

History 306 and 706  
 Spring 2017  
 HIS 304  
 MWF 10:10-11

Professor Charles Capper  
 Office: HIS 502  
 Telephone: 617-353-8318  
 E-mail: capper@bu.edu  
 Office Hours: WF 11-12:30

## **American Thought and Culture, 1900 to the Present**

### **Elements**

#### READINGS:

David A. Hollinger and Charles Capper, eds., *The American Intellectual Tradition: A Sourcebook*, Vol. 2, Seventh Edition (Oxford)  
 Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (Penguin)  
 F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (Scribner)  
 Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (Random)

#### FILMS:

Joseph Dorfman's *Arguing the World*  
 Frank Capra's *Meet John Doe*  
 Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound*  
 Nicholas Ray's *Rebel without a Cause*

**SUBJECT AND APPROACH:** History 305/705 and 306/706 investigate the history of ideas underlying religious, philosophical, political, artistic, and other major cultural practices in the United States. Both courses emphasize the thinkers and movements most influential in formulating, debating, and disseminating these ideas in their own time and beyond. Both also address two important questions about this distinctive approach to the American past. One concerns method: How does the study of reflective and expressive thought illuminate the larger culture of the United States? The other is about definition: In light of the nation's extensive importation of ideas from Europe, its unique diversity of ethnic and other identity groups, and its purportedly hyper-utilitarian ethos, what does it mean to speak of an "American Intellectual Tradition"?

**THEMES AND TOPICS:** History 306 examines American thought in the twentieth century when intellectuals in the United States determinedly anointed themselves and their times as "modern." But what was distinctively "modern" about them and what were the historical stakes in conceptualizing them that way?

To get at answers we'll pay particular attention to four modern sets of ideas and the controversies they generated: philosophical pragmatism's revolt against intellectual "formalism," social science's discovery of cultural relativism, modernist art's lures of unreason and self-reflexivity, and political theorists' debates over America's role in the world. Since thinkers in the United States often linked these ideas, rightly or wrongly, to progressive liberalism, challenges to that ideology after World War II over questions of "power," intellectual authority, cultural fragmentation, and racial and gender identities

created a crisis of legitimacy for modern thought. Whether succeeding conservative and postmodernist thinkers overcame or exacerbated this crisis is a question we will consider. Finally, returning to the anxiety over “unbelief” initially sparking the modernist turn, we conclude by considering the search for meaning in these recent postmodern reconfigurations of science, religion, popular culture, and global justice.

READING: The required texts are all primary works written by thinkers at the time. The versions that we’ll be using are contained in books that are available at the BU Barnes and Noble bookstore or can be purchased online from various booksellers.

“FILMS OF AMERICAN IDEAS”: Viewing the films listed on the syllabus is required. They can be obtained from providers such as You Tube and Netflix. One copy of each film will also be available for individual viewing for one week before it is discussed in class at the reserve desk of the Geddes Language Center at 685 Commonwealth Ave., 5<sup>th</sup> Floor.

DISCUSSIONS: In order to make lectures comprehensible and discussions fruitful, reading assignments and film screenings must be done *before* the date for the topic and reading indicated on the syllabus. Discussions will be emphasized on certain dates, but questions and comments are encouraged throughout the term.

### Assignments

SHORT PAPERS: Each student will write two 4-5 page papers analyzing the ideas addressed in all or most of the required documents for a particular day. Remember that your object is not just to paraphrase the readings but to *analyze* them—i.e., pick out the main arguments or themes presented or inferred, evaluate how they are supported and developed, and estimate how they fit or not into topics or movements we have discussed in the course so far. If you choose a day when multiple documents are assigned, you should be sure to compare them in your analysis. The first paper can be on any required reading assignment through **Mar. 15** and should be turned in no later than the beginning of class on the day the assignment is scheduled to be discussed. The second short paper can be on any assignment from **Mar. 17** through **May 1** and will likewise be due in class on the day the document(s) are discussed.

TERM PAPER: This paper is an essay of 10 pages on a single book by an American thinker. It should address the question, “*What marks this book as a product of its intellectual time?*” You may choose any book by an American author listed in the “Chronologies” sections of *AIT2* with four qualifications: 1.) The book must not include a selection from the required reading. (You may choose a different book by the author.) 2.) The first publication date of your book should be between about 1900 and 1985. 3.) Before selecting it, you should get my approval either in person or by email. 4.) If you want to write on a novel, you need to consult me about its suitability for the course.

