AMERICAN THOUGHT SINCE THE CIVIL WAR

Overview:

This course surveys the history of ideas in an American context since the Civil War. Readings and discussions will explore the interplay between belief and uncertainty, modernity and tradition, unity and diversity, science and religion, and egalitarianism and individualism.

Learning Objectives:

Students in this course can expect to learn:

• how to comprehend difficult texts;
• how to situate texts in their social and intellectual context, in order to better understand the author's intended meaning;
• how to critique and defend complex philosophical arguments in oral debate;
• how to develop forceful written arguments that acknowledge and illuminate the subtlety of their subjects;
• how to relate historical ideas to contemporary problems; and
• how to track the development of ideas over broad expanses of time, and to recognize antecedents for contemporary social philosophies.

Grading:

25%: participation
25% in-class writing (5% per assignment, with the lowest grade dropped)
5%: first essay draft
10%: first essay (4-6 pages, double-spaced, 12pt font)
15%: second essay (4-6 pages, double-spaced, 12pt font)
20%: third essay (7-9 pages, double-spaced, 12pt font)

The grades of late papers will be lowered one level for each day they are late (e.g., a grade of B becomes a B- if one day late, a C+ if two days late, etc.).

Any student with a disability who may need accommodations in this class must obtain an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services, 101 Shaffer, (410) 516-4720, studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu.
Assignments:

During ten class meetings, students will be randomly assigned into two or more groups that will be asked to participate in debates for or against the ideas expressed by specific authors on the syllabus. The topics for these debates will be distributed in the week before the class meeting.

The in-class writings will ask students to explain, analyze, and compare the arguments in readings completed for the course. The prompts will always be based on discussion questions that have been previously distributed.

The first essay will ask students to develop a surprising argument about one of our readings based in part on an analysis of the context in which it was written. Students will be expected to draw on at least one primary source and at least one secondary source beyond the assigned course readings.

The second essay will ask students to develop a formal proposal that establishes the guiding principles and/or philosophical justification for a new venture based on the ideas of one or more of the authors encountered in the course.

The third essay will ask students to produce the transcript of an imagined podcast conversation between three or more theorists on the syllabus.

Individual Meetings:

All students will be expected to meet with Professor Burgin in the first week of classes, to share information about their academic background and interests, as well as their goals for the semester.

Academic Integrity:

The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, reuse of assignments, improper use of the internet and artificial intelligence, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition. Please report any violations you witness to the instructor. You may consult the associate dean of student conduct by calling the Office of the Dean of Students at 410-516-8208 or via email at integrity@jhu.edu. For more information, see the Homewood Student Affairs site on academic ethics: https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/policies-guidelines/undergrad-ethics/.

Texts:

All course readings are available on electronic reserve.
Monday, January 23: University Life after the Civil War

Wednesday, January 25: Darwinism in an Age of Industry

Reading:

- *Lester Frank Ward, “Mind as a Social Factor” (1884), Mind 9, no. 36, 563-573.

In class:


Monday, January 30: Victorian Culture and Modern Morals


In class:

- First paper topics distributed.

Wednesday, February 1: Reforming the Cult of Domesticity

- *Charlotte Perkins Gilman, selection from Women and Economics (1898), 58-75.

In class:

- In-class writing assignment #1.

Monday, February 6: The Problem of Poverty in the Gilded Age

- *Edward Bellamy, Looking Backward (1898), preface, ch. 1–7, 12, 14, 18, 22, 25, 28, postscript.
- *Jane Addams, selection from Twenty Years at Hull House (1892), 115-127.

In class:

- Debate: Bellamy’s social vision.
Wednesday, February 8: The White City and the Image of the West


*THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 12:00PM: FIRST PAPER DRAFTS DUE*

Monday, February 13: Antimodernism as Impulse and Theory


Wednesday, February 15: Varieties of Pragmatism

- *William James, “The Will to Believe” (1897), in The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy, 1–31.
- *William James, Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking (1907), lectures 2 and 6.

In class:
- Debate: James on pragmatism.

Monday, February 20: The Politics of Progressivism

- Walter Lippmann, Drift and Mastery (1914), introduction and ch. 1–3, 8–10, 13–16.

In class:
- In-class writing assignment #2.
Wednesday, February 22: Legal Realism and Social Reform


*In class:*

- *Debate*: Holmes v. critic on jurisprudence.

*THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 12:00PM: FIRST PAPERS DUE*

Monday, February 27: The Intellectuals and the War


*In class:*

- Second paper topics distributed.

Wednesday, March 1: Double-Consciousness and the Cosmopolitan Ideal


*In class:*

- In-class writing assignment #3.
Monday, March 6: Conservatism in a Liberal Society


H.L. Mencken

Wednesday, March 8: The Vital Center

- *Reinhold Niebuhr, selection from The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness (1944), 9–41.

In class:

Monday, March 13: Mass Culture and the Pathology of Normalcy (Ibanca Anand)


James Baldwin

"WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15, 12:00PM: SECOND PAPERS DUE"

NO COURSE MEETING: PLEASE COMPLETE THE MIDSEMESTER SURVEY AND ENJOY THE BREAK!
Monday, March 27: Civil Rights and the American Dilemma


*In class:*
- In-class writing assignment #4.

Wednesday, March 29: The Moral Life of Markets


*In class:*
- *Debate*: Hayek v. Friedman v. critic on the role of markets in society.

Monday, April 3: Left Critiques of Liberalism

- *Herbert Marcuse, selection from *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), 1–18.

*In class:*
- *Debate*: Bell v. Mills on ideology.

Wednesday, April 5: Cold War Capitalism (Ibanca Anand)


*In class:*
- *Debate*: Chomsky v. critic on the social responsibility of intellectuals.
- Third Paper topics distributed.
Monday, April 10: The Redistribution of Rights


*In class:*
- Debate: Rawls’s universal principles of justice.

Wednesday, April 12: Truth and Meaning in the Postwar Sciences

- *Thomas Kuhn, selection from The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1962), 144–159.

*In class:*
- In-class writing assignment #5

Monday, April 17: Gender Equality, Gender Difference


*In class:*
- Friedan v. Butler on feminist coalition-building.

Wednesday, April 19: The Norms of Postmodernity


*In class:*
- In-class writing assignment #6.

Monday, April 24: Technologies of Identity

Wednesday, April 28: Community in an Age of Fracture


* MAY 10, 12:00PM: THIRD PAPER DUE *