

LEH 301: American Political Ideas
Lehman College - Department of Political Science
Prof. Artinian
Spring 2007

Class meets from 6:00 pm to 8:30 pm on Mondays in room CA 208.

Email: arto.artinian@lehman.cuny.edu

Office Hours: by appointment

Objectives

Today, it is common not to associate the arts with politics. These two areas of human action don't seem to be connected in the minds of public opinion. After all, what could poetry possibly have to say about politics? Sarcasm aside, it will be the objective of our class to dig, read and listen to examples of poetry, music, written criticism and visual arts which are infused with politics, either in response to specific events or to history. As such, most of the stuff we will read will be critical and focused only on the United States. It is important to be critical, since this is a basic requirement for democratic citizenship.

Many of the authors might be unfamiliar to us. However, the selections here come from absolute masters, giant figures in our cultural history. At every point along this journey, we will seek to integrate these thinkers' works in the broader historical contexts of what it means to be an American by looking at how key ideas in our nation's history changed over time. Lastly, we will investigate some important ideas that have been left out of common discussions.

The class aims to engage with not only those studying political science, but also creative writing, cultural criticism, music and history.

Participation and Readings:

It is crucial for all to complete the readings before class, since class discussions are a key part of the course. This is not meant to be a lecture class.

Reading:

Course readings will consist of three books (two of them available at the Lehman bookstore – see below) and materials distributed by me in class.

Writing

There is one substantial writing requirement, which is due towards the end of the semester. This research project is a research paper to be developed by you (with my feedback) over the course of the semester. The goal is to identify a feature of the American experience, narrow it down, analyze it and produce a piece of scholarship on it. Topics must be related (broadly, at least) to issues being discussed in class throughout the semester. You will choose the topic, and preparation for the paper will include library research. The medium of your project can be: poetry, music, fiction, non-fiction and historical narratives. The project will be broken down into a number of parts, whose submission dates will be spread through the semester, ending with the final report to be submitted in May. The format of your project is open. Students in the past have written poetry as their Analysis Project, while others have written a selection of short stories. Whatever you choose to do, you must remember that what counts is your analysis and not the medium of expression.

I will provide detailed instructions on requirement and submission dates throughout the semester.

Midterm and Final Exam

The exams will cover assigned readings and class discussions.

Attendance:

A student who has missed four (4) or more classes for any reason will automatically receive a failing grade for the semester. Our class meets once a week and four or more absences represent a huge percentage of the total number of class meetings.

Grading:

Grading will be based on:

- 1) Midterm Exam
- 2) Final Exam
- 3) Research Project
- 4) Class Participation and Attendance
- 5) Weekly reading summary presentation

Final grades will be determined as follows:

- Midterm Exam: 20%
- Final Exam: 30%
- Research Project: 30%
- Weekly reading summary presentation: 10%
- Class participation: 5%
- Attendance: 5%

Required Texts:

Two books have been ordered and are available at the Lehman Bookstore:

- 1) William Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, Hill and Wang, 2003
- 2) Daniel Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country*, Harvard, 2001

In addition, the following book can be purchase online for about \$3: Amiri Baraka “Blues People”, any edition.

I will distribute additional materials in class.

Date	Focus of Class Discussion and Readings
Jan-29	Introduction and Class Overview
Feb-5	Early History - Daniel Richter's <i>Facing East from Indian Country</i>
Feb-12	Lincoln's Birthday – no class
Feb-15	Note, this is a Thursday! Richter (continued), William Cronon: “ <i>Changes in the Land</i> ”
Feb-19	President's Day – no class
Feb-21	Note, this is a Wednesday! Cronon (continued), Mary Rowlandson: <i>Captivity Narratives</i>

Feb-26	Constitutional Foundations: the Federalist and Anti-Federalist Debate
March-5	The Fabric of American society - Ed Dorn: <i>'The Shoshoneans' (excerpts)</i> , W.E.B. DuBois: <i>(Excerpts from the DuBois Reader)</i>
March-12	Intersections of race, class and culture in today's prison system - Dylan Rodriguez: <i>Forced Passages (excerpts)</i>
March-19	Midterm Exam
March-26	American Music (Part I) – Amiri Baraka: <i>Blues People</i> , selected musical examples, bluegrass music
April-16	American Music (Part II) – John Cage, H. Partch, electronic and Computer Music
April-23	American Music and Politics – The Birth of Hip Hop and its politics
April-30	Poetry and Politics (Part I) – Ed Sanders: <i>Investigative Poetics</i> , Philip Whalen, John Wieners (excerpts), Charles Olson: <i>Maximus Poems (excerpts)</i>
May-7	Politics and Poetry in context (The Vietnam War) – W. Ehrhardt: <i>Essays</i> , Jim Neilson: <i>Warring Fashions</i>
May-14	A survey of the last fifty years in American Visual Arts
May-21	Final Exam