In making a preliminary assessment of possible books, you might find it helpful to consult a dictionary of American thinkers and ideas, such as Richard Wightman Fox and

James T. Kloppenberg's *Companion to American Thought* (1995). The focus of your paper should *not* be on the author's life but on his or her *ideas*. You should not try to fit your book into the history of particular social and political events of its era, although you may allude to them. Rather you should select a central intellectual problem, question, theme, or movement alive at the time and position your book in relation to it. To compare your author's ideas on this question to similar or different ones articulated by intellectuals roughly writing around the same time, you should use evidence drawn from relevant documents in *AIT2* or other assigned reading. Papers will be due **May 5** by 4:30 PM in my box in the History Department Office.

**CITATIONS:** Citation form should be consistent and generally follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*. If you frequently cite the same text, you can place a shortened version of author and title in parentheses at the end of a quotation or sentence and before the period and create a bibliography of full citations at the end of the paper.

**EXAMS:** There will be a quiz and a final.

**GRADE BREAKDOWN:** 10% on the quiz, 30% on the two short papers, 30% on the term paper, and 30% on the final.

**GRADUATE STUDENTS AND AUDITORS:** HI 706 graduate students are required to do the recommended readings and to reference them where relevant in their papers and exams. In addition to the required exams and writing assignments, they will be asked to write a 10-page historiography paper due at the end of the semester. Auditors will not write papers or take exams but are expected to regularly attend, do the required readings, and, if they wish, participate in discussions.

### **Regulations**

**ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION:** Attendance at all classes is required and unexplained absences will lower a student's final grade. Participation in the form of questions and comments in class may raise it by as much as a half grade.

**LATE WORK:** Make-ups will not be given nor will late papers be accepted except in the case of an extraordinary emergency, such as a severe illness or the death of a parent, spouse, or partner. I need to be informed in advance unless the event's suddenness makes that impossible. Generally, a makeup date will be scheduled within a week.

**PLAGIARISM:** Plagiarism is arguably the most serious ethical violation that a scholar or student can commit in his or her writing. Read the Academic Conduct Code to understand the college policy on plagiarism. All cases of its suspected perpetration, as well as all other acts of suspected academic misconduct, will be referred to the Dean's Office. If found guilty, a student will receive the maximum punishment allowed at the university.

ETIQUETTE: To preserve a classroom atmosphere conducive to collective learning, turn off cell phones and use laptop computers only for taking notes on the classroom lecture and discussion and without excessively drawing visual attention away from them.

## Topics and Reading Schedule

### Jan. 20 Ideas and Intellectuals in History

*Recommended:*

Stefan Collini et al., "What Is Intellectual History?" *History Today*, 35 (Oct. 1985)

#### *I. Social Progress and the Power of Intellect*

### Jan. 23 Progressive History and American Exceptionalism

*Reading:*

*AIT2*, vii-xvii

Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *AIT2*, 55-63

Woodrow Wilson, "The Ideals of America," *AIT2*, 149-56

### Jan. 25 W. E. B. Du Bois's Colored Exceptionalism

*Reading:*

*AIT2*, 123-27

W. E. B. Du Bois, Selection from *The Souls of Black Folk*, *AIT2*, 157-62

*Recommended:*

Julia Liss, "Diasporic Identities: The Science and Politics of Race in the Work of Franz Boas and W. E. B. Du Bois," *Cultural Anthropology*, 8 (1998): 127-66

### Jan. 27 The Evolutionist Revolt against Formalism

*Reading:*

Thorstein Veblen, Selection from *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, *AIT2*, 134-48

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., "Natural Law," *AIT2*, 211-14

### Jan. 30 Two Faces of Progressivism

*Reading:*

Jane Addams, "The Subjective Necessity of Social Settlements," *AIT2*, 128-33

Walter Lippmann, Selection from *Drift and Mastery*, *AIT2*, 174-78

Feb. 1 **Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* and the Naturalist Romance of Commodification**

*Reading:*

Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (1900)

Feb. 3 **George Santayana's Critique of the Genteel Tradition**

*Reading:*

George Santayana, "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy," *AIT2*, 110-22

Feb. 6 **William James and the Meaning of Pragmatism**

*Reading:*

William James, "What Pragmatism Means," *AIT2*, 163-73

*Recommended:*

James T. Kloppenberg, "Pragmatism: An Old Name for Some New Ways of Thinking?" *Journal of American History*, 83 (1996): 100-138

