

21H.105. AMERICAN CLASSICS. Spring 2011. Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2-3:30.
Instructor: Prof. Pauline Maier

Course Description:

This subject is devoted to reading and discussing basic American historical texts that are frequently cited but often remain unread, understanding their meaning, and assessing their continuing significance in American history and culture. Since it is a "Communications Intensive" subject as well as a HASS-D, 21H.105 is dedicated to improving students' capacities to write and speak publicly. It requires a substantial amount of writing, participation in discussions, and individual presentations to the class.

Requirements:

1) Regular attendance, completion of readings, and participation in discussions. This constitutes a significant component of students' performances in the subject.

2) Completion of three papers of 4 to 5 pages based on the readings assigned for a specific week. Students will be divided into three groups. The members of each group will submit three papers, due at three-week intervals during the early part of the term. The papers of group I will be due on weeks 2, 5, and 8; of group II on weeks 3, 6, and 9; of group III on weeks 4, 7, and 10. Papers must be turned in at the Tuesday class in the week when they fall due. (On week 4, when there is no Tuesday class, students should submit papers electronically on or before Wednesday morning so they can remain on the same writing and revision schedule.) Papers are usually returned on Thursday, and those students asked to rewrite the papers should see the writing assistant as soon as possible thereafter. Rewrites must be submitted within two weeks, i.e. no later than the week before the next paper is due.

Students sometimes find that they have a paper due in 21H.105 just when they have heavy obligations in other subjects. They can, of course, prepare their papers ahead of time. They can also exchange places with students in other groups. Such arrangements must, however, be announced to the instructor *before* the week in which the first paper is due, and they last for only one cycle.

3) On the Tuesday of the week in which students have papers due they make brief presentations to the class on the subjects of their papers. During the final weeks of the term, when students are no longer obliged to write papers on the assigned readings, these presentations will continue. That is, students in group 1 should be prepared to speak about the readings on April 26; group 2 on May 3, and group 3 on May 10, unless the instructor announces a changed format for those classes.

4) Preparation of a final paper, roughly 10 pages in length, on a notable historical work that was not assigned as required reading. A list of possible topics will be provided; topics not on the suggested list must be approved by the instructor. Students will be asked to submit their topics in the class on April 14, and the topics will be discussed in class on April 21. The paper is due at the final meeting of the class on May 12.

ALL papers must be double-spaced, written in clear and correct English, and identify the source and page numbers of all direct quotations. Final papers must include footnotes or endnotes in correct form (or, where citations are drawn entirely or predominately from a single text, page citations within the text) and a bibliography.

Please consult the Guide to Notes and Bibliographies that will be posted on the course website for 21H.105.

There will be no final examination.

Readings:

Most readings are available in paperback books. Others are accessible as electronic reserves on the 21H.105 class website. Those paperbacks ordered for purchase are designated below by an asterisk. Any document without an asterisk and for which no Internet address is supplied will be on the class website, as will several that do have an Internet address.

Week 1. Feb. 1-3. Introduction; the Puritans.

John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity," a sermon of 1630, from Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, eds., The Puritans: A Sourcebook of Their Writings, I (rev. ed.; New York, 1963), 194-99.

William Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620-1647, esp. chapters 4 and 9, pp. 23-27 and 58-63 in the edition edited by Samuel Eliot Morison (New York, 1979), which has adapted the language for modern readers (see his comments on this and on Bradford's history, pp. vii-xii).

Week 2. Feb. 8-10. "The First Famous American": Benjamin Franklin.

* The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin with Related Documents, ed. Louis P. Masur. Bedford/St. Martin's paperback, 2nd edition (2003). (ISBN13: 978-0-312-40415-4 and 10: 0-312-40415-8).

NOTE: Discussion will focus particularly on Franklin's autobiography, not all parts of which are equally important. Sections toward the end that describe in detail Pennsylvania politics and the Seven Years War can be skimmed, although they include some significant passages. Much of the introduction to the book simply repeats information from the autobiography, but take note of passages on the writing and publication of the autobiography. Some documents at the end of the book might help assess the sincerity of Franklin's regime for acquiring virtue. Others, including the essay on pp. 174-82 (frequently published as "The Way to Wealth") and the satiric essay on the slave trade on pp. 191-93 are classic Franklin.

