

American Mind

(36 lectures, 30 minutes/lecture)

Course No. 4880

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Americans pride themselves on being doers rather than thinkers. Ideas are naturally suspect to such a people. But ideas are at the root of what it means to be American, and today's habits of thought practiced by citizens throughout the United States are the lineal descendants of a powerful body of ideas that traces back to the first European settlers and that was enriched by later generations of American thinkers.

Behind this nation's diverse views on religion, education, social equality, democracy, and other vital issues is a long-running intellectual debate about the right ordering of the human, natural, and divine worlds.

In their own times such great thinkers as Jonathan Edwards, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, William James, Martin Luther King, Jr., and many others engaged in lively and often contentious debate that helped mold America's institutions and attitudes. Their approach was frequently honed by ideas from abroad—from Locke, Hume, Kant, Darwin, Marx, Freud, and Gandhi, among others.

This immensely stimulating conversation that made the U.S. what it is today is the subject of **The American Mind**, a series of 36 lectures that offers you a broad survey of American intellectual history.

Politics, Religion, Education, Philosophy

In this course you will delve deeply into the philosophical underpinnings of the nation, forged by the Puritans and the leaders of the American Revolution. You will also explore many other aspects of the elaborate structure that became modern America, tracing ideas in politics, religion, education, philosophy, psychology, anthropology, literature, social theory, and science—proving that Americans have a much richer intellectual tradition than generally imagined.

Your teacher is the distinguished historian Allen C. Guelzo, an unprecedented two-time winner of both the Lincoln Prize and the Abraham Lincoln Institute Prize for his successive books on Abraham Lincoln, one of America's most underrated but influential intellectuals.

The Washington Post noted themes in Professor Guelzo's work that are especially relevant to this course: "In his book on Lincoln as a man of ideas, Guelzo argues that Americans have failed to recognize what an intellectually vibrant country this was in the first half of the 19th century."

America: A Hotbed of Ideas

As it was in Lincoln's day, so it has been throughout U.S. history: America is an enduring hotbed of ideas. For example:

- *The Transcendentalists*: In 1834, Ralph Waldo Emerson moved to Concord, Massachusetts, where he began work on the brief book that would become his manifesto, *Nature*. With its publication, Kantian epistemology and romantic sensibility arrived in America with a bang. Emerson's later lecture entitled "The Transcendentalist" provided a name for this influential new movement.
- *Pragmatism*: William James codified a characteristically American philosophy in his book *Pragmatism: A New Name For Some Old Ways of Thinking*. The term came from Kant, and the concept grew out of a short-lived philosophical club that James had attended in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the early 1870s. The club included Chauncey Wright, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and a bafflingly eccentric mathematician-turned-philosopher named Charles Sanders Peirce.
- *Conservatism*: The origin of a distinctively American brand of conservatism is linked to the arrival of émigré European intellectuals after World War II. These thinkers found allies among former American communists, who had turned away from socialism; traditionalist Roman Catholics; and Southern agrarians.

An Entirely Different Map of the American Mind

Professor Guelzo's goal in this course is to lay out an entirely different map of the American mind from that taught in traditional presentations of American intellectual history. The usual approach underrates the Puritan contributions, marginalizes 18th-century theologian Jonathan Edwards, embellishes the influence of Benjamin Franklin, oversimplifies pragmatism, and slights the rich contributions of a wide range of 20th-century thinkers.

In these 36 lectures, Dr. Guelzo remedies these shortcomings by covering the large stretches of intellectual territory that are ignored in the traditional survey. You begin with the Puritans, exploring their participation in a larger, transatlantic realm of philosophical work. Next you study Jonathan Edwards as the creative fusion of two seemingly opposed trends: the spiritual revival of the Great Awakening and the passion for reason sparked by the Enlightenment.

After examining the intellectual currents underlying the American Revolution, you focus on the backlash against Enlightenment values that spawned American Romanticism. Then you study the surprising diversity of American pragmatism and discover that it cannot account for such 20th-century intellectual developments as the Old Left, the New Left, and Neo-Conservatism.

Throughout the course, Dr. Guelzo stresses the persistence of six fundamental themes that developed as the nation matured. These are at the center of our lives today and will doubtless be the principal preoccupations of American minds for a long time to come:

- *Intellect versus will*: From the Puritans to Lincoln to the behaviorist B. F. Skinner, no question has shown up more often in American culture than the struggle between intellect and will—whether it is more important to think or to act.

- *The persistence of religion*: Religious ideas have defied every prediction of their demise and have remained a living part of American intellectual life.
- *Religion versus the Enlightenment*: From the colonial era until today, religion and the Enlightenment have formed the two souls of the American consciousness.
- *The power of liberal capitalism*: American history has been marked by the struggle between liberty and power; a contest exemplified by the liberal capitalism of Alexander Hamilton and Abraham Lincoln matched against the agrarian populism of Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson.
- *Pragmatism*: In the post-Civil War decades, American thinking made a dramatic shift away from traditional philosophical and social thinking toward pragmatism and secularism.
- *The rise to world power*: America's ascent to world power through two world wars has created entirely new dilemmas and responsibilities for the nation and its thinkers.

An Intellectual Feast

One of the fascinating aspects of this course is that you trace the origin and evolution of America's colleges, which have served as a battleground of ideas, sometimes in an almost literal sense. In 1732, a leader of the Great Awakening held a bonfire of doctrinally suspect books at Yale College, expressing the hope that "the Authors of those Books, those of them that are dead, are roasting in the Flames of Hell...."

Many of the adherents of the Great Awakening turned their backs on America's venerable Puritan colleges, Harvard and Yale, to found alternative institutions such as Princeton, Rhode Island College (which became Brown), Queen's College (which became Rutgers), and Dartmouth. Two others, the future University of Pennsylvania and Columbia College, also bore the imprint of the Awakening.

A century later, higher education's religious calling was all but forgotten as American colleges embraced the secular mission of providing human capital to industry in the aftermath of the Civil War. And in the 1950s and '