Rough draft (it should give you an idea of the mechanics, the assignments, and the requirements. The final version will be available in late December 2015)

HIST142 Looking at America through a Global Lens

Winter 2016

When: M-Tu-W-Th-F
Where: online
Instructor:
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E-mail: saverio@umd.edu
Office Hours: by appointment only
Office: TLF 2137

Course Description

America is powerful and original; America is violent and abominable. We should not seek to deny either of these aspects, nor reconcile them.[1]

Writing these words in the 1980s French philosopher and sociologist Jean Baudrillard was trying to make sense of the ambivalence that the French, and the entire world, had felt toward the United States since their founding. Baudrillard attempted to make this unsolved dualism, the center of his interpretation of America. Dichotomies, contradictions, oxymora were the vital core of America and could not be marginalized, or simplistically avoided. America was not a supermarket where one could pick up the last record by Bob Dylan while ignoring the foreign or domestic policy of Richard Nixon. America had to be understood as a functioning whole made of contradictory parts, or not understood at all.
Baudrillard was just one in a long line of philosophers, artists, novelists, travelers and historians who had tried to make sense of America. Since their founding, the United States have been involved in an intense social, economic, but also cultural exchange with Europe and the world. The nature of this exchange has evolved across time. With the exception of coerced and voluntary migrants, in the early 19th century relatively few of those who had not been born there had a direct experience of the United States. For those who cared about this land, America was a “vision” something that could perhaps be used as a starting point of an argument that meant to make broader ones, perhaps about the direction and development of democracy in general. By the end of World War II, U.S. influence had grown more concrete and far-reaching, and the debates about America had become more intense and more urgent. All over the world, many felt the economic, cultural, and social impact of the United States – what historians Charles Bright and Michael Geyer call “off-shore America” -- in their own lives. Many also saw the United States as the embodiment of what their own societies were to become. For some this was an enticing possibility, for others it was an ominous prospect.

This course means, at one level, to explore two of the key terms of contemporary public discourse: Americanism and anti-Americanism. **Looking at America** will focus on a thematic and chronological approach to the study of -- negative and positive -- European perceptions of America. My goal is to encourage students’ critical thinking rather than to achieve an exhaustive treatment of this complex subject.

The structure of this course will perforce be interdisciplinary. Students will be asked to peruse a set of secondary readings produced by historians as well as cultural critics alongside a set of primary sources that will include novels, music, art and film.

At a second level, this course wants to use the act of “looking at America” as a case study to explore the way we “look” at other peoples and nations. What does “judging another nation” really mean and entail? How can we collapse a nation and a people into a single image or even a complex theorization? Is this unavoidable? Is this unfair? Perhaps it is both. We shall discuss these questions.

We shall also turn the tables, and encourage all of us to examine our own way of “looking at” other, non US, peoples and nations. For example, is there an American Europeanism or anti-Europeanism? My hope is to use the case of Americanism and anti-anti-Americanism to show the students how we know, or we think we know, other peoples and other nations.
**Course Goals:**

*Some of the specific goals of this course are:*

1. To learn some of the “history” behind present day debates about Americanism, anti-Americanism, Europeanism and anti-Europeanism.
2. To improve our understanding of the cultural relations between the United States and the world.
3. To learn to read cultural texts historically, that is,
4. To learn how cultural texts (political speeches, movies, novels) embody long-standing cultural attitudes and may, in turn, contribute to their production.
5. To explore the formation of national stereotypes.

**Course Mechanics:**

This course will be entirely online. It is, however, a very intensive course: a three-week immersion in the history of European Americanism and anti-Americanism and the equivalent of a regular semester long class. I shall post lectures every day. Every day, students will be asked to do some readings, some listening, and/or, sometimes, some watching of films. Lectures will consist mostly of Powerpoint presentations with a voice over and they will be posted online. Everyday before 1 am, I shall post the relevant web link to the lecture. The first introductory lecture will be posted Monday January 4th 2016, by 1 am.

Most of the Powerpoint (PPT) presentations will be posted in the Course Document section of ELMS. **THESE PPT PRESENTATIONS, HOWEVER, ARE ONLY NOTES. THEY SHOULD NOT BE USED AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR LISTENING TO THE LECTURES.** Sometimes, they will have URL's of youtube clips that I could not directly post online for copyright reasons.