This edition unfortunately does not include the epitaph Franklin wrote in 1728: "The Body of B. Franklin Printer / (Like the Cover of an Old Book / Its Contents torn out / And stript of its Lettering & Gilding) / Lies here, food for Worms. But the Work shall not be lost; / For it will, (as he believ'd) appear once more, In a new and more elegant Edition / Revised and corrected. *By the Author.*"

Week 3. Feb. 15-17. Independence.

* Thomas Paine, Common Sense and Related Writings, Dover Thrift edition (ISBN 0-486-29602-4).

The Virginia Declaration of Rights, June 12, 1776, available at:

http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/virginia.asp

The committee or "Jefferson" draft of the Declaration of Independence, with Congress's editings (June -July 1776).

Tuesday, February 22: Monday Schedule (no class)

Week 4. A “More Perfect” Union? The Constitution and the First Ten Amendments.

The U. S. Constitution (1787; ratified 1788) at

http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html

George Mason’s Objections to the Constitution, October 1787, at:

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=1847>

“The Federal Farmer” Number 3, at

<http://www.constitution.org/afp/fedfar03.txt>

NOTE: the “Federal Farmer” has never been positively identified, but his writings are generally acknowledged to be the best (or one of the best) essays critical of the Constitution. What did he criticize? What did he want? Do his objections seem sensible? How do they compare to Mason’s?

James Madison, “The Federalist” No. X, available at:

<http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa10.htm>

NOTE: Federalist No. X was not very widely reprinted in 1787-88, but it has become the most famous essay in “The Federalist,” a long series of essays composed by John Jay, Alexander Hamilton, and Jay. How does it differ in its view of the power of the people at large from that of the “Federal Farmer”?

James Madison’s speech to the First Federal Congress proposing amendments to the Constitution, June 8, 1789 (on the class website).

The first ten amendments to the Constitution, at

http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/bill_of_rights_transcript.html

NOTE: despite including the resolution of Congress in recommending twelve amendments to the states on September 25, 1789, this list includes only the ten that were approved by the required three-quarters of the states by the end of December 1791. The first proposed amendment provided a complicated scheme for increasing representation as population rose; the second is our Twenty-Seventh Amendment, prohibiting Congress from voting itself a pay increase before an intervening election to the House of Representatives occurs; neither was ratified by the requisite ten states by the end of 1791. The ten ratified amendments were not apparently called a “bill of rights” until after the Civil War.

Week 5. March 1-3. Exploring the West.

Jefferson’s instructions to Capt. Meriwether Lewis, June 20, 1803, available at:

<http://www.mt.net/~rojomo/landc.htm>

and also (in a somewhat better format):

<http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/dept/history/lavender/jefflett.html>

* Gary E. Moulton, ed., *The Lewis and Clark Journals*; University of Nebraska Press pb. (ISBN0-8032-8039-4) Read the preface, introduction, “editorial principles,” and afterword. Feel free to skim, and don’t be surprised if it takes some time to get into the story. There are memorable passages in the book, which tells the tale of a great adventure and a lot about the country and its peoples at that time, but the “good parts” are scattered, so it is difficult to define just which pages to read. In general, pay attention to the relationship of Lewis and Clark with other members of the expedition, and how their

form of leadership evolved over time; the expedition members' relationship with Indian groups; their observations of the land and their interactions with animals, including the famed grizzly bear. How important was Sacajawea, the only woman on the trip? In general, trust your instincts: what's interesting to you is probably important---or at least interesting to many people.

This edition provides an extensive introduction, which should make navigating the journals easier. However, papers should be based on *the journals themselves*, not those parts supplied by the editor.

Week 6. March 8-10. Slave Narratives: Frederick Douglass.

* Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass..., with an introduction by David Blight. Bedford/St. Martins paperback, 2nd edition (2002). (ISBN: 0312257376.) Read the introduction and supplementary documents--, including "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?"--- as well as the autobiography.

Week 7. March 15-17. "The Little Lady Who Caused This Big War."

* Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin. Penguin Classics pb. (ISBN 140390030) This is a long book, but it's easy reading. Start early.

March 22-24: Spring Vacation.

Week 8. March 29-31. The Lincoln-Douglas Debates; Lincoln.