Feb. 8 **John Dewey's Democratic Pragmatism**

*Reading:*

John Dewey, "Philosophy and Democracy," *AIT2*, 215-23

Feb. 10 **World War I and the Acceleration of Anti-Victorianism**

*Reading:*

Randolph Bourne, "Twilight of the Idols," *AIT2*, 184, 195-201

H. L. Mencken, "Puritanism as a Literary Force," *AIT2*, 202-10

*Recommended:*

Henry F. May, "The Rebellion of the Intellectuals, 1912-1917," *American Quarterly*, 8 (Summer 1956): 114-26

Feb. 13 **World War I and the Acceleration of Anti-Victorianism Continued**

Feb. 15 **"The Great Race," Ethnic Pluralism, and the Concept of Cultural Relativism**

*Reading:*

- Madison Grant, Selection from *The Passing of the Great Race*, *AIT2*, 179-83  
 Randolph Bourne, "Trans-National America," *AIT2*, 185-94  
 Ruth Benedict, Selection from *Patterns of Culture*, *AIT2*, 245-54

*Recommended:*

- Richard Handler, "Boasian Anthropology and the Critique of American Culture," *American Quarterly*, 42 (1990): 252-73

Feb. 17 **"The Great Race," Ethnic Pluralism, and the Concept of Cultural Relativism Continued**

Feb. 20 **Presidents' Day Holiday**

Feb. 21 **QUIZ**

Feb. 22 **Stillborn Modernism and America's Second Literary Renaissance**

*Reading:*

- Joseph Wood Krutch, Selection from *The Modern Temper*, *AIT2*, 224-32

Feb. 24 **F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and "The American Dream"**

*Reading:*

- F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925)

Feb. 27 **The Southern Rejection of "Progress"**

*Reading:*

- John Crowe Ransom, "Reconstructed but Unregenerate," *AIT2*, 233-44

Mar. 1 **From Communism to Pragmatist Marxism**

*Reading:*

- Sidney Hook, "Communism without Dogmas," *AIT2*, 255-64

Mar. 3 ***Arguing the World* and the New York Intellectuals**

*Discussion of Film:* Joseph Dorfman's *Arguing the World* (1998)

Mar. 4-12 **Spring Recess**

## ***II. Extending Democracy and Formulating the Modern***

Mar. 13 **1930s Liberalism and the Debate over “The American Century”**

*Reading:*

*AIT2*, 267-69

David E. Lilienthal, Selection from *TVA: Democracy on the March*,  
*AIT2*, 280-85

Henry Luce, Selection from “The American Century” (1941), on  
reserve

Henry A. Wallace, Selection from *The Century of the Common Man*  
(1942), on reserve

Mar. 15 **Frank Capra’s *Meet John Doe*, Cultural Populism, and the Specter of Fascism**

*Discussion of Film:* Frank Capra’s *Meet John Doe* (1941)

**LAST DAY TO TURN IN FIRST SHORT PAPER**

Mar. 17 **Universalist Liberalism and America’s Racial Dilemma**

*Reading:*

Gunnar Myrdal, Selection from *An American Dilemma*, *AIT2*, 286-94

James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” *AIT2*, 302-07

Martin Luther King, Jr., “Loving Your Enemies,” *AIT2*, 381-89

*Recommended:*

Rogers W. Smith, “Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The  
Multiple Traditions in America,” *American Political Science Review*,  
87 (2003), 549-66

Mar. 20 **Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* and Racial Modernism**

*Reading:*

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952)

Mar. 22 **Cold-War Anti-Communisms**

*Reading:*

George F. Kennan, Selection from *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950*,  
*AIT2*, 324-28

Whittaker Chambers, “Letter to My Children,” *AIT2*, 329-41

Hannah Arendt, “Ideology and Terror,” *AIT2*, 355-65

Mar. 24 **The Reassertion of Neo-Orthodox Christianity**

*Reading:*

Reinhold Niebuhr, Selection from *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, *AIT2*, 295-301

Perry Miller, "Errand into the Wilderness," *AIT2*, 342-54

John Courtney Murray, Selection from *We Hold These Truths*, *AIT2*, 414-21

*Recommended:*

John T. McGreevy, "Thinking on One's Own: Catholicism in the American Intellectual Imagination, 1928-1960," *Journal of American History*, 84 (1997): 97-131

