Honors 2212: American Institutions

Section 1, T/TH, 2:00-3:20; BUC 208

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In short, one may say anything about the history of the world--anything that might enter the most disordered imagination. The only thing one can't say is that it's rational. The very word sticks in one's throat. —Dostoevsky

When the individuality of the artist begins to express itself, what the artist gains in the way of liberty he loses in the way of order. —Picasso

History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake. —Joyce

American political institutions were conceived to promote equality. Just what did "all men are created equal" mean to the privileged white men who led the American Revolution and wrote the Constitution? Most of those men saw themselves as "natural aristocrats". Many owned slaves. During the American Revolution, most Native Americans and African Americans understandably sided with the British. During the eighty years after independence, slavery quadrupled in size. Native Americans endured transportation and ethnic cleansing. Nor did Emancipation and Union victory in the Civil War erase racial, class, and gender violence or exploitation. Neither did late nineteenth-century industrialization or twentieth-century world power. Yet, since the Civil War, the United States has never faced anything approaching a social revolution, and American civil rights have expanded dramatically, to include women and people of color. Human rights have fared less well. As a United States citizen, that is, you have the right to vote or the right to a jury trial (civil rights), but not the right to eat. That matters, since the United States has by far the highest hunger rates in the industrialized world: in 2015, 12.7% of American households (15.8 million households) were food insecure; and 5.0% experienced very low food security (6.3 million households). Equality has never meant the same things to all Americans. Maybe it never will. How have debates over equality shaped American history? How does it stand with American equality today?

Requirements: Each student will be involved in producing **five (5) "think pieces"** on the readings for a given week (2-4 pages each, longer is fine if the spirit moves you), and also produce **a final project** (a more substantial and finished work, roughly equivalent to three think pieces). **The think pieces need not be written.** They can be art, music, dance, videos, whatever; they can also be done in groups and some group pieces may be required during the term. **The think pieces are due on Tuesdays, by email before class starts, and cover the assignments for that week—that is, you produce think pieces before the class discusses the subject material.** If your piece is a physical object of some sort, please bring it to class, but also be sure to send the professor pictures via email before class starts. **Taken together, the think pieces count 1/2 of the final grade; class participation counts 1/4th; the final project counts 1/4th. Take class participation seriously.** Even when you are not involved in a think piece, you are still required to complete the weekly assignment and participate in discussions. Class participation will be tracked.

Students with Disabilities: The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in this class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Olpin Union Building, 581-5020 (V/TDD). CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations.

Accommodations for Course Content: Some of the readings, lectures films, or presentations in this course may include material that may conflict with the core beliefs of some students. Please review the syllabus carefully; if you have a concern, please discuss it with the professor as soon as possible. For more information, consult the University of Utah's Accommodations Policy at: www.admin.utah.edu/facdev/accommodations-policy.pdf

Learning Outcomes: The objective of the American Institutions requirement is to ensure that students have at least a minimal basis for responsible citizenship. All students receiving a baccalaureate degree from a public college or university in the state of Utah are required to have an understanding of fundamentals of history and the principles and form of government and economic system of the United States.

According to Utah State Code R470, An AI course in History will include comprehensive coverage of: American history from first European contact with indigenous peoples to the present. The establishment of the North American colonies, the Revolution, and the constitutional system established after independence. Changes over time in America's definition of citizenship, and the contested nature of the development of American participatory democracy and the laws and practices that empowered or restricted the citizenship of individuals on the basis of race, class, gender and sexuality. The processes and consequences of economic growth, industrialization, and development. The rise of the United States to world power.

Daily Assignments: Please note that **there is no textbook** and that **there are no books to be purchased.** All the assigned material is available online.

Please note that **this course is in part a collaboration: the syllabus isn't a legal contract and, as the course approaches the present, the topics and assignments will be tailored to student interests.**

Also note that **the questions on the syllabus for each assignment are only to help you absorb the material and prepare for class discussion.** You are not required to produce written responses to the questions (though doing so privately to prepare for class discussion may help). Nor are the questions meant as assignments for or guides to producing think pieces.

