

# Issues in American Culture and History

GENA2122 | Term 1, 2024-2025

Wednesdays 2:30PM - 4:15PM | Tsang Shiu Tim Building Room 103

## **Instructors**

Mr. Sam Pekats (he/him/his)

[sam.pekats@cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:sam.pekats@cuhk.edu.hk)

Mr. Kevin LI (he/him/his)

[kevinyiyangli@cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:kevinyiyangli@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 defining eras through these 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. This is why we have set aside the penultimate lecture with some space to cover anything that may be missing or need reiteration throughout the course. You will have the chance to explore a topic of your choice in more depth through the final project, and we 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	4 Sept	Course Introduction: Primary Source Analysis & U.S. Human Geography	Both
2	11 Sept	American Empire & the End of History	Both
3	25 Sept	Colonial Modernity	Kevin
4	2 Oct	America's Racial Reckoning	Sam
5	9 Oct	Pre-War and Inter-War Anxieties	Kevin
6	16 Oct	Constitutionalism & Divided Government	Sam
7	23 Oct	Mini-Debate & Mini-Lecture: Religion in America	Sam
8	30 Oct	Intersectionality	Sam
9	6 Nov	Reagan and the Cold War	Kevin
10	13 Nov	Full-Class Debate	Both
11	20 Nov	TBD	TBD
12	27 Nov	Synthesis & Concluding Remarks	Both

**Assessment Scheme**

Attendance	10%
Participation	10%
Weekly homework	35%
Mini-Debate	5%
Full Debate & Position Paper	10%

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. This **includes** in-class assessments and group activities.

*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.

### **AI Policies**

Acknowledging support from AI tools: Students are required to acknowledge all functional uses of a generative AI tool and cite it when they paraphrase, quote, or incorporate into their own work any content (whether it is text, image, data, or other format) that was created by it.

i. An example of acknowledgement 'I acknowledge the use of (name of AI tool – e.g. ChatGPT (<https://chat.openai.com/>) to (specify the support, e.g. plan my essay, generate some ideas for the content, ask for examples of data collection instruments, get the dates of historical events, etc.).

ii. An example of citation OpenAI. (2023). ChatGPT (Mar 20 version). <https://chat.openai.com/chat> (Students are reminded that due to the rapid developments of generative AI tools, some citation formats may be updated regularly.)

iii. An example of including texts generated by an AI tool in their work "The following text was generated by an AI tool / language model (ChatGPT):" [Insert the text generated by ChatGPT here.]

iv. An example of including texts generated by an AI tool and the prompts that were used to elicit the text from the AI tool "[The prompt], as generated by an AI language model (ChatGPT):" [Insert the text generated by ChatGPT in response to the prompt.] Students are reminded to learn and use the AI tools responsibly and ethically and be aware of the limitations. Students are reminded to clarify with the course teacher and obtain permission if necessary when in doubt.

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>. With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures.

- In the case of group projects, all members of the group should be asked to sign the declaration, each of whom is responsible and liable to disciplinary actions, irrespective of whether he/she has signed the declaration and whether he/she has contributed, directly or indirectly, to the problematic contents.
- For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. • Students are fully aware that their work may be investigated by AI content detection software to determine originality.
- Students are fully aware of the AI approach(es) adopted in the course. In the case where some AI tools are allowed, students have made proper acknowledgment and citations as suggested by the course teacher. Assignments without a properly signed declaration will not be graded by teachers.

Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide. The submission of a piece of work, or a part of a piece of work, for more than one purpose (e.g. to satisfy the requirements in two different courses) without declaration to this effect shall be regarded as having committed undeclared multiple submissions. It is common and acceptable to reuse a turn of phrase or a sentence or two from one's own work; but wholesale reuse is problematic. In any case, agreement from the course teacher(s) concerned should be obtained prior to the submission of the piece of work.

The copyright of the teaching materials, including lecture notes, assignments and examination questions, etc., produced by staff members/ teachers of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) belongs to CUHK. Students may download the teaching materials produced by the staff members/ teachers from the Learning Management Systems, e.g. Blackboard, adopted by CUHK for their own educational use, but shall not distribute/ share/ copy the materials to a third-party without seeking prior permission from the staff members/ teachers concerned.