Mar. 27 **Postwar Modernism and Its Discontents**

*Reading:*

Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *AIT2*, 270-79

Lionel Trilling, "On the Teaching of Modern Literature," *AIT2*, 430-443

Mar. 29 **Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound*, the Psycho-thriller, and Postwar Film Noir**

*Discussion of Film:* Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945)

Mar. 31 **Ego Psychoanalysis and the "Identity" Concept**

*Reading:*

Erik H. Erikson, Selection from *Childhood and Society*, *AIT2*, 308-23

Apr. 3 **Nicholas Ray's *Rebel without a Cause* and Psycho-cultural Critique**

*Discussion of Film:* Nicholas Ray's *Rebel without a Cause*

Apr. 5 **Modernization Theory and Postwar Social Science**

*Reading:*

W. W. Rostow, Selection from *The Stages of Economic Growth*, *AIT2*, 379-86

Daniel Bell, "The End of Ideology," *AIT2*, on reserve

Apr. 7 **John Rawls and the Revival of Liberal Ethics**

*Reading:*

John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness," *AIT2*, 390-406

Apr. 10 **The (Re)surgence of Intellectual Conservatism**



*Reading:*

Peter F. Drucker, "Innovation—The New Conservatism?" *AIT2*, 407-13

Milton Friedman, Selection from *Capitalism and Freedom*, *AIT2*, 444-53

Ayn Rand, "Man's Rights," *AIT2*, 454-59

Apr. 12 **Preview**

### ***III. Postmodernism and the Reassessment of Identities and Solidarities***

Apr. 14 **New Left Social Theory and the War in Vietnam**

*Reading:*

*AIT2*, 462-64

C. Wright Mills, "Letter to the New Left," *AIT2*, 478-86

Herbert Marcuse, Selection from *One-Dimensional Man*, *AIT2*, 521-30

Noam Chomsky, "The Responsibilities of Intellectuals," *AIT2*, 542-51

Apr. 17 **Patriots Day**

Apr. 19 **The Debate over Identity Group Solidarities**

*Reading:*

Malcolm X, Selection from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, *AIT2*, 531-41

Richard Rodriguez, Selection from *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*, *AIT2*, 575-88

Barak Obama, "A More Perfect Union," *AIT2*, 653-660

Apr. 21 **The Reconceptualization of Gender**

*Reading:*

Betty Friedan, Selection from *The Feminine Mystique*, *AIT2*, 506-13

Nancy Chodorow, "Gender, Relations, and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective," *AIT2*, 563-74

Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Selection from "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse," *AIT2*, 589-98

Judith Butler, Selection from *Gender Trouble*, *AIT2*, 635-41

Apr. 24 **Postmodernism and Cultural Critique**

*Reading:*

Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation," *AIT2*, 514-20

Frederic Jameson, Selection from "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," *AIT2*, 600-609

Apr. 26 **Paradigms and Solidarities in Postmodernist Science**

*Reading:*

J. Robert Oppenheimer, "The Sciences and Man's Community," *AIT2*, 366-72

Thomas S. Kuhn, Selection from *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, *AIT2*, 497-505

Richard Rorty, "Science as Solidarity," *AIT2*, 610-20

Apr. 28 **The End of Faith?**

*Reading:*

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Christianity's Third Great Challenge," *AIT2*, 465-70

Harold John Ockenga, "Resurgent Evangelical Leadership," *AIT2*, 471-77

Philip Kitcher, "Militant Modern Atheism," *AIT2*, 661-73

*Recommended:*

David A. Hollinger, "The Accommodation of Protestant Christianity with the Enlightenment: An Old Drama Still Being Enacted," in Hollinger's *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton, 2013), 1-17

May 1 **Post-Colonialism, Post-Communism, and the Search for Global Justice**

*Reading:*

Edward Said, Selection from *Orientalism*, *AIT2*, 552-62

Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *AIT2*, 621-34

Thomas Pogge, "Priorities of Global Justice," *AIT2*, 642-52

**LAST DAY TO TURN IN SECOND SHORT PAPER**

May 3 **Review**

May 5 **TERM PAPERS DUE:** By 4:30 PM in my box in the History Department Office

May 8 **FINAL: 9-11 AM in class**

May 10 **GRADUATE HISTORIOGRAPHY PAPERS DUE:** By 4:30 PM in my box in the History Department Office