When completing the daily assignments, **remember that you are not helpless.** If you don't know much about a given topic or if you want more background, search online or email me.

CALIBAN BLUES

Tuesday, 8/22: Introduction: no assignment.

Thursday, 8/24: Read the *Declaration of Independence* carefully; there are many copies online, for instance at: http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/.

How could a smart rich man who owned slaves, like Thomas Jefferson, then governor of Virginia, the biggest, wealthiest and most important mainland American colony, have written "all men are created equal" with a straight face? Seriously, see if

you can come up with a believable answer. Don't worry--nobody else has, either--but try.

Then read Po Bronson, "The Power (and Peril) of Praising Your Kids," *New York Magazine*, February 12, 2007, at: http://nymag.com/news/features/27840/.

Does Dweck's research correspond to your time in school or at home? What are realistic alternatives to praising intelligence and ability? Think about the people who've taught you the most in your life. What strategies did they use?

Finally, look up the SAT and ACT on Wikipedia. What do they each intend to test/predict? What populations are they actually based on? I don't just mean cultural bias. I mean, what's the data set? Why and how are the SAT or ACT scores each supposed to predict students' performance in and after college? **If you're planning on graduate school, look up the relevant standardized test for that (GMAT, LSAT, GRE, subject GRE, whatever) and research the same questions.**

Optional Music: Iggy Pop, American Caesar (album). What's this got to do with Jefferson, Dweck, or standardized testing?

Tuesday, 8/29: Go to the Virtual Jamestown website and look at John White's 1585 original watercolors of Native Americans: http://www.virtualjamestown.org/images/white_debry_html/jamestown.html**. Then compare those to the black and white etched versions by Theodor Debry later published in England, also available on the site.**

What do you make of White's watercolors? Critical or accepting? Are White's Indians fully human in his eyes? How different are they? Equal to the British? Does White Europeanize Indians, or do you think that his watercolors are faithful representations? How do the Debry published etchings compare to the original watercolors, and what does the comparison tell you?

Google and watch the entire episode (not just the trailer) of the PBS documentary "We Shall Remain," episode 1, "After the Mayflower."

Ask yourself how WSR differs from most history you've learned. What do you make of such an aggressive point of view? Think about what evidence the makers of WSR really have for their

confident vision of what it was to be Wampanoag. How precisely did they figure it out? Are you entirely convinced?

Find and read a copy of Sherman Alexie's short story, "A Drug Called Tradition," from his collection T*he Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*.

What do you think the Native Americans in WSR would say about this story, about Alexie's tone? Would it offend them? Did you like it or did it offend you? Is recovered/reimagined tradition "just" a trip? Is that kind of trip necessary, even vital, to Native Americans today? Is it wrong to treat these subjects with such bitter humor, or is Alexie right that the gravitas of the WSR folk might be much worse? Worse for whom?

Thursday, 8/31: NO CLASS, PROFESSOR AWAY.

Start reading Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*; the Foreword and Part I (basically two thirds of the book) are due on Tuesday.

Yeah it's a novel, but it's by far the most influential American writing and thinking on race over the past thirty or forty years; it redefined all of African American studies.

What do you make of Morrison's strange, stilted, often hostile tone, "consciously exalted, perversely stressed," as one reviewer put it. Her point's in the voice, not the book's big metaphor, not the "magical realism", or any other tedious literary analysis. Take your own responses seriously. Do you like her tone? If you hate it, or are bored or indifferent, that's fine—but ask yourself why. Keep asking until you have answers you're prepared to defend in class.

It might help to compare and contrast *Beloved*'s voice and your responses to "A Drug Called Tradition."

Tuesday, 9/4. Be sure to have finished *Beloved*, Part I (if you have time, finish the book; the rest will be assigned in a couple of weeks).

Look over the summary of seventeenth-century Virginia laws pertaining to slavery at: http://www.virtualjamestown.org/slavelink.html. If you don't know much about the Jamestown settlement, the website is excellent. You'll notice that the laws change pretty dramatically by the seventeenth century's end--why?

