

# Issues in American Culture and History

GENA2122 | Term 2, 2023-2024

Wednesdays 2:30PM - 4:15PM | NAH 115 (Humanities Building, Room 115)

## **Instructors**

Ms. Amy ZHANG (she/her/hers)

[amyzhang@cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:amyzhang@cuhk.edu.hk)

Mr. Kevin LI (he/him/his)

[kevinliyongli@cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:kevinliyongli@cuhk.edu.hk)

Office location: Fung King Hey Building, Room 311 (or Zoom, if necessary)

Office hours: By appointment

## **Course Description**

In this course, we will explore the intellectual and moral foundations of American culture and history of the 20th century. We will examine how race, empire, and modernity interacted in critical contexts and highlight key arguments both for and against these era-defining developments. Throughout the course, students will develop their critical thinking and writing skills by analyzing a range of primary and secondary sources from cultural, economic, historical, political, and social perspectives. Students will leave the course with a fuller understanding of America's place in the world and in history.

Students should note that the scope of this course is ambitious and the length of the term limited. This means that we will move through material quite quickly, with many topics appearing in one lecture and not necessarily reappearing as we advance through the course. Although you will have the chance to explore a topic of your choice in more depth through the final project, we also encourage you to email us at any time if you have questions about the course or want to learn more about a particular topic.

## **Course Objectives**

In this course, students will learn to:

- Understand how domestic and foreign pressures shaped the trajectory of American historical developments over the last century.
- Critically examine continuities and change across time periods in American culture and history.
- Identify thematic connections between mainstream and reactionary ideas.
- Analyze primary and secondary sources with a critical eye using a variety of perspectives.
- Construct original, organized, and well-supported historical arguments.
- Participate in open discussions by clearly communicating ideas, actively listening, and critically responding to others.
- Relate the course contents to your everyday lives, developing the skills to analyze your own society with a critical lens.

### **Course Schedule** (subject to change)

Week	Date	Topic	Instructor(s)
1	10 Jan	Course Introduction: The Long 20th Century	Both
2	17 Jan	Jim Crow Era	Amy
3	24 Jan	Theodore Roosevelt and the American Empire	Kevin
4	31 Jan	Global Conflicts & New Solutions	Kevin
5	7 Feb	The Roaring 20s	Kevin
6	21 Feb	Pre-War America & WWII	Kevin
7	28 Feb	Civil Rights Movement	Amy
8	13 Mar	Intersectional Feminism	Amy
9	20 Mar	Reagan and the Cold War	Kevin
10	27 Mar	Debate / Criminal Justice	Amy
11	3 Apr	Criminal Justice	Amy
12	10 Apr	Student Presentations	Both
13	17 Apr	Student Presentations & Conclusion	Both

### **Assessment Scheme**

Attendance and participation	20%
Weekly homework	50%
Final project	30%

*Attendance and participation:* Students are expected to attend class punctually, complete the assigned readings on time, and participate proactively in class discussions with substantive comments.

*Weekly homework:* Each student will hone their critical analysis skills over the course of the semester with short weekly homework assignments that are intentionally cumulative. Each week, students will be asked to practice various aspects of critical analysis on particular primary and secondary sources before discussing them as a class.

*Final project:* At the end of the term, each student will be required to submit a final project exploring a topic in American history and/or culture of their choice. This project can take many forms: a traditional research paper (1400-1600 words); a podcast or video; a primary source collage; an interactive website; a visual or performing arts piece; and so on. Different project forms may have slightly different expectations and requirements, but each project must demonstrate the student's primary source analysis and historical argumentation skills. Students must also draw connections between different time periods. Details on the final project will be explained in class during Week 8.

## **Class Policies**

*Attendance:* If you will be absent or late to class with a legitimate excuse (e.g., sickness, family emergency, essential appointment), please email both instructors as soon as possible, ideally at least 24 hours *before* the class you expect to miss. Unexcused absences and tardiness will drag down your attendance and participation grade. If you do miss all or part of a class, you are responsible for the course materials you have missed.

*Late submission:* Late submission of assignments without an authorized extension will be penalized 5% for each day late. If you require an extension, please email both instructors as soon as possible, ideally at least 24 hours *before* the due date of the assignment. Extensions will be granted on a case-by-case basis.

*Electronics:* In order to maintain a classroom environment conducive to student engagement, please refrain from using electronics during class other than to access course materials and take notes.

*Accommodations:* As instructors, one of our goals is to support students' learning as much as possible. If you need accommodations for any reason (including but not limited to disabilities, mental health, and medical issues), please reach out to us and we will work with you to find a solution.

*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 their final projects\* to VeriGuide and include signed and dated VeriGuide statements with their submissions. We will report plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty to the relevant bodies as necessary.

\*Those who choose an alternative format for the final project (i.e., not the essay) will still be required to submit the written portion of their final project to VeriGuide.

*Respect:* Everyone deserves 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.

*Feedback for evaluation:* Students will be asked to complete course evaluations for GENA2122 at the end of the term. Comments and suggestions about the course content, teaching methods, and learning tasks are most welcome at any time during the term.