Italy and North America: Contact, Conflict, and Exchange, 1492-the present

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Course Description
“Around 1930, when Fascism seemed to be ‘the hope for the world,’ some young Italians instead discovered through its literature America, a thoughtful and barbaric America, happy and belligerent, lascivious, fertile, heavy with the past of the whole world, and also young, innocent.”

— Cesare Pavese, Saggi letterari (1946)

This course examines cultural exchange between Italy and North America from the Renaissance to the present. In tackling cultural representations from epic poetry to film, we explore how Italians of different eras grappled with the North American continent, its inhabitants, and its many facets of influence.

As we examine key moments like Vespucci’s and Columbus’s arrivals on the American continent or the imagined landscapes of Spaghetti Westerns, we question how cultural contact and exchange impact our own understanding of national identity. For example, how did European invention of a “new” continent destabilize the center of the known world for Renaissance authors like Ariosto and Tasso? How did American literature offer 20th-century Italian writers new possibilities of expression and political resistance? How did Italian immigrants in the U.S. negotiate their hybrid identities? We will investigate how Fascism, war and recovery—as well as the physical presence of American soldiers on Italian soil—shifted the political and social stakes of this relationship. We explore American cultural influence throughout the increasingly globalized 20th century, as Italians adapted American film styles, television programs, music, and food, and pop singers teased teenagers who tried to “fa’ l’americano” (“act American”). We conclude with a discussion of the history of pizza as well as mass tourism in the age of climate change. As we analyze both canonical works of film and literature and new media, we will develop new perspectives on transatlantic cultural history and critically engage with how exchange shapes this history.

Course Objectives
You will gain a fuller understanding of Italian history and culture. You will learn how to analyze cultural texts and how they narrate their socio-historical moment, and in the process you will develop your capacity for critical listening, reading, thinking, and writing, as well as aesthetic and historical interpretation and evaluation. You will hone your skills conducting research and engaging with primary and secondary sources, as well as your ability to clearly express your analysis in oral and written projects. Finally, you will be able to apply your critical expertise through the completion of a final research paper.
**Materials**
All required and supplementary reading materials will be provided digitally on NYU Classes. Each text can be found in the bibliography of this syllabus. You are welcome to purchase copies of the texts, should you desire. Full films are streaming through Kanopy (accessed through the Bobst Library catalog).

**Teaching Strategies**
This course will have a mix of lecture and active learning exercises to better promote a lively class discussion, and as such it relies on you to help it succeed. I will provide historical context, theoretical structure, and guiding questions for each topic, so that you will feel better prepared to analyze our course materials. In addition to my introduction of themes and questions for the day, we will actively engage with primary and secondary sources through student-led presentations, frequent in-class and at-home writing exercises, and group work. These frequent activities discussing and critiquing sources will better prepare you to conduct your own research and analysis in the final project. Assessments are designed not to prove your memorization of information but to demonstrate your ability to engage with the material and articulate your own ideas about it.

**Assessment**
Your grade for the course is composed of four elements: participation, in the form of active engagement during seminar sessions (for which attendance is an implicit requirement); discussion prompts and homework; a midterm reflection paper; and three analytical papers.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Due</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion prompts, homework, and activities</td>
<td>Mar. 23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm reflection paper (2-3 pages)</td>
<td>Feb. 23</td>
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<tr>
<td>First paper (3 pages)</td>
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<td>Second paper (5 pages)</td>
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<td>Final research paper (8-10 pages)</td>
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➢ Beyond a measure of how much you speak in class, your participation grade will depend on criteria such as material preparedness, completed reading, collaborative work, and meaningful contributions to the class. Please come to class ready to engage.
  - Please note: Attendance is mandatory and is part of your participation grade. More than one absence will begin to affect your participation grade. Four absences will result in failure of the course. If you will miss class to observe religious holidays, please notify me in advance.
  - Please note: To better facilitate class discussion, laptops are not allowed without special permission from me. You must bring readings to class either printed or on an e-reader.
➢ In addition to quizzes and periodic in-class assignments, you will complete two discussion prompts.
   - Discussion prompts will facilitate our in-class conversations. You will have the opportunity to select two topics for which to prepare a one-paragraph (8 sentences), written discussion prompt. You are free to choose the focus, but it must engage with the materials assigned for that week and conclude with two discussion questions that you would like to pose to the class. They must be handed in in person on the day they are due; late assignments will not be accepted.