Google middle passage, images, and see what you get. Then check out Jason Taylor's remarkable underwater sculpture installation: http://www.underwatersculpture.com/sculptures/.

Compare and contrast the standard images to Taylor. Obviously both are outraged and antislavery. But Taylor's sculptures have a completely different feel. Why? Taylor says this work isn't about the Middle Passage. Nobody buys that--why do you think he said it?

Music: "Ogundey," "Oh Dey Seo," "Go Down Moses," at: http://www.history.org/foundation/journal/winter02-03/music.cfm (scroll to bottom of page, the article itself isn't bad).

Odetta, "No More Auction Block," at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfbpsmbxE2c.

How'd you respond to the music, as compared to *Beloved*? Did you like it more or find it more relatable? Why, since it says the same damn thing?

Thursday, 9/6: Read Jonathan Edwards's description of his wife-to-be, Sarah Pierpont, at: https://pastoral-theology.com/2011/06/22/a-jonathan-edwards-love-poem-to-his-future-wife-sarah/.

Then read the Phillis Wheatley entry on Wikipedia; the Edwards entry is also good if you don't know anything about him or the "First Great Awakening".

Google and read carefully these three poems by Wheatley (or follow one of the links at the bottom of the Wikipedia entry): "To the University of Cambridge, in New England," "On being brought from Africa to America," and "Thoughts on the works of Providence." Google Phillis Wheatley, images.

Did Wheatley surprise you? Do you find her surprisingly moderate or surprisingly radical? Why was she so important in her day? Was she primarily religious? Primarily rational? Somehow both? How do images from her time portray her? Are more recent images different? How does she portray race? Slavery (it's in there, in disguise)?

Finally, watch Kimberle Crenshaw, "On Intersectionality," at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DW4HLgYPlA

What would Crenshaw make of Wheatley, do you think? What would Wheatley make of her?

Tuesday, 9/11: Research Donald Trump's statements that "both sides" were to blame for the violence at the original "Unite the Right" march in Charlottesville, Virginia.

How would you compare the rhetoric and ideas surrounding the violence in Charlottesville (the site of Thomas Jefferson's famous plantation, Monticello) to the most influential American statement of the eighteenth century on Native Americans, African Americans, race, and slavery, Jefferson's *Notes on Virginia*?

Read Jefferson's response to Wheatley and to charges of hypocrisy over slavery in *Notes*, at:http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/JefVirg.html: part of Query 14 (Laws), pp. 264-270, all of Query 18 (Manners and Customs, it's only two pages) and SKIM Query 11 (Aborigines). If the UVA e-text doesn't work, find a free copy of *Notes* somewhere else.

Given what he seems to have thought about people of African descent, do you think that Jefferson's opposition to slavery was sincere? Or was it just a sop to European critics of the American Revolution who agreed with the great British writer Samuel Johnson's rhetorical question "How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of negroes?" Jefferson was anything but stupid. How do you think he justified his contradictions about slavery and race to himself? Why was he so much more positive about Native Americans than he was about Africans? What do you think African Americans at the time made of *Notes*?

Music: Go to the hymn list at the bottom of this page about Isaac Watts, the leading musician of the First Great Awakening, at: http://songsandhymns.org/people/detail/isaac-watts. Click on the song titles that are links and you'll be able to listen to them as RealAudio or MP3. If you're interested, Jefferson's favorite musician was Corelli.

Thursday, 9/13: Find a copy of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* online somewhere and SKIM it BRIEFLY.

How would you compare Paine to Wheatley? They had much in common--what? Does Paine have anything in common with Crenshaw? With the Declaration? What would Paine have made of Jefferson's

Notes? How would you compare Paine's appeal to that of Bernie Sanders? What I mean is that while both Paine and Sanders sound pretty good, what do you think would happen if a government tried to enact their ideas?

Too see what did happen with Paine, **look over the Wikipedia entry, "Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776,"** a terrible entry, though it does describe the main elements of the document. Ask yourself why this entry is so weak and why I assigned it.

