

# Thought and Society in the American Past

Spring 2020  
(American Studies, 01:050:225)

Mondays, 10:55AM to 1:55PM  
Ruth Adams Building 105

**Prof. Andy Urban**

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Office Hours: 1-3PM, Tuesdays, or by appointment  
Ruth Adams Building 205E



Henry Ossawa Tanner, *The Banjo Lesson*, 1893.  
Courtesy of the Hampton University Museum.

## Course Description:

This course examines key American events, debates, and cultural developments that defined the long nineteenth century, a period that spanned the aftermath of the American Revolution to the eve of World War I. Analyzing a variety of historical, visual, literary, and cultural texts from the era, and using context and interpretation provided by scholarly secondary sources, we'll explore key topics in nineteenth-century thought, such as revivalism, transcendentalism, populism, progressivism, and pragmatism. We'll also explore how nineteenth-century American society was organized, and how gender, class, and ethnicity shaped social experiences. This course is not intended to be a comprehensive survey of American society and thought in the nineteenth century. Instead we'll use different case studies to gain insights into what nineteenth-century Americans experienced, felt, believed, and understood.

## Required Readings:

- Gordon Chang, *Ghosts of Gold Mountain: The Epic Story of the Chinese Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad* (Stanford University Press, 2019). ISBN#: 9781328618573.
- Edith Wharton, *Edith Frome* (Norton, 1995 [1911]). ISBN#: 9780393966350.
- W.E.B. DuBois, *Souls of Blackfolk* (Penguin Classics, 1996 [1903]). ISBN#: 9780140189988.

Additional required readings – listed in this class schedule portion of this syllabus – will be posted as .pdf files on the course's SAKAI site, in the section titled "Resources."

Readings correspond to the day they will be discussed and need to be completed before class meets. You are required to bring readings to class, to have available to reference in discussion, and there may be occasional spot checks to see if you have done this.

Please use the ISBN numbers provided above to acquire the correct editions of the books. I understand why it is often easier and less expensive to read an online version or another print edition, but please keep in mind that when grading essays, I will need to know the page number of the passages you are citing and locate them in the text. If you use a different edition of the book, you will be responsible for ensuring your citations correspond to the above listed versions that I will be using to grade.

## Assignment and Grading Summary:

- **Attendance and Participation** – 10%
- **Workshopping Primary Sources (Group Assignments)** – two presentations, 25% total (12.5% each)

- **Wharton Essay** - 20% (Due, March 6)
- **Exam** - 25% (In-Class, April 20)
- **DuBois Essay** - 20% (Due, May 11)

Attendance is mandatory. Unexcused absences will result in deductions to your attendance grade.

Participation in class discussions is key to your Attendance/Participation grade. Discussion is where you demonstrate that you have been doing the readings and are engaging them critically.

If you feel uncomfortable speaking in class or have other questions about how to improve your participation in discussion, I'm happy to meet with you to discuss strategies for improvement in this area.

### **Grading Scale:**

92-100=**A**; 87-91=**B+**; 81-86=**B**; 77-80=**C+**; 70-76=**C**; 60-69=**D**; 0-59=**F**

**Note:** there are no minus grades at Rutgers.

### **American Studies Department Learning Goals Met by this Course:**

Students will learn to synthesize interdisciplinary sources and methods of analysis and to conduct investigations into American culture and history. Students will learn to use scholarship in history, politics, literature, and art to analyze and interpret the varied experiences, perspectives, and events that define American life. Students will be able to write well; speak articulately; and think critically, analytically, and creatively.

### **Class Policies:**

#### **SAKAI and Class Announcements:**

Please make sure that you are receiving and checking SAKAI announcements via email, as I regularly use this tool to post important information relating to class. You are responsible for knowing the information and instructions posted to SAKAI.

**Special Accommodation Requests:**

All special accommodation requests should be brought to my attention during the first two weeks of class. Full disability policies and procedures are available for review at: <http://disabilityservices.rutgers.edu/>.

**Missing Class:**

If you have to miss class due to sickness, an emergency, or another excused reason, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me.

**Phones and Computers:**

Computer and phone use should be limited to activities related to class. If I see you regularly using your phone or computer for purposes unrelated to class, it will hurt your grade.

**Academic Integrity Policy:**

<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity.shtml>

Violations include: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, denying others access to information or material, and facilitating violations of academic integrity.

If you are unsure about how to research and write a paper - the most common cause of violations of the academic integrity policy - please ask me for help!

