

History 651 and 651A, Colloquium in Early Modern European History. Fall 2012

The trope of America in European political thought

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Purpose. Eric Fassin, a French historian who specializes in French-American relations, remarked recently that for European intellectuals “America is a good thinking aid” (“L’Amérique est bonne à penser”). In this colloquium we will explore the trope of America in European discourse since the early eighteenth centuries to Tocqueville’s important synthesis “Democracy in America” continuing with a few major lines of argument in the 20th and early 21st century. We are less interested in the actual political/diplomatic exchanges – although these will form the background of our discussions – than in the mental constructions of “America.” This is primarily a colloquium in the history of ideas; however, the readings cover multiple methodological approaches to the subject.

Each meeting will be devoted to the readings indicated in the syllabus, to which we will occasionally add some of the relevant readings placed on reserve. We will discuss the way images of America were and are formed in European thought as an example of the continuous interplay between ideas, politics, and cultural patterns. Related to this, we will discuss the construction of stereotypes and the part stereotypes play in history.

Evaluation. This course is in essence a series of long conversations based on careful readings of rather complex texts. The success of a colloquium depends on the students’ preparation and intellectual commitment; it follows that 100% participation is essential and absences are not acceptable. Please look at the syllabus now and make sure you will have no conflicts during this semester. Participation to discussion will count as 25% of the grade; a final 25 page analytical essay will complete the grade. Each student will be responsible for leading one or two discussions. This will involve preparing a number of questions to kick-off the conversation and drawing the conclusions for the topic of the day. Your typed reading notes will serve as prompts for participation during the discussion and will be turned in at the end of the class as part of the participation grade.

Schedule of topics and assignments:

1. August 29: Organization of the class. Main themes
2. September 5: America within the Enlightenment. Free discussion on Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolutions*, chapters I-IV and Benjamin, *The Atlantic World*.
3. September 12: Steele and Giordanetti, *Was America a mistake?*

4. September 19: Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* and Franklin, "Information to those who would remove to America"
5. September 26: Chateaubriand, *Atala*, Liebersohn, *Aristocratic Encounters*, part I, and Malcom Bradbury, *Dangerous Pilgrimages* (chapter 1)
6. October 3: *Lafayette in Two worlds*:_Introduction + chapters 1, 2, 6, 8 + Epilogue
7. October 10: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*
8. October 17: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*
9. October 24: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*
10. October 31: Beaumont, *Marie* and Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of Americans*
11. November 7: Aurelian Craiutu and Jeffrey Isaacs (editors) *America Through European Eyes: British and French Reflections on the New World from the Eighteenth Century to the Present*_(*excerpts*)
12. November 14: Jean Baudrillard, *America* and Ceaser, *Reconstructing America* (*excerpts*).
13. November 21:

Thanksgiving Break

14. November 28: Philippe Roger, *The American Enemy*. Review discussion.
15. December 8: No class. Individual appointments in my office.

Books to purchase

J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (any edition)

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. Penguin or any paperback unabridged edition

Jean Baudrillard, *America* Verso 1999

Philippe Roger, *The American Enemy* University of Chicago Press, 2005

Aurelian Craiutu and Jeffrey Isaacs (editors) *America Through European Eyes: British and French Reflections on the New World from the Eighteenth Century to the Present* Modern Humanities Research, 2009.

Frances Trollope, *Domestic manners of the Americans* (1832) – any paperback edition

Additional readings:

Benjamin Franklin, "Information to those who would remove to America" at the following url:

<http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch15s27.html>

Books placed on reserve:

Lloyd Kramer, *Lafayette in two worlds* (1996)

René de Chateaubriand, *Atala*

Gustave de Beaumont, *Marie*

Henry Steele Commager and Elmo Giordanetti, *Was America a mistake? An eighteenth century controversy* (1968)

Malcom Bradbury, *Dangerous Pilgrimages* (1989)

James W. Ceaser, *Reconstructing America* (2007)

Recommendations

As the literature on the subject is vast, students should get acquainted with two long-standing fundamental monographs, always excellent:

R.R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolutions and Durand Echeverria, Mirage in the West* - the canon of Atlantic studies enriched by our own Thomas Benjamin's subtle and extensive analysis, *The Atlantic World* (2008)

In addition, students may consult with profit other synthetic works such as:

Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *France and the United States from the beginning to the present* (1978) and Bernard Fay, *The revolutionary spirit in France and America* (1927) (and old but still useful overview).

More recent titles include: Patrice Higonnet, *Sister Republics* (1988); Roger G. Kennedy, *Orders from France* (1989); Jean Philippe Mathy, *Extreme Occident* (1993); Richard Kuisel, *Seducing the French: the dilemma of Americanization* (1993); Susan Dunn, *Sister Revolutions* (1999); Mark Hulliung, *Citizens and Citoyens. Republicans and Liberals in America and France* (2002); Maria Höhn, *GIs and Fräuleins: The German-American Encounter in 1950s West Germany* (2002); Bernard Henri-Levy, *American*

Vertigo: Traveling in America in the footsteps of Tocqueville (2006); Beppe Severgnini, *Ciao America* (2002); Philipp Ziesche, *Cosmopolitan Patriots* (2010).

Also of interest: Philip Marchand, *Ghost Empire* (2005) (one of those “what if?” theories – in this case: what if the French won the Seven Years war and North America would now be a French speaking country?); Jacques Portes, *Fascination and Misgivings* (2000)(more on stereotypes about America). The latest addition to this topic is Geoffrey Hodgson, *The Myth of American Exceptionalism* (2009)

See also: *The Tocqueville Reader* (2002) if you would like to deepen your understanding of this great political writer. There is also a wonderful Tocqueville website:

<http://www.tocqueville.culture.fr/fr>

Very useful are the websites of the French Embassy <http://www.ambafrance-us.org/franceus/index.asp>; and of the German Embassy:

<http://usa.usembassy.de/garelations.htm>