American Thought and Culture, 1776 to 1900

Elements

REQUIRED READING:

James Fenimore Cooper, The Prairie (Penguin)
Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom’s Cabin (Penguin)
Mark Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Viking-Penguin)
Harold Frederic, The Damnation of Theron Ware (Viking-Penguin)

AIMS AND APPROACHES: History 305/705 and 306/706 investigate the history of ideas underlying religious, philosophical, political, artistic, and other intellectual disciplines and 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 on the courses’ subject. One is methodological: How does the study of reflective and expressive thought illuminate the larger culture of the United States? The other is definitional: 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-practical ethos, what does it mean to speak of an “American Intellectual Tradition”?

THEMES AND TOPICS: History 305/705 examines how major American thinkers and intellectual movements of the “long nineteenth century” constructed an “exceptional” national identity by adjusting their culture’s provincial Protestant and Enlightenment traditions to the challenges of transnational democratic, Romantic, and secular modes of thinking. Topics include American Transcendentalism; evangelical and liberal Protestantism; pro- and anti-slavery arguments about “freedom,” race, and gender; philosophical idealism; literary realism; and scientific and social Darwinism.

READING: The required readings are all primary documents of their times, including essays, addresses, debates, book excerpts, pictures, and novels.

BOOKS AND ARTICLES: All required books are available at the BU Barnes and Noble bookstore or can be purchased from Amazon and other online booksellers. Links to electronic versions of articles from journals (e-journals) and essays from books (e-
reserve) may be found on the BU Libraries website. Students desiring overviews of major
periods in American intellectual history covered in HI 305/705 and HI 306/706 might
want to consult the relevant volumes in Lewis Perry and Howard Brick, Series Editors,
American Thought and Culture (1991-2010). Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen provides a
succinct synthesis in The Ideas That Made America: A Brief History (2019).

DISCUSSIONS AND QUESTIONS: To make lectures optimally useful and discussions
possible, it’s essential that reading assignments be done before the date indicated. Class
discussions will be emphasized on certain dates, but comments and questions will be
encouraged throughout the term. There will also usually be a time at the beginning or end
of class for students to ask questions about the reading and lectures.

Assignments

SHORT PAPERS: Students will be required to write two 5-page papers. Each is a
comparative analysis of all or at least most of the reading assignment for a particular day,
although you may, especially when the readings include a relatively long text, such as a
novel, largely emphasize it. The object is not just to summarize or paraphrase the
readings but to analyze them. Some ways of doing this would include picking out their
main arguments or themes, evaluating how they’re supported logically or rhetorically,
how in these respects they compare with each other, and how they fit (or don’t fit) into
the topics or texts we’ve discussed in the course so far.

The first paper can be on any required reading assignment from Sept. 5 through Oct. 22
and should be turned in no later than the beginning of class on the day the assignment
will be discussed. The second short paper can be on any assignment from Oct. 24
through Dec. 10 and will likewise be due in class on the day scheduled to discuss it.

TERM PAPER: This paper is an essay of 10 pages on a single book by an American
thinker and should address the question, “What marks this book as a product of its
intellectual time?” You may choose any book listed in the “Chronologies” sections of
AIT1 and AIT2 with four qualifications: 1.) The book must be by an American author. 2.)
Its first publication date should be roughly between 1776 and 1900. 3.) Generally it
should not include a major selection from the required reading. 4.) Ideally it should not
be a commonly assigned novel that you’ve already read.

Before selecting your book, you need to check with me either in person or by email about
your selection. In initially assessing 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 your author’s biography 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, using evidence
drawn from the required reading. Term papers will be due on Dec. 13).
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 its author and title in parentheses directly following a quotation or sentence and create a bibliography of full citations at the end.

EXAMS: There will be a quiz *(Oct. 1)* and a final *(Dec. 17)*.

