Is America Exceptional?

“We should have such an empire for liberty as she has never surveyed since the creation: & I am persuaded no constitution was ever before so well calculated as ours for extensive empire & self-government.” -Thomas Jefferson, letter to James Madison, 1809

Course Description

Is democracy in the United States uniquely strong or durable? Is the American political system somehow immune to revolution? Why do class consciousness and class antagonism in the United States seem underdeveloped in relation to Europe? How has America’s imperial history (slavery, Native American genocide, settler colonialism) shaped American democracy and its limits? This course examines some of the central questions surrounding the discourse of American exceptionalism. We consider especially how the apparent contradiction between democracy and empire has been figured in American cultural and intellectual history through readings in the disciplines of political science, history, American studies, sociology, economics, and literary studies. Through our exploration of long-standing debates about American race and class politics, we will hope to shed light on contemporary issues such as spiraling income inequality, mass incarceration and police violence, American military intervention since 9/11, Trumpism and the rise of the far right, and the resurgence of socialist politics in the US.

Course Objectives

The central purpose of this course is to teach students to make college-level academic arguments. Through each of the four course units, we will focus on identifying a problem, making a defendable claim, supporting claims with evidence and warrants, and providing a motive for writing. We will pay close attention to the arguments in the readings and use them as positive and (in some cases) negative examples. But your own writing will remain the primary focus of the class. With the help of brief writing assignments, in-class presentations and workshops, and one-on-one instructor conferences, this course seeks to develop your ability as a persuasive, engaging, and lucid writer.

Course Materials – Purchase Optional; Will be available online via Orbis or Canvas

- Gerald Graff, Kathy Birkenstein, and Russel Durst, They Say/I Say, 4th ed. [ISBN 978-0393631678] (also available as PDF on Canvas)

*Unless otherwise indicated, all other readings will be available to you on Canvas. 
Requirements
1. Attendance and participation. We will read sophisticated and complex essays. Read carefully and slowly, and come to class with annotated print-outs of the reading materials, questions, notes, ideas, and writing assignments. Come prepared to contribute meaningfully to class discussions and to listen actively.
2. Brief in-class and take-home writing assignments, an oral presentation on your research paper
3. Three final essays and several draft versions to be submitted by the deadline indicated on the syllabus and the prompt.
4. Three instructor conferences.
5. Read carefully and often the policies and guidelines for this course. By handing in the first written work, you indicate that you have read, understood, and accepted the requirements of the course.

Formatting of Assignments All papers should be double-spaced and have a title. Use one-inch margins, Times New Roman, twelve-point font. Write your full name, date of submission, and your instructor’s name on the upper left corner of the first page. Remember to create a right justified header with your last name and the page number on each page. All essays must be turned in via the Assignments page on Canvas AND via email to me. Consult formatting guidelines for MLA or Chicago style. Failure to follow instructions may lower the grade for that paper.

The Library
You should acquaint yourself with the library as soon as possible. All students are assigned a Personal Librarian upon enrollment at Yale. To find your personal librarian, go to http://www.library.yale.edu/pl/ and enter your name in the search box in the top right-hand corner. Contact your Personal Librarian whenever you have a question about locating research materials. You will need to use the library’s resources for this class. As a class, we will have one library visit.

Revisions
You will submit drafts of each paper for my comments and peer review before final submission. Initial drafts will not be graded. An initial draft must be a full and complete paper: it must contain an introduction and conclusion as well as a page listing any works cited. Submitting your paper late will prevent you from participating in the workshop on that paper and from receiving my comments on that version.

Late Papers
You must turn in copies of all drafts on the required due date as indicated on the essay assignment and on the syllabus. One third of a letter grade (i.e., A to A-) will be deducted from the essay’s final grade for each day the essay is late. Extensions will be granted only in the case of 1) documented illness, 2) religious observance, or 3) a Dean’s Excuse.

Attendance
Attendance is mandatory. This is a writing and discussion course; everyone’s presence is always needed. Repeated absences, lateness, and lack of preparation will adversely affect your grade. More than two unexcused absences will result in a lowering of your grade. You must not exceed
four absences or you will fail the course. This includes both excused and unexcused absences. If you miss a class meeting, it is your responsibility to obtain any class notes or other course material you may have missed from your peers. It is also your responsibility to make arrangements for any graded assignments.

**Electronic Devices**

Turn off and put away all electronic devices in the classroom (no laptops, no phones). If you require the use of such devices, please come speak to me. You must bring a copy of the text under discussion, a notebook, and a pen or pencil to each class. All discussion notes should be handwritten on paper and transferred to your computer later.

**Seeking Help Outside of Class**

You are encouraged to use the resources at Yale to help you write your papers. These resources include Yale College Writing tutors and writing partners who can offer advice on all stages of the writing process. You can find contact information for both sources at [http://ctl.yale.edu/tutoring/writing-tutoring](http://ctl.yale.edu/tutoring/writing-tutoring) or you may go directly to the Writing Center website: [http://ctl.yale.edu/contact-yale-college-writing-center](http://ctl.yale.edu/contact-yale-college-writing-center). Please acknowledge that you have received help at the end of your paper.

**Statement on Academic Conversation**

Think of your spoken and written ideas shared in this course as part of a rich, deep, and ongoing conversation, one that began before you entered it and one that will continue in small part thanks to your contributions. You must fairly and clearly acknowledge the ideas of others and cite them properly in your work. Any instance of plagiarism, recklessly careless citation, or any other form of academic dishonesty, such as unauthorized collaboration, may result in a failure on the particular assignment involved or of the course. Familiarize yourself with Yale’s policies on this matter at [http://yalecollege.yale.edu/content/undergraduate-regulations](http://yalecollege.yale.edu/content/undergraduate-regulations) and at [http://writing.yalecollege.yale.edu/using-sources](http://writing.yalecollege.yale.edu/using-sources).

