Writing Seminar I: The Idea of “America”: What Does it Mean?

This class will examine “America” as a complex, historically-rooted, and malleable idea, which writers, social scientists, politicians, and the state have shaped, changed, and critiqued to fit their own contexts and purposes. We will explore the historical roots and shifting conceptions of the idea of America through analysis of political treatises, poetry, essays, and official government documents from the pre-colonial period to the present. Approaching “America” as both a nation-state and an empire, and considering how it has been imagined by those within as well as outside its borders, we will analyze the idea of America not only in the context of life in the United States, but also in the context of global development, environmental crises, and American foreign policy. Students will write informal response papers as preparation for drafting and revising 3 essays over the course of the semester. Texts will include works by Mary Rowlandson, Thomas Jefferson, Frederick Douglass, James Baldwin, Michael Rogin, and Barbara Ehrenreich.

Reading and Writing
This class is designed to hone your skills and practice as a writer. Our premise is that reading and writing are inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing. We write in order to extract and convey a particular reading and significance of a book, article, movie, public event, political debate, or episode in our own lives.

Assignments and Grading:
Over the course of the semester, you will write 3 formal essays based on the course texts and class discussion. Essays will be graded for the form as well as content of their analysis. For each essay, you will write a rough draft, which we will workshop in class. Final papers should be in 12-pt. font, double-spaced, and paginated.

Essays (specific guidelines will be distributed in class):
Essay 1: 4-6 pages (25%)
Essay 2: 4-6 pages (25%)
Essay 3: 8-10 pages (30%)
Participation: (20%)

Participation Requirements:
Participation is key for your success in this course. In addition to coming to class regularly and on time, you must:

1) Complete all reading assignments
2) Post 2 discussion questions before each class. Please post your questions to the Forum section of NYU Classes at least 1 hour before class on the day we are scheduled to discuss the reading.
3) Contribute Regularly and Thoughtfully to Class Discussion
4) Engage Others With Respect

Books: Please purchase the following books at the NYU bookstore. I have also placed copies on reserve at NYU Bobst Library.

- Hacker, *Pocket Manual of Style* (or a style manual of your choice with MLA and Chicago guidelines)

Readings and Assignments: Readings and assignments are due on the date they are listed. Readings marked with an asterisk (*) can be found in the Resources Folder of the course website in NYU Classes. You must print and bring a hard copy of the reading to class.

Phone/Computer Policy: Please turn your cell phones off during class. You are permitted to use your laptops for writing and other specific exercises. Please do not use laptops during class discussion.

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**Schedule of Readings and Assignments**

Sept. 3: Introduction: The Idea of America and The Politics of Voice
-David Brooks, “Listening to Ta-Hesi Coates While White”*

**Master Narratives of Early America**

Sept. 8: Mary Rowlandson, *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*

Sept. 10: Mary Rowlandson, *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*

Sept. 15: NO CLASS

Sept. 17: Michael Rogin, “Liberal Society and the Indian Question”*

-Assign Essay 1
Sept. 24: -Jonathan Martin, “State by State, Democratic Party is Erasing Ties to Jefferson and Jackson”*

Sept. 29: **Essay 1 Drafts Due**
Workshop Essay 1 Drafts

**Slave Narratives and the Politics of Writing**

Oct 1: **Essay 1 Due**
Phillis Wheatley (selected poems)*

Oct. 6: Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (pages 323-403)

Oct. 8: **NO CLASS**

Oct. 13: **NO CLASS—Fall Break**

Oct. 15: Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (pages 403-436)

Oct. 20: Writing Exercises: TBA

-Assign Essay 2

Oct. 27: Recent Op-Eds: Find and bring to class a recent op-ed that addresses the legacy of U.S. slavery in contemporary American life.

Oct. 29: **Essay 2: Drafts Due**
Workshop Essay 2 Drafts

**Liberal Capitalism and Narratives of Economic (In)Equality**

Nov. 3: **Essay 2 Due**
Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (“Authors Introduction”)*

Nov. 5: Writing Exercises: TBA

Nov. 10: Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By In America* (pages 1-121)

Nov. 12: *Nickel and Dimed* (pages 121-193)
-Jill Lepore, “Richer and Poorer: Accounting For Inequality”*
Nov. 17: Carolyn Betensky, “Princes as Paupers: Pleasure and the Imagination of Powerlessness”*  
Assign Essay 3

Nov. 19: Nickel and Dimed (pages 193-235)

Nov. 24: Writing Exercises: TBA

Nov. 26: NO CLASS--Thanksgiving

Dec. 8: Essay 3 Drafts Due
Workshop Drafts

Dec. 10: Tim Stanley, “It’s Still Not the End of History”* 

Dec. 15: Essay 3 Due
Course Evaluations and Reflections