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

GRADUATE STUDENTS: Graduate students enrolled in History 705 are expected to read the secondary texts listed in “Recommended Reading” and, where pertinent, reference them in some of their papers and exams. In addition they will be required to write a 10-page historiography paper on two or three scholarly works on any of the topics in the course, which will be due by *Dec. 16*. Students should consult with me about appropriate subjects and books.

AUDITORS: 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: Makeups will not be given nor will late papers be accepted except in the case of an extraordinary emergency or a severe illness. 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. 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. Laptop use should not interfere with your ability to interact with the instructor and other students.

**Hub Areas**

History 305 qualifies as a Hub course by engaging with three areas of thinking or “habits of mind”: historical consciousness, ethical reasoning, and critical thinking.
SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READING

Sept. 3  Intellectual History and the Long Nineteenth Century

Recommended:

I. ENLIGHTENMENT FOUNDATIONS

Sept. 5  Visions of Revolutionary Republicanism
Reading:
*AITI*, xi-xv, 109-14
Thomas Paine, Selection from *Common Sense*, in *AITI*, 139-47

Recommended:

Sept. 10 Debates over Republican Constitutionalism
Reading:
“Brutus,” in *AITI*, 158-68
James Madison, *The Federalist*, “Number 10” and “Number 51” in *AITI*, 169-78

Sept. 12 John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and the Republican Enlightenment
Reading:
John Adams to Samuel Adams and to Thomas Jefferson, in *AITI*, 187-96
Thomas Jefferson, Selection from *Notes on the State of Virginia*, in *AITI*, 197-208
Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, to Benjamin Rush, and to Thomas Law, in *AITI*, 209-18
Recommended:

Sept. 17 Race, Gender, and the Proto-Democratic Enlightenment
   Reading:
   Samuel Stanhope Smith, Selection from *An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species*, *AII*, 219-32

   Recommended:

II. PROTESTANT COUNTERPOINTS AND DEMOCRATIC ORDER

Sept. 19 The Reawakening of Protestant Theology
   Reading:
   *AII*, 233-38
   William Ellery Channing, “Unitarian Christianity,” in *AII*, 239-51
   Nathaniel William Taylor, *Concio ad Clerum*, in *AII*, 252-66

   Recommended:

Sept. 24 Christian Perfectionism and Social Reform
   Reading:
   John Humphrey Noyes, Selection from *The Berean*, in *AII*, 278-85
   Sarah Grimké, Selection from *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes, and the Condition of Woman*, in *AII*, 300-13

Sept. 26 The Problem of “The People” in Democratic Ideology
   Reading:
Orestes Brownson, “The Laboring Classes,” in AIT1, 324-39

Oct. 1 Harmony and Hierarchy in Whig Social Thought
Reading:
- Catharine Beecher, Selection from A Treatise on Domestic Economy, in AIT1, 340-53
- Henry C. Carey, Selection from Harmony of Interests, in AIT1, 354-64

QUIZ

III. ROMANTIC INTELLECT AND CULTURAL REFORM

Oct. 3 Romantic Nationalism in James Fenimore Cooper’s The Prairie
Reading:
- James Fenimore Cooper, The Prairie

Recommended:

Oct. 8 Transcendentalism as a Religious Demonstration
Reading:
- AIT1, 365-69
  - Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Divinity School Address,” AIT1, 386-98

Recommended:

Oct. 10 Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Philosophy of Self-Reliance
Reading:
- Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” AIT1, 399-412

Oct. 15 No Class—Substitute Monday Classes

Oct. 17 Transcendental Education
Reading:
- A. Bronson Alcott, Selection from Conversations with Children on the Gospels, AIT1, 370-85
- Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, “Plan of the West Roxbury Community,” in AIT1, 413-20
Oct. 22  Margaret Fuller, Henry David Thoreau, and Transcendentalist Politics  
Reading:
Margaret Fuller, Selection from *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, in *AIT1*, 421-39  
Henry David Thoreau, “Resistance to Civil Government,” in *AIT1*, 440-53  