➢ Your midterm reflection paper will offer you a chance to articulate your understanding of the material so far by reviewing the main themes we have explored and examining how they have affected your own ideas and academic practice.

➢ You will write three main papers in this course. For the first two papers, a writing prompt will be given in advance, and you will have the opportunity to develop a short argument using specific examples from texts we have studied.

➢ For final research paper (8-10 pages), you will propose your own topic, conduct research, and workshop a draft with your classmates. The paper must develop a defined argument using supporting evidence. You will submit a paper proposal on April 25, which we will go over together, and we will workshop preliminary drafts in class.

**Late policy:** Late papers will be penalized 10% if handed in within the first 24 hours after the lecture at which they are due, and 5% for each subsequent 24 hour period after that (unless accompanied by valid documentation of illness or emergency).

Plagiarism and all other forms of academic dishonesty will be treated with the greatest severity in this course. You must cite any idea, phrase, or passage that comes from an outside source. You should familiarize yourself with the New York University policy for Academic Integrity; see [http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity](http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity).

NYU also has the following College and University resources:
   a) The University Learning Center (ULC), which provides peer tutoring for many courses, workshops on study skills (e.g., time management or citation norms), and special programming for international students. See [www.nyu.edu/ulc](http://www.nyu.edu/ulc)
   b) The Writing Center, which provides one-on-one consultations with Expository Writing Program faculty trained in writing pedagogy. See [http://www.nyu.edu/cas/ewp/html/writing_center.html](http://www.nyu.edu/cas/ewp/html/writing_center.html)
   c) Bobst Library is your main resource for anything research related. The Library also offers consultations, a state-of-the-art media library, study spaces, and more. See [http://www.nyu.edu/life/resources-and-services.html](http://www.nyu.edu/life/resources-and-services.html)

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The
Moses Center website is www.nyu.edu/csd. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosecsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

Course Schedule

Unit One: Shifting Worlds
Week 1: Introduction
1/26

Week 2: The Invention of the Americas
2/2
The Discovery of America (print), Galle (ca. 1600)
Christopher Columbus, “Letter to Luis De Santangel” and “Letter to Ferdinand and Isabella” Writings (15 pp)
Amerigo Vespucci, “Mondus Novus” and “Letter of Amerigo Vespucci to a Magnificent Lord (First voyage),” Letters (32 pp)

Walter Mignolo, “Putting Americas on the Map: Cartography and the Colonization of Space,” The Darker Side of the Renaissance (22 pp)

Week 3: Poetry of Destabilized Centers
2/9
Ludovico Ariosto, selections from Cantos 6-8, Orlando furioso (18 pp)
Torquato Tasso, selections from Cantos 15-16, Gerusalemme liberata (29 pp)

Jane Tylus, “Reasoning Away Colonialism’” (15 pp)

Unit Two: Italians Abroad
Week 4: New Nations
2/16
Vittorio Alfieri, “L’America Libera,” (35 pp)
Giuseppe Mazzini, “Manifesto of Young Italy” and “America as a Leading Nation in the Cause of Liberty” (8 pp)
Stefania Buccini, “Italy and the New America,” *The Americas in Italian Literature and Culture, 1700-1825* (37 pp)

**Week 5:** Immigration Part I: Fears of an Emigrant Nation  
2/23  
Giovanni Pascoli, “La grande proletaria si e’ mossà” and critical introduction by A. M. Baranello (16 pp)

Mark Choate, selections, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (25 pp)  
Marcella Bencivenni, “Italian American Radicalism: Old World Roots, New World Developments,” *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture* (30 pp)

~First paper due in class~

**Week 6:** Immigration Part II: Experiences in the U.S.  
3/2  
Rose Breci oral history interview  
Jacob Riis, “The Italian in New York,” *How the Other Half Lives* (7 pgs)  
Pietro Di Donato, “Tenement,” *Christ in Concrete* (31 pp)  
John Fante, selections, *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* (23 pp)