Next, read the US Constitution. Ask yourself why the PA Constitution might have failed and what process could have led to the very different US Constitution. Would you have voted to ratify the Constitution? Remember that at the beginning of the ratification process, a big majority of voters opposed ratification—why?

All to raise one of the most important (and oldest—it was debated at the time) questions about the Revolutionary Era: did the Constitution betray the Declaration, Paine, and the spirit of the Revolution?

Music: William Billings, "Chester" (written in 1770, this song by one of America's best known composers and a friend of Ben Franklin, was adopted as a sort of anthem for the American Revolution): http://www1.cpdl.org/wiki/index.php/Chester_(William_Billings). If you Google Chester, you'll find a few modern performances with the Revolutionary words. Compare to Lana Del Rey, "National Anthem".

The Founders, most of whom were rich, would have hated the idea that "money is the reason we exist/it's a fact, kiss kiss". In their view, that was Britain in 1776 and why they had to leave the British Empire. What precisely did they claim to see as the differences between corrupt wealth and power, and natural human independence?

CENTS AND SENSIBILITIES

Tuesday, 9/18: Read carefully "Federalist No. 10" at http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Federalist_(Dawson)/10. If that link doesn't work, there are many other online copies.

"Federalist No. 10" is widely viewed as the most important American contribution to world political theory. Why does Madison think that the USA would become more stable than any

previous republic? And what's so great about stability? What does he mean by "faction", and why does he despise it? Do you think he was right?

Watch WSR, II, "Tecumseh."

Could Tecumseh have "won"? What did he think victory would mean? How would you compare Tecumseh's idea for an Indian confederation to European American notions of people and nation?

Ask yourself when a revolution ends. During great upheavals it seems like anything is possible, anything can be changed, any old evils eliminated. When does that sense vanish and the ugly compromises and injustices of normal life and politics resume? Doesn't somebody always think "revolutionary time" hasn't ended, that it should go on somehow? Who gets to decide when revolutions end? Is the Constitution a document of "revolutionary time" or a return to "normal time"—and was that a betrayal of revolution?

Reconsider the whole period from 1763-1812 as not just a long revolutionary era but one long war. Obviously that makes sense from a Native American perspective. But would it also be useful for a European American perspective as well? An African American perspective? How does this new periodization change how one might see the Constitution and the Revolution?

Finally, read Alexie, "The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven" and "Witnesses, Secret and Not" both in *Lone Ranger*. My favorite thing Alexie's done is the film *The Business of Fancidancing*, but I don't think it's available streaming anywhere anymore, for pay or otherwise. The library does have the CD though.

What would Alexie make of of Tecumseh? Do you think Alexie would see historians' attempts at recovery and representation even of heroic Indianness as a toxic brand of romanticism? Are Indians' difficult memories ("rememories" in Morrison's terms) somehow different than other Americans'? More authentically inauthentic, more authentically ambiguous and challenging? Many historians think so. That cultural genocide and the general lack of written Native sources make Native American history distinct from other fields of American history, including African American history. Sure, "Indianness" was created by Atlantic crossings, by contact with Europeans and Africans. But Native American experiences have still been rooted in place in

ways that neither European American nor African American experiences could ever be. So some historians, and many Native Americans themselves, argue that there is something specially coherent and distinct to Native American identities. Do you buy it? Why doesn't Alexie?

Shawnee Stomp Dance (probably not too different from Shawnee music in Tecumseh's day): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xaAIEwGqV-0. Link Wray, "Shawnee Tribe".

Wray claimed to be Shawnee--what do you make of his romanticization?

Thursday, 9/20. Watch We Shall Remain, III, "Trail of Tears."

Ask yourself why so many white people supported the Cherokee against Georgia, including Supreme Court Chief Justice, and Virginia slaveholder, John Marshall. What would the same kinds of people think about slavery and abolitionists?

Then look up *Dartmouth College v. Woodward* on Wikipedia.