Recommended:
John L. Thomas, “Romantic Reform in America,” *American Quarterly* (Winter 1965), 656-81

LAST DAY TO TURN IN FIRST SHORT PAPER

Oct. 24  Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, and the Two Souls of Romantic Democracy  
Reading:
Herman Melville, “Hawthorne and His Mosses,” in *AIT1*, 464-74  

Oct. 29  Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin, and the Powers of Sentiment  
Reading:
Horace Bushnell, “Christian Nurture,” *AIT1*, 454-63  
Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

IV. THE QUEST FOR UNION AND RENEWAL

Oct. 31  Slavery and the Making of Southern Conservatism  
Reading:
*AIT1*, 475-79  
John C. Calhoun, Selection from *A Disquisition on Government*, in *AIT1*, 480-90  
Louisa McCord, “Enfranchisement of Woman,” in *AIT1*, 491-503  
George Fitzhugh, Selection from *Sociology for the South*, in *AIT1*, 504-14

Recommended:

Nov. 5  Race and Nation in Antislavery Political Thought  
Reading:
William Lloyd Garrison, Selection from *Thoughts on Colonization*, in *AIT1*, 286-99
Martin Delany, Selection from *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*, in *AIT1*, 515-531
Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” in *AIT1*, 532-45

Nov. 7  **Abraham Lincoln, Francis Lieber, and the Antislavery Origins of American Nationalism**

*Reading:*
Abraham Lincoln, “Speech at Peoria, Illinois,” “Address Before the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society,” “Address Delivered at the Dedication of the Cemetery at Gettysburg,” and “Second Inaugural Address,” in *AIT1*, 546-61
Francis Lieber, “Nationalism and Internationalism,” *AIT1*, 562-74

**V. TOWARD A SECULAR CULTURE**

Nov. 12  **Huckleberry Finn and the Ironies of Literary Realism**

*Reading*
* AIT*, 3-4
Mark Twain, “Fenimore Cooper’s Literary Offences,” in *AIT2*, 64-70
Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

*Recommended:*

Nov. 14  **Constructs of Culture and the Rise of the Research University**

*Reading:*
Thomas Wentworth Higginson, “A Plea for Culture,” in *AIT2*, 11-14

*Recommended:*

Nov. 19  **Scientific Belief and the Darwinian Controversies**

*Reading:*
Asa Gray, “Selection from Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*,” in *AIT2*, 6-10

Nov. 21  **Biblical Criticism and Harold Frederic’s Damnation of Theron Ware**

*Reading:*
Charles Augustus Briggs, Selection from *Biblical Study*, in *AIT2*, 36-40
Harold Frederic, *The Damnation of Theron Ware*

*Recommended:*

**Nov. 26**  
**Philosophical Idealism, Pragmatism, and the Secularization of Belief**  
*Reading:*  
William James, “The Will to Believe,” in *AIT2*, 71-84  

**Nov. 27-Dec. 1**  
**Thanksgiving Recess**

**Dec. 3**  
**“Social Darwinism” and Evolutionary Social Science**  
*Reading:*  
William Graham Sumner, “Sociology,” in *AIT2*, 26-35  
Lester Frank Ward, “Mind as a Social Factor,” in *AIT2*, 41-49

**Dec. 5**  
**Evolution, the Self, and the Gendering of Victorian Culture**  
*Reading:*  
Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “The Solitude of Self,” *AIT2*, 50-54  
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Selection from *Women and Economics*, in *AIT2*, 98-104

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

**Dec. 10**  
**Review**

**Dec. 13**  
**TERM PAPERS DUE** (by 4:30 PM in my box in the History Department)

**Dec. 16**  
**GRADUATE HISTORIOGRAPHY PAPERS DUE** (by 4:30 PM in my box in the History Department)

**Dec. 17**  
**FINAL EXAM** (9-11 AM in class)