

Department of History

SEMESTER II YEAR 1979

INSTRUCTOR

COURSE NO.

COURSE TITLE

History 405 American Cultural History to 1860

Daniel Rodgers

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course is designed to explore the history of popular values, ideologies, and cultural norms in American life from the seventeenth century to the Civil War. Lectures will deal with changing religious and political beliefs, patterns of social and family life, the impact of expansion on American culture, the rise and decline of romantic utopianism, the influence of European rationalist and romantic ideas in America, and trends in literature. The major theme of the lectures is the running tension between individualism and the community in early American history.

The heart of the course, however, will not lie in the lectures but in the discussion groups which will meet for 1½ hours each week (at times to be arranged the first week of classes). Some discussion sections will be led by a graduate assistant, some by myself. Their aim is to confront students with original source materials in American cultural history, to prod their powers of analysis, and to encourage the "doing" (not merely the absorption) of history.

LECTURES

Twice weekly. TR 9:50-10:45

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS and EXAMS

Two 5-6 page papers on some aspect of the assigned readings will be required during the term. The final two weeks of class will be devoted to independent reading projects. Each student will choose a problem in American cultural history and write a paper of about 12 pages analyzing that problem and relating it to the themes and readings of the course. There will be no examinations.

GRADING SYSTEM

Assignments will be weighted approximately in proportion to the number of pages required, but grading will not be done on a strictly mathematical basis. Improvement, extraordinary work and extraordinary lapses, and, in particular, class discussion will all be considered in the final grade.

REQUIRED READINGS

The attached syllabus, with some substitutions, indicates the kind and scope of readings.

Daniel Rodgers
4105 Humanities

History 405: American Cultural History to 1860

I. The Puritan Ethos

1. Lectures: Introduction
The medieval heritage
2. Lectures: Puritanism--the examined heart
Puritanism--the chosen few
Reading: William Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation (1630-1646)
3. Lectures: The social order of 17th-century New England
Protestantism and the spirit of capitalism
Reading: John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity" (1630)
Edmund S. Morgan, The Puritan Family (1944)

II. The 18th Century: Science, Reason, and Revolution

4. Lectures: The Enlightenment in America
Cultural provincialism
Reading: Richard L. Bushman, ed., The Great Awakening
5. Lectures: The moral roots of the American Revolution
Jefferson, Paine, and the radical revolution
Reading: John Adams, Diary and Autobiography, Vol. 1 (1755-1770)
6. Lectures: Passions in equipoise--a new science of politics
Reading: Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia (1785)
Jefferson, Letters from France, 1785-1789

III. The 19th Century: Hope, Anxiety, and Change

7. Lectures: Transformations of space, power, and time
Nature, civilization, and the west
Reading: Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery" (1836)
Herman Melville, "The Tartarus of Maids" (1850s)
To be discussed together with slides of American landscape art
8. Lectures: The civilizers
The ideology of capitalism
Reading: James Fenimore Cooper, The Prairie (1827)
9. Lectures: The politics of democracy
Violence and vigilantism
Reading: Marvin Meyers, The Jacksonian Persuasion (1957)
"Introductory Statement of the Democratic Principle" from
The Democratic Review (1837)
Edward Everett, "Accumulation, Property, Capital, Credit" (1838)

IV. The Romantic Impulse

10. Lectures: Romanticism in Europe and America
Ralph Waldo Emerson—the self and the circular universe
Reading: Stephen E. Whicher, ed., Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson
11. Lectures: The politics of perfection—community, sex, and salvation
No section meetings
12. Lectures: Slavery and the individual conscience
The scepticism of Nathaniel Hawthorne
Reading: Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Blithedale Romance (1852)

V. The Decline of Utopianism

13. Lectures: Cities, immigrants, and social change, 1850-1860
The invasion of sentiment
Reading: Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852)
14. Lectures: The feminine sphere
The invention of the plantation legend
Reading: Individual projects
15. Lectures: Understanding the Civil War
Overview
Reading: Individual projects