~Class visit to the Tenement Museum~

**Unit Three:** Fascism  
**Week 7:** Fascism, Gender, and the United States  
3/9  
Newsreels, "Benito Mussolini is greeted by 50,000 Italian Women" and “Fascist women parade at the Piazza Venezia in Rome, Italy”  
Gaetano Salvemini, “Do Italian Women Obey Mussolini?” (2 pp)

Victoria de Grazia, “Nationalising Women: The Competition Between Fascist and Commercial Cultural Models in Mussolini’s Italy” and “Going Out” (54 pp)  
David Schmitz, Ch. 3, *The United States and Fascist Italy* (21pp)

3/16  
~No Class/Spring Break~

**Week 8:** American Literature as Resistance
3/23

Italo Calvino, “Hemingway and Us” (7 pp)
Cesare Pavese, “Yesterday and Today” (4 pp)
Elio Vittorini, “American Literature: Its Origins and Present State” and “Notes on American Writers” (8 pp)

Lawrence G. Smith, Ch. 7 “The Peach of the World,” Cesare Pavese and America (46 pp)
Charles Leavitt, “Impegno nero: Italian intellectuals and the African-American struggle” (27 pp)

~Midterm reflection due online~

Unit Four: World War II and Occupation
Week 9: World War II
3/30

Why We Fight, I, Prelude to War (film) (1942)

Cavallero, Jonathan James. “Redefining Italianità: The Difference Between Mussolini, Italy, Germany, and Japan in Frank Capra’s’ Why We Fight’” (12 pp)

Ruth Ben-Ghiat, “The Wars of Fascism,” Fascist Modernities (31 pp)

John Diggins, selections, Ch. 13-14, Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America (29 pp)

Week 10: Race and the American Occupation
4/6

Paisà (film), Rosellini

Norman Lewis, Naples ’44 (21 pp)

Curzio Malaparte, Ch. 1, “The Plague,” The Skin (34pp)

Walter Francis White, A Rising Wind (5 pp)

~Second paper due in class~

Unit Five: “Americanization” of Italy
Week 11: Whiskey, Soda, Rock and Economic Boom
4/13

1948 election posters

Women in printed advertisements

Stephen Gundle, “The Americanization of Daily Life” and “Feminine Beauty, National Identity and Political Conflict in Postwar Italy” (47 pp)

John L. Harper, “Introduction and Overview,” America and the Reconstruction of
Week 12: Imagining America: Travel Writing and Spaghetti Cinema
4/20
A Fistful of Dollars (film) (1964)
Guido Piovene, selections, De America (12 pp)
Fernanda Pivano, “Women and Independence,” America Red and Black (11 pp)
Pier Paolo Pasolini, “Civil War,” Heretical Empiricism (7 pp)

Ara Merjian, “Everything is about to begin” (7 pp)
Austin Fisher, Ch. 1 “Imagining America: US Influence and American Mythology in Post-War Italy,” Radical Frontiers (32 pp)

~Final paper proposal due in class~

Unit Six: Cultural Exchange in a Globalized World
Week 13: Musical Exchange
4/27
Vi parlo dell’America (album), Marini
“Tu vuò fa’ l’Americano” (song), Carosone
“Fight da Faida,” (song), Frankie Hi NRG

Franco Minganti, “Jukebox Boys: Postwar Italian Music and the Culture of Covering” (17 pp)
Joseph Sciorra, “Hip Hop from Italy and the Diaspora” (14 pp)

Week 14: Pizza, Coffee, and Tourism
5/4
Robert Davis and Garry Marvin, Chapter 5, “Contested Ground,” Venice, the Tourist Maze (25 pp)
Carol Helstosky, Ch. 1, “History on a Plate” Pizza: A Global History (27 pp)

~Final paper workshop in class~
Preliminary Bibliography


Columbus, Christopher. 1802. *Writings of Christopher Columbus, Descriptive of the Discovery and Occupation of the New World*. New York: C.L. Webster & Co.


University Press.


