American Civilization (Master Year 1 / Spring)

Master in English and American Language, Literature and History / Faculty of Liberal Arts

Introduction

From the moment of contact between indigenous Americans and people from what became the “Old World,” the Americas posed problems for established stories about the deep past. As early as the founding of the U.S. in the late-eighteenth century, the concept of “prehistory”
began to take shape as the life and earth sciences pushed the frontiers of the past back ever further, cordoning off a time before “history.” In the nineteenth century, a growing variety of entertainments and new media popularized this knowledge and made it into a vital part of
American culture more broadly. Eventually, prehistory would become an integral part of both American art and the American “culture industry.”
Because the “prehistory” concept helped encode a narrative of civilizational progress from “nature” to “culture,” a certain image of Native Americans was central to the concept in the US, where it carried out ideological functions when it came to colonial land expropriation. We
will explore this as well as other ideological functions of prehistory, but also how various groups—including feminists, artists, afro-futurists, and environmentalists—have used it to criticize American culture and society. We will examine how prehistory entered American cultural history through phenomena such as the fine arts, international expositions, literature and the press, museums, and cinema. Ultimately, we will come away with an understanding of how this concept helped mediate concerns over the meaning of the nation as well as issues of
human agency and natural order.

Objectives

*Analyze the relationship between American culture the reception of the concept of “deep time”
*Learn to critically analyze scholarly research – journal articles, books, etc.
*Critically examine historical documents (primary sources) concerning prehistory in US cultural history

Duration

1 semester

Teaching languages

- English

Conditions of submission

If you need more information about this course, kindly send an email to: incomingdri@icp.fr

Admission

Prerequisite

Prerequisites training

-C1 strongly recommended
-American history/civilization courses recommended for context (L1-L3)

Program

Methods of Instruction

-Lecture, discussion, collective analysis (discussion, writing) of primary sources (pictures, periodicals, texts, films, cartoons, etc.), writing exerises, oral presentation/Q&A

Assessment and Final Grade

There are two assessments:
• Assessment 1 (30%): A short oral presentation in class on one of the secondary readings (10 minutes)
• Assessment 2 (70%): A short essay (1,250-1,500 words) on a question related to the course, from an assigned list or worked out in coordination with the instructor.

Course Requirements

Plagiarism is not acceptable at the Institut Catholique de Paris, nor at any other institution of higher learning. Plagiarism means taking the intellectual work of others and claiming it as your own, either inadvertently or on purpose. If you are using the words or ideas of another person, you need to cite them. Plagiarism includes the use of Large Language Models such as ChatGPT. If I detect plagiarism on the essay assignment you will receive zero credit for that assignment.
In addition to these assignments, it is a requirement that you attend all course sessions unless excused. Email me as soon as possible to discuss alternate arrangements due to emergencies. All sessions begin on time—please do not arrive after class begins. This is a small seminar-based course that requires interaction and discussion between you, me, and your fellow students.
Finally, there is some minimal assigned reading for the course (typically 1 or 2 articles or book chapters). I expect you to have read this material and be prepared to discuss it. That means that you are able to identify and critically assess its argument and the way that it marshals evidence to support that argument.