

GENA2292 American Themes Through Creative Expression

2020-2021 Term 2 | Tuesday 10:30-12:15 PM | Via Zoom

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Office location: Fung King Hey Building, Room 314 / Zoom Classroom

Office Hours: By appointment. Email us!

This course investigates topics and themes significant to United States culture, history, and society from a variety of perspectives. We will engage critically with different forms of creative expression, including literature, visual arts, and performing arts.

After completing this course, students should be able to:

- I. Understand several of the dominant ideas and themes in American creative expression and trace their development
- II. Consider how these ideas relate to broader historical events within and outside of the U.S.
- III. Analyze creative works both formally and historically
- IV. Apply these skills to make sense of art that they encounter in their own lives

Course Schedule

Week	Date	Topic/Content
1	Jan 12	Foundations – Intro to the Course, Pre-Columbian Era to Early Republic (SP)
2	Jan 19	Foundations – Early Republic to Gilded Age (JG)
3	Jan 26	Foundations – 20th Century to Present (SP)
4	Feb 2	American Landscape (JG)
5	Feb 9	Modernity and Anti-Modernity (JG)
6	Feb 16	Lunar New Year. No class. 新年快樂!
7	Feb 23	Gender and Sexuality (SP)
8	March 2	Migration and Displacement (SP)
9	March 9	Religion and Faith (JG) Midterm Exam
10	March 16	Showbiz (SP)

11	March 23	Memory and Storytelling (JG)
12	March 30	No class.
13	April 6	No class.
14	April 13	Class presentations on final projects.
15	April 20	Class presentations (continued).

Online Teaching

This course will take place entirely online. Accordingly, we have decided to alter the instructional mode to better suit the realities of online learning and to encourage active participation. We will be following the schedule below:

Weeks 1-3 (Foundations):

The class will meet synchronously on Zoom for the entirety of the assigned time slot (Tuesdays 10:30 AM - 12:15 PM).

Weeks 4-11 (Themes):

Students will watch a pre-recorded lecture (45-60 minutes) before class. We will upload lectures and other materials for the thematic classes to Blackboard by the Thursday of the preceding week (e.g. the 'American Landscape' lecture and materials will be available by Jan 28 for the lesson on Feb 2).

By Monday night (before class) at 11:59 PM, students will respond to a question posted under the "Discussion Board" section on Blackboard by the instructors. Students may respond to the question itself or to another student's comments. Responses will be graded for completion only, so students should limit their posts to no more than 4 sentences. The purpose of this activity is to (1) ensure that students have watched and engaged with the pre-recorded lecture and (2) raise in advance questions or thoughts that may enrich our in-class discussions.

Then, we will then meet synchronously on Tuesdays for a shorter period of one hour (10:30-11:30 AM).

Weeks 14-15:

The class will meet synchronously on Zoom for the entirety of the assigned time slot (Tuesdays 10:30 AM - 12:15 PM) for in-class student-presentations. There will be no lectures during these weeks.

Assessment Scheme

Attendance — 10%

Participation — 10%

Response Papers (4) — 5% each, 20% total
Midterm Exam — 25%
Final Project — 35%

Attendance — We will take attendance at every class meeting. Weekly contributions on Blackboard during our thematic weeks will count towards the attendance grade. We will grade these comments for completion rather than content.

If you are to be absent or tardy with a legitimate excuse (sickness, family emergency, essential appointment, etc.), please email both instructors as soon as possible.

Students who miss all or part of a class are responsible for emailing us or a classmate to ask for materials and a quick class summary to catch up.

Participation — To receive full participation marks, students should share ideas, even when they are not fully developed. See [Class Participation Guidelines](#) for more details on participation expectations.

Student-led discussions — Your participation grade will also include a brief presentation that you will make with a partner about a work of art that you both find interesting. This work can be in any media or context, and you and your partner will speak for no more than 10 minutes about the work at the beginning of class. The purpose of these presentations is to give you a chance to apply some of the skills we will be learning to art that you encounter in your own life. We will circulate a sign up sheet for these presentations at the beginning of the course.

We will not be evaluating English fluency, so please do your best and participate!

Response Papers — During the thematic weeks (Weeks 4-11), the instructors will upload a document with works related to the topic of that week's lesson. These works will form the basis of our in-class discussion, so please take some time to think about how they relate to the class material.

Students will be required to submit 4 response papers (1-2 pages double spaced, 250 words minimum) to one or more of these works. We intend this as an exercise for students to organize their thoughts for our class discussion and to practice using the ideas and strategies of the course to analyze a new work of art. Questions that can guide their response may include:

- 1) What is happening in this work? What do I see? What do I read? What is my first reaction to the work?
- 2) Can I situate this work within a historical context? Based on what we've covered in class, what sort of events were happening when this work was made? Does the work make reference to any of these things? Does my understanding of the work's context change my answer to (1)?

- 3) How does the content of work relate to thematic ideas we've talked about in the course? Is this work trying to say anything? Does it contradict anything I've learned? Expand on anything?
- 4) Does the work or its ideas relate to any different contexts? Does it relate to your own life? To Hong Kong?
- 5) What questions do you still have about the work?

Each response paper will make up 5% of the final grade. Students have the option to submit 5 response papers, and we will drop the paper with the lowest grade.

Students may decide which thematic weeks they would like to submit a response paper for. We do recommend, however, submitting at least one before midterm so that we can give students feedback before submitting the others. All response papers must be submitted via Blackboard by the start of Tuesday's lesson (10:30 AM) in order to count for that week. Students may use content or ideas from their response papers for their Blackboard comments in the same week.

Midterm Exam — There will be a 30-minute exam at the start of class on March 9. It will be an open note exam and will assess students' ability to synthesize and apply the content and skills they've learned in the first half of the course. The type of thinking we will be doing during in-class discussions will be invaluable for preparing for this exam, so do not think that you can prepare by only watching the lectures.

Final Project — More details to be announced. The final project will not take the form of a traditional research paper but will allow students to synthesize ideas from the course in a creative way.

Class Policies

Respect: Everyone deserves a chance to learn in an environment where they feel safe and respected. We do not tolerate disrespect of any kind in our classroom. Lively conversations and robust disagreements about the course content, however, are warmly encouraged.

Late submission: Late submission of assignments will be penalized half a grade for each day late.

Electronics: Students should 1) refrain from using electronics that are unrelated to the Zoom sessions during class time and 2) refrain from checking email, checking social media, online shopping, etc. while in class. We are happy to make accommodations for students with documented needs; just reach out to us.

Zoom: To alleviate concerns about privacy, we will not be recording the discussion components of this class. We will record only lectures given by instructors.

We respectfully urge all students to likewise refrain from recording or screenshotting class discussions in order to maintain a comfortable environment for all.

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We ask students to turn their cameras on during discussions in order to facilitate more authentic class engagement. Please get in touch with us if this will pose a challenge to you.

Academic honesty: The University places very high importance on honesty in academic work and follows a policy of zero tolerance toward academic dishonesty. You may review its policies [here](#). Students will be required to submit midterm exams and final projects to VeriGuide. We will report plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty to the relevant bodies as necessary.

Teaching Feedback: Students will be asked to complete course evaluations for GENA2292 at the end of the term. If you have any comments or suggestions for the course, please feel free to email us or come talk to us in person. We are always interested in hearing what you think and want to help you get the most out of your experience in this course!