**Requirements and Grading:** There will be three essay tests and a daily discussion board activity.

A. I shall post a discussion board question each day. Students are required to post one or more comments on that discussion board every day before midnight. (For example: the question for January 4th will be posted on Monday January 4th by 1 am, and students’ comments are due by 11:59 pm on Monday January 4th and so on so forth.). These comments should try and precisely reference the readings and the posted lecture. This activity will be
worth 40 percent of the final grade. I may or may not intervene in the DB but I shall send you short weekly evaluations of your posting activity every Monday.

B. In addition, there will be an essay exam every week. Each weekly exam will be worth 20% of the final grade. It will be made available every Friday morning around 1 am and it is due the following Sunday by midnight. (The first essay exam will be available on Friday January 8th by 1 am and it may be submitted to me anytime before midnight of Sunday January 10th; the second will be available on Friday January 15th at 1 am and is due anytime before midnight of Sunday January 17th; the third will be available on Friday January 22nd at 1 am and is due anytime before midnight of Sunday January 24th.

**Essays should be attached to an email sent directly to me (saverio@umd.edu)** Late assignments will count for 0 points. Essays should not exceed 3 pages in length. They should be typed and written in grammatically correct English. They should make specific references to films, readings, and lectures.

**Reminder:**

The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity, administered by the Student Honor Council. This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit


To further exhibit your commitment to academic integrity, please remember to copy and sign the Honor Pledge on all essay examinations. As you know, it reads as follows: "I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this examination. [signature of the student follows]"

**Grading:**

Grades will be assessed in points. Their meaning in alphabetical letters is as follows:

A+: 100
A: 91-99
Failure to complete any of the assignments (tests, papers, exams) will warrant a failing grade (F) for the entire course. All assignments need to be completed for each student to receive a passing grade.

**E-mails:** I shall briefly answer e-mails for this class every Wednesday night.

**Books to be read in their entirety:**


Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*

**Course Schedule**

*(Please be advised that I reserve the right to change the syllabus at any time. Should I need to make changes, I shall notify you in advance)*

**Monday 1/4:** The Issues on the Table...
Tocqueville in America: The Making of a Master Narrative

Readings: Alexis de Tocqueville, Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* 36-111

Tues 1/5: The Legacy of Tocqueville and America as a Riddle: Socialists Look at the United States

Readings: Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* 111-161; *Democracy in America* 339-372 (part 2 book 4)


Readings: Mark Twain “To the Person Sitting in Darkness”

Thur 1/7: Wilson, WWI, and American Image Abroad and the Consequence of the Peace

Readings: Excerpts from Daniela Rossini, *Woodrow Wilson and the American Myth in Italy*


Friday: 1/8: The Twenties, Modernization Projects, and the Fascist Alternative (1st part)

Readings/Viewing: Fritz Lang *Metropolis*  

Antonio Gramsci, "Americanism and Fordism."

First test: Due Sunday at...

Monday 1/11: America in the Soviet and the Fascist Imaginary


(Gentile’s essay is easily accessible on line through the library’s research port)

Tues 1/12: World War Two and the Perception of America in Europe

Reading: James Agee, “Europe: Autumn Story”; Boris Vian, I Spit on Your Grave

Wed 1/13

Cold War and Reconstruction in Europe II

excerpts from Simone de Beauvoir, America Day by Day

Mary Nolan, The Transatlantic Century; excerpts

Thurs 1/14: Cold War and Reconstruction in Europe III

Readings/Viewing: Film: Jean-Luc Godard Breathless (1959)

Mary Nolan, The Transatlantic Century excerpts

Robert Frank, The Americans

Friday 1/15: American Image and Civil Rights


2nd test due...

Monday 1/18: A Different Imperialism?

Tues 1/19: Exporting Film


Mary Nolan, *The Transatlantic Century* excerpts

Wed 1/20: Off shore America?


Excerpts of lyrics from **French**, **Cuban**, and **Italian** rock and roll rap songs will be provided by the instructor.

Thur 1/21: Off Shore America? The Sixties, Decolonization, and Global Liberation

Reading/Viewing: B. Bertolucci, *Last Tango in Paris*

Listening: David Bowie, “Young Americans” **lyrics** and **sang by Bowie**

Readings: Mary McCarthy, *The Stones of Florence*
Friday The Iraq Effect

Readings:

Arundhati Roy, Power Politics, 105-124

Harold Pinter 2005 Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech


Mary Nolan, “Anti-Americanism and Anti-Europeanism” from The New American Empire

3rd in class test (cumulative, please review all we have done from the beginning of the semester)

Please Note: This syllabus may change over the course of the semester because of various unforeseeable circumstances. It is your responsibility to stay tuned.