

# American Culture

**Lecturer: David Park**

## Language

English

## Course description and objectives

The USA isn't what it used to be. Not only is its role as the biggest player in the world being questioned but the country itself is showing signs of wear. Though it once represented democracy and free trade, now these things might not even be seen as positive or for everyone, and they are certainly endangered within the US. This course alternates between looking at the US in the past and the present. Firstly, we look at the last century, what has been nicknamed the American century, when the US was the dominant force in shaping economics and culture. Some of the historical things covered are immigration, the failure of capitalism in 1929, WWII, the economic boom, and the financial crisis of 2008; in looking at these periods, we also look at the country's contribution to film, art, and music during those times. Secondly, what are the problems in the US now? We consider the growing distance between rich and poor, medical care, the decreasing life expectancy, the increased suicide rate, and the growing idea that democracy and meritocracy are falsehoods. Furthermore, America seems reluctant to recognize that it isn't the Super Power it was, and it is still trying to impose its way on the world. Is the dollar eternal? Thirdly, three positive aspects are considered: 1) though voices in the US go from the most reactionary to the most radical perhaps in all of the chaos it may still offer the most objective views (John Steward, John Mearsheimer, etc.); 2) though Hollywood is less influential and more stereotyped than before, there has been a growth in both alternative films and shows (The Truffle Hunters, One Night in Miami etc.) as well as global music platforms (Tiny Desk: NPR, WEXP etc.); and 3) the LGBT movement has become a major player on the national level.

## Audience

The course is open to students enrolled in Bocconi degree programs (Bachelor, Master of Science, Integrated Master of Arts in in law), University Master students and PhDs.

## Prerequisites

The course is open to students whose English skills are at a high B2 or C1 level. On the one hand, it is a course which will help students consolidate their listening and speaking skills while, on the other hand, it is a university course on American Culture.

## Duration

24 hours

## Teaching mode

This course will be only taught in person. Distance mode will not be provided.

## Calendar

Lecture	Date	Time	Room
1	Thu 14/09/2023	18.15 – 19.45	N12 (Velodromo)
2	Fri 15/09/2023	14.45 – 16.15	N12 (Velodromo)
3	Fri 15/09/2023	16.30 – 18.00	N12 (Velodromo)
4	Thu 21/09/2023	18.15 – 19.45	N12 (Velodromo)
5	Fri 22/09/2023	14.45 – 16.15	N12 (Velodromo)
6	Fri 22/09/2023	16.30 – 18.00	N12 (Velodromo)

## Syllabus of the course

Lessons are typically divided into 3 parts: 1) discussion around a series of questions 2) a lecture by the professor dealing with what experts think and 3) a class discussion where students are expected to go into further detail.

Provocative questions and key words are written in slots to give students an idea of what a lesson could cover. There is too much information here, and obviously given time limits we will not cover everything. Conversely, American Culture is so broad that suggestions for things students would like to discuss are welcome.

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## Lecture Topics

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## 1 Geography/Native Americans/Discovery

- Was it easier to start up a civilization in Europe or the Americas? Why?
- Who were the first native Americans? When and how did they come? Are they still there?
- What was "the Trail of Tears"?

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## 2 Colonization/Nationhood/Immigration

- When and why did people come to the US?
- The original settlers can be divided into three groups, what are they? How readily did people mix?
- Are there still segregated areas?

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## 3 Capitalism/Corporate America/too Big to Fail

- Amazon versus Trade Unions
- Buffett says **he's taxed at a lower rate than his secretary.**
- Does free trade really exist?
- What did Thomas Piketty say?

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## 4 Blacks and Whites

- What happened in 1619? And in 1624?
- America **has** the highest incarceration rate in the world. What percentage of the prisoners are black?
- Spike Lee
- What did Frank Sinatra do to **help the civil rights movement?**

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## 5 Funky Black Sound from the cotton fields to Tupac

- Motown and Tammy Records **may have been** the greatest promoters of civil rights in the 60's
- From Scot Joplin to Bruno Mars (who isn't really black) and Anderson Paak
- Duke Ellington "Take the A Train", John Coltrane, Billy Holiday, Sam Cooke, Nat King Cole, and Miles Davis.

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## 6 The American Dream and going to a good school

- God only saves rich people. Meritocracy. How much is tuition at Harvard for a year?
  - Can you really get an idea of how rich a family is by their son's or daughter's SAT **scores?**
  - The Tyranny of Merit by Michael Sandel
  - What is the student **debt problem?**
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## 7 American Art and Design

- From Thomas Eakins to Jean-Michel Basquiat
- Winslow Homer, Edward Hopper, Jasper Johns and Mark Rothko. When did New York become the art Capital of the world? Mid-Century **Modern style**.
- Can you make some artistic/creative connections between the US and Italy? Hollywood and Italian fashion? Armani and Richard Gere?

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## 8 100 Years of wars: WW1, WW2, Korea, the Cold War, Cuba, Vietnam, Latin America, the first Gulf War, Afghanistan, Iraq

- The arms industry, the atomic bomb, private mercenary contractors, drones...
- Patriotism
- Nationalism

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## 9 American Food: As American as Apple Pie

- The Diner has been the source of America's best
- McDonald's and Supersize me
- Obesity in the US
- Starbuck's
- Can you eat well in the US?
- Thanksgiving Dinner

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## 10 Religion in America

- How are people divided up?
- Puritans
- Religious fanaticism
- White Supremacism

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## 11 Facebook, Google and the Surveillance Economy

- Should they be allowed to invade our lives the way they do?
- How much do they know?

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## 12 LGBT, America was the first place!

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### Suggested bibliography

The lecturer will provide bibliography references during the course.

## Available seats

This activity is limited to **110** participants. Registrations cannot be carried out once this number has been reached or after closing of the registration period. Please remember that you can unsubscribe from Language Center supplementary activities only before the registration deadline.