Why is this widely considered the most influential Supreme Court decision in American history? (The only competition is *Brown v. Board of Education*.) Why might someone who thought this way support the Cherokee versus Georgia?

Look over the ideas behind the movement to end corporate personhood via a constitutional amendment: https://movetoamend.org.

Music: "Music and the Cherokee Indians" website: http://bonnieramsey.hubpages.com/hub/Music-and-the-Cherokee-Indians.

Tuesday, 9/25: Find and read a copy of Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* and finish Morrison.

Again, who was Douglass's father and why? Prove it from the text. Why does Douglass see free labor as so much more moral than slavery?

Read the excerpts from speeches by Sojourner Truth (look her up if you don't know who she is): http://www.sojournertruth.org/Library/Speeches/.

Obviously, Baby Suggs is partly modeled on Truth. Compare and contrast Douglass, Morrison, and Truth. How does Douglass see gender? God? How does Morrison's book as a whole critique Douglass's view? She wrote Beloved to try to imagine what freedom would have been like for a black woman in the nineteenth century. How does Douglass's vision of freedom in the *Narrative* different from that? Do you think that Douglass kept the same view throughout his long life (he died in 1895)?

Music: Explore this comprehensive survey of slave spirituals: http://www.negrospirituals.com/song.htm.

Thursday, 9/27. Find and read a copy online of Melville's short story, "Bartleby the Scrivener."

Ask yourself what it's about and why I had you read it. You might hate it at the start. Press on--for my money, this is the greatest American short story. What's the point? Does it remind you of anything in modern media?

Explore the National Parks Service website about the Lowell mills: http://www.nps.gov/lowe/index.htm.

Tuesday, 10/2. Look up "Capitalism" on Wikipedia and skim the entry to get a sense of the major definitions and what's involved in them.

Read Edward E. Baptist, "Left Hand," Chapter 4, *The Half Has Never Been Told*, available online through the Marriott Library website (you must be signed in for access).

Skim James Henry Hammond, "Cotton is King," at http://www.sewanee.edu/faculty/willis/Civil_War/documents/HammondCotton.html; read the last few paragraphs carefully.

Finally, read parts II and III of Friedrich Engels's "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific," generally regarded as the best short presentation of nineteenth-century Marxism (part I is a history of earlier versions of socialism--it's interesting if you have an extensive background in political philosophy): https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/soc-utop/.

How do you think slavery fits into the history of capitalism? Why did Marx think that slavery was a prior and less efficient "mode of production" than industrialization—even thought slavery produced cotton, the main product driving industrialization?

Market capitalism and slavery can and do co-exist, even today. Your gut level reaction may immediately be to deny this, but ask yourself why, really? Hammond was sure that slavery was good for capitalism. Don't many of us think almost the same way in certain limited cases? As in the argument that America "needs" undocumented immigrants to do low wage jobs that citizens refuse—and that such jobs provide a kind of training for people who (supposedly) don't have the cultural background of responsibility and hard work. Many goods in the global marketplace are produced by slave or otherwise forced labor. The desk you're sitting at in class might have been made by an inmate in the US prison system—isn't that kind of production a form of slavery justified by paternalistic notions of the moral training of uncompensated or barely compensated work backed by exploitation and torture?

All to say, why do you think that it took until 2014 for somebody to make Baptist's argument and have it be widely accepted? Why is it so important to think of slavery as backwards and unmodern?

Thursday, 10/4: Read very carefully Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address," at: http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/speeches/gettysburg.htm. The links at the bottom are interesting and mostly accurate.

Read closely and analyze Lincoln's "Second Inaugural Address," available at: http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres32.html.

Finally, read Barbara Fields's classic article, "Ideology and Race in American History," at: https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~furrg/essays/fieldsideolandrace.html.

Why do you think the Second Inaugural sounds so different than the more renowned Gettysburg speech? Why isn't the Second Inaugural as well known--even though it's a better speech, and Lincoln's final world on the meaning of the Civil War? Had you even heard of the Second Inaugural before this class? Why not? What would Fields say?

NO CLASS 10/9 AND 10/11: FALL BREAK