Lincoln's "House Divided" speech at Springfield, June 16, 1858, when he accepted the Republicans' nomination for senator (read this before reading the Lincoln-Douglas debates), and, after reading the debates (below), his First Inaugural (1861), the Gettysburg Address (1863), and his Second Inaugural Address (1865), which are available at <http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/speeches/speech.htm>

* Harry Holzer, ed., The Lincoln-Douglas Debates: The First Complete, Unexpurgated Text. Fordham University Press paperback (2004). ISBN 0-8232-2342-6). Read the Preface, Introduction, descriptions of "the scene" for *all* of the debates, which were held in 1858, and the appendix as well as the debates themselves. The speeches are long and repetitious since the speakers went over the same issues, sometimes reading passages from previous speeches, again and again. When they get into details of Illinois politics, you can flip pages. The real fight was over the future of slavery in the United States. Much of the content was pretty well established after the first three debates, which you should read, as well as those in Charleston and Alton, and perhaps Galesburg. Quincy is perhaps the least important. Ask yourself who came out best in the various debates. Also, did Lincoln, as Douglas charged, take a different position---or just state his position differently--- in Ottawa and Freeport, in the northern part of Illinois, which was settled by migrants from free states, than in Charleston or Alton, which were settled by people from the South who were in general more pro-slavery? As this edition (*do not accept substitutes!*) makes clear, the debates took place outside, without microphones, to audiences that often interrupted the speakers. Even the audience's interjections and the speakers' responses, which Holzer includes, are interesting. Can you compare these with modern presidential debates, and their audiences with those of today?

Week 9. April 5-7. Ulysses S. Grant and the Civil War.

* U. S. Grant, Personal Memoirs, Penguin pb. (ISBN 0140437010), esp. pp. xiii-xxvi, 3-54, 92-133, read about some battle of the Civil War (Shiloh, 177-99, for example; Vicksburg was more important, but the account is also much longer), 376-82, 525 (bottom) -35, 558-61, 580-640.

Week 10. April 12-14. Making Money---and Giving it Away.

(Review Franklin, "The Way to Wealth," in The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, Masur ed., 174-82.)

* Horatio Alger, Ragged Dick or, Street Life in New York with the Boot Blacks. Signet pb., with an introduction by Alan Trachtenberg (ISBN 0451524802).

Andrew Carnegie, The Gospel of Wealth and Other Timely Essays, Edward C. Kirkland, ed. (Cambridge, 1962), pp. 3-13 ("Introduction: How I Served My Apprenticeship") and 14-49 (the "Gospel of Wealth"), in "Readings." There are copies at least of the second of Carnegie's essays on the Internet, but be sure to read an *unabridged* copy.

Tuesday, April 19: Patriot's Day Holiday; no class.

Week 11, April 21. DISCUSSION: Paper Topics; Writing Final Papers.

(No reading.)

Week 12. April 26-38. Segregation and Blacks' Dreams of Success.

* Booker T. Washington, Up From Slavery, esp. chs. 1-5, 7-8, 10-14 (pp. 29- 77, 85- 100, 108-57); and W.E.B. DuBois, Souls of Black Folk, chapters on Washington and "Of the Meaning of Progress," pp. 240-61, in Three Negro Classics. Avon paperback. (ISBN 0380015811).

Week 13. May 3-5. What a Difference the Radio Made: the Presidency, at Home.

* Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Great Speeches. Dover Thrift ed. (ISBN 0486408949). Pay particular attention to the "fireside chats"---and anything else that catches your interest.

Week 14. May 10-12 Free at Last?

* Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (1963), Norton paperback (ISBN 0-440-32497-1), esp. chs. 1, 2, 10, 12 (esp. pp. 305-09) and ch. 14 (esp. 342-48, 377-78). This book is often cited as a founding event of the "Women's Liberation" movement. If so, why does it seem dated now? Did Friedan overstate "the problem that has no name," and why had it become a problem since the days of Harriet Beecher Stowe? Do you think the more "liberated" roles of women today (compared to those she described) emerged from arguments like Friedan's or from longer-term trends, which were reversed only temporarily in the wake of World War II?

Martin Luther King, "Letter from the Birmingham Jail," April 19, 1963, and "I have a dream" speech, August 28, 1963, available at

<http://www.mlkonline.net/speeches.html>

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

21H.105 American Classics
Spring 2006

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.