ideological foundations of American society II. --
R.W. Emerson: "Spiritual Laws", "Politics"
excerpts from:
A. de Tocqueville, Democracy in America [1835 and 1840]
J. H. St. J. de Crevecoeur: Letters from an American Farmer [1782]
and from the work of J.F. Cooper and B. Franklin
- 3) Ideology of the self-made man and of the American dream
F.S. Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby [1925]
excerpts from Autobiography of Frederick Douglass [1845]

- 4) Becoming "white American" – European ethnic immigration to the USA in the second half of the 19th century
 excerpts from:
 Mary Antin, The Promised Land [1912]
 Jennifer L. Hochschild: Facing up to the American Dream [1995]
 Noel Ignatiev, How the Irish Became White [1995]
- 5) Hispanic immigration
 excerpts from Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza [1987]
- 6) Early American feminist writing
 Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "The Solitude of Self" [1892]
 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, „Yellow Wallpaper“ [1899]
 Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, chapter Master and Slave [1807]
 Stanton, Seneca Falls Woman's Rights Convention, Declarations and resolves [1848]
 excerpts from Margaret Fuller, Woman in the Nineteenth Century [1845]
- 7) 20th-century American feminism
 excerpts from Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique [1963]
 excerpts from Judith Butler, Gender Trouble [1990]
- 8) Antebellum South, rhetorics employed to justify and oppose slavery and racism;
 traditional, southern rendering of the Reconstruction that became the nation's interpretation in the early 20th ct
 Eric Foner, Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction [2006]
 chapter 2: Forever Free
 Kenneth M. Stampp: "The Tragic Legend of Reconstruction" in Reconstruction – An Anthology of Revisionist Writings [1967]
- 9) Meanings of freedom for African Americans after the Civil War -- Presidential Reconstruction and achievements of Congressional Reconstruction
 Foner, Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction [2006]
 chapter 4: An American Crisis
 chapter 5: The Tocsins of Freedom (with the exception of p. 134 , paragraph "In 1867 ..." to page 137, paragraph "Hostile contemporaries ...")
- 10) The "Jim Crow" era as documented in contemporary black writers
 W.E.B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk [1903]
 Cha 1: Of Our Spiritual Strivings
 Cha 3: Of B.T. Washington and Others
 excerpts from B.T. Washington: Up From Slavery [1901]
 poetry of Paul Lurance Dunbar; excerpts from Marcus Garvey
- 11) 20th-century African-American writers I
 James Baldwin, Nobody Knows My Name [1949]
 chapters: "Discovery What It Means to Be an American", "In Search of a Majority"
 excerpts from Richard Wright, Native Son [1940] and Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man [1952]
 poetry of Langston Hughes
- 12) 20th-century African-American writers II
 Alice Walker, The Color Purple [1982]
- 13) The Civil Rights Movement, Women's Rights, and Gay Rights Movements of the second half of the twentieth century; their various rhetorics and manifestations
 M. L. King, "Black Power" in Where Do We Go From Here? [1967]
 Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet" [1964]
 excerpts from Stokeley Carmichael, Eldredge Cleaver, Angela Davis, and gay liberation activists;
 poetry by Maya Angelou