**Accessibility:**

Course accessibility is extremely important to me. If you require an accommodation for a disability, please let me know as soon as possible. I will happily work with you and/or Yale’s Resource Office on Disabilities to ensure that the appropriate accommodations are made. Their website is: [https://rod.yale.edu](https://rod.yale.edu)

**Due Dates**

**Unit 1**

7/4/19 - P1V1 (3-4 pages)
7/8/19 - P1V2

**Unit 2**

7/11/19 - P2V1 (4-5 pages)
7/16/19 - P2V2
Unit 3
7/19/19 - Working Bibliography and Proposal (20–25 sources)
7/22/19 - Partial P3V1 (4 pages)
7/25/19 - Complete P3V1 (8–10 pages)
7/30/19 - Complete P3V2 (8–10 pages)

Presentation
7/31/19 or 8/2/19

Grading
Paper 1 (3-4 pages, close reading for argument) 15%
Paper 2 (4-5 pages, controlled research argument) 25%
Paper 3 (8-10 pages, research-based argument) 30%
Presentation 15%
Participation, including contributions to class discussions and workshops, and brief writing assignments 15%

*I do not discuss grades over email. If you wish to talk with me about a grade you have received, please email me to set up an appointment. I reserve the right—after discussing your paper—to raise or lower your grade if I notice something that I missed on the first read.

Grading Criteria
All of your writing for this course will be graded on your paper’s performance in four areas: 1) argumentation (claim and organization), 2) content (use of assigned materials and/or secondary research), 3) style (effective rhetoric, correct grammar and punctuation, clarity and readability), and 4) originality (i.e., what distinguishes your ideas and your writing from anyone else’s).

An A paper does an exemplary job on all four performance areas. It has an interesting, clearly-articulated, and provable claim, which it argues in an organized manner. It displays a thorough and thoughtful analysis of primary and secondary texts. It is written in a fluent and engaging style, without any significant grammatical or typographical errors. It connects complex ideas across texts in a sustained and consistent manner.

A B paper does a very good job on at least three of the four performance areas. It has a clear, provable claim, which it argues without displaying major mistakes or misunderstandings. Its claim is consistent, but not necessarily original or surprising. It is written in a competent but not exceptional manner, with only minor grammatical errors or stylistic issues. It makes connections between the various texts and ideas under discussion, although its evidence may be inconsistent at times.

A C paper does a passable job on at least two of the four performance areas. It has a thesis statement, although its claim may be unclearly articulated, vague, and/or inconsistently argued. It may have more serious structural or rhetorical issues that make the argument hard to follow. It does engage with assigned materials or secondary sources, but not in a particularly original or thoughtful way. It may also suggest that the student has misunderstood the assignment, his/her/their secondary texts, or both. It may have multiple stylistic or grammatical errors.
A D paper does the minimum to fulfill a given assignment. It may have a weak or unclear claim, or no claim at all. It engages with assigned texts or secondary materials in only a cursory (i.e., shallow or derivative) way, or hardly at all. It may have significant grammatical and/or stylistic errors. It may also have many typos or proofreading errors that suggest a lack of conscientiousness on the part of the student.

**Course Schedule**

All assignments and readings should be completed before the class meeting on the dates listed below. This schedule is subject to minor changes.

**Unit One: Democracy in America**

**Week 1**
M, July 1  Course Introduction  Essay #1 assigned
W, July 3  Alexis de Tocqueville, “Why Great Revolutions Will Become Rare”  
Abraham Lincoln, “Gettysburg Address”  
Gerald Graff and Kathy Birkenstein, Chapters 1-4 from *They Say/I Say*

**Thu, Jul 4**  Paper #1 (first draft) due at 9AM on Canvas

F, July 5  Tocqueville, “Why Great Revolutions Will Become Rare” (reread)  
Neil Davidson, “Bourgeois Revolution and the US Civil War”  
Paper #1 workshop  
Bring peer reviews to class  
Graff and Birkenstein, Chapters 5-7, 9 from *They Say/I Say*

**Unit Two: Is American Exceptional? Histories and Theories**

**Week 2**
M, July 8  **Paper #1 final draft due at 9AM on Canvas**  
Essay #2 assigned  


**Th, July 11**  Paper #2 (first draft) due at 9AM on Canvas
F, July 12  Essay #2 Workshop
Bring peer reviews to class
Listen to Aziz Rana podcast, “Universalizing American Liberty”

Unit Three: Empire and Ideology

Week 3
M, July 15  Paper #3 Assigned
Listen to Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, “Recovering Identity Politics from Neoliberalism”

Tu, July 16  Paper #2 (final draft) due at 9AM on Canvas

W, July 17  Library Session
Note Location: Bass Library
Wayne Both et al., “From Problems to Sources” and “Engaging Sources” from The Craft of Research

F, July 19  Research proposal and working bibliography due at beginning of class (bring two printed copies)
Apocalypse Now (film)

Week 4
M, July 22  Essay #3 (partial draft) due at beginning of class (Introduction with claim, at least three body paragraphs, and detailed outline with quotes—bring two printed copies)
Yale University Art Gallery visit

W.E.B. DuBois: A Biography in Four Voices (film)

Th, July 25  Essay #3 (complete draft) due at 9AM on Canvas

Unit Four: American Futures
F, July 26  Paper #3 workshop
Bring peer reviews to class
Week 5

T, July 30  Essay #3 (final draft) due at 9AM on Canvas

W, July 31  Panels 1 and 2

F, Aug 2  Panels 3 and 4
This Changes Everything (film), or Sorry to Bother You (film)