**Honor Pledge:**

I pledge on my honor that I will adhere to all aspects of the Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy

By accepting this syllabus and enrolling in this course, you assume responsibility for knowing the above policies and the possible penalties - including suspension and expulsion - should you violate the Honor Pledge.

## Class Schedule and Assigned Readings

**January 27 – Introductions; Definition: “Thought and Society”? ; Scope of Course and Goals**

**February 3 – Religion in 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Thought**

- Sam Haselby, “To Raise a Holy People, Wear No Slouched Hat,” *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* (2015)
- Paul Gutjahr, “Joseph’s Gold Bible,” *The Book of Mormon: A Biography* (2012)
- Albert Raboteau, Excerpt from “Religious Life in the Slave Community,” *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (2004)
- Edward Beecher, preface, *The Papal Conspiracy Exposed* (1855)

**February 10 –Family and Domestic Life; Literature and Art from the Antebellum Period**

- Jodi Vandenberg-Daves, “Medicalizing the Maternal Body,” *Modern Motherhood: An American History* (2014)
- Jeanne Boydston, “The Political Economy of Housework,” *Home & Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (1990)
- Nathaniel Hawthorne, “The Birth-Mark,” *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1843)
- *Selected Works of Art* (SEE SAKAI FOLDER)

Primary Source Workshop, Group A

**February 17 – *Ethan Frome***

- Wharton, *Ethan Frome* (entire book)

**February 24 – Adapting the Past**

In-Class screening of the first two episodes of *Dickinson*

In-class work on Wharton Essays

### **March 2 – American Philosophies**

- Erin McKenna, Part One, *American Philosophy* (2015)
- Kent Curtis, “The Virtue of Thoreau: Biography, Geography, and History in Walden Woods,” *Environmental History* 15, no. 1 (2010): 31-53.
- Thoreau, “Life Without Principle,” (1863)
- Eleanor Harvey, “Founding Landscape: Charles Willson Peale’s Exhumation of the Mastodon,” *American Art* 31, no. 2 (2017): 40-42.
- *Selected Works of Art* (SEE SAKAI FOLDER)

#### Primary Source Workshop, Group B

### **March 9 – Narrating and Understanding Slavery**

- Kendra Boyd, Miya Carey, and Christopher Blakely, “Old Money: Rutgers University and the Political Economy of Slavery in New Jersey,” in *Scarlet and Black: Slavery and Dispossession in Rutgers History* (2016)
- Walter Johnson, “Turning People into Products,” in *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (2001)
- James Olney, “‘I Was Born’: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature,” *Callaloo* 20 (1984): 46-73.
- Charles Bell, *Fifty Years In Chains; or, The Life of an American Slave*, chapters 1, 12, & 15 (1858)

#### Primary Source Workshop, Group C

### **March 23 – Labor and Capital**

- Chang, *Ghosts of Gold Mountain*, Introduction through Chapter 5
- *Geography of Chinese Workers Building the Transcontinental Railroad: A virtual reconstruction of the key historic sites*,  
<http://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/website/virtual/>

- *Chinese Railroad Workers Project*, online exhibition,  
<http://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/website/>

### Primary Source Workshop, Group A

#### **March 30 – Immigration**

- Chang, *Ghosts of Gold Mountain*, Chapter 6 to conclusion
- Erika Lee, “The ‘Inferior Races’ of Europe,” in *America for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States* (2019)
- Erika Lee, “Trump’s xenophobia is an American tradition – but it doesn’t have to be,” *Washington Post*, November 26, 2019
- *Selected Images* (SEE SAKAI FOLDER)

### Primary Source Workshop, Group C

#### **April 6 – Indigeneity and Colonization**

- Jeani O’Brien, “Lasting,” in *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians out of Existence in New England* (2010)
- Theda Perdue and Michael Green, *The Cherokee Removal: A Brief History with Documents*, Introduction and Part 4 (1995)
- David Chang, ““We Will Be Comparable to the Indian Peoples”: Recognizing Likeness between Native Hawaiians and American Indians, 1834–1923,” *American Quarterly* 67, No. 3 (September 2015): 859-886.

### Primary Source Workshop, Group B

#### **April 13 – The Politics of the Western**

In-Class screening of director John Ford, *The Searchers* (1956)

#### **April 20 – In-Class Exam**

**April 27 - The Souls of Black Folk**

- Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, chapters I - VII
- Du Bois, "The Propaganda of History," from *Black Reconstruction* (1935)

**May 4 - The Souls of Black Folk**

- Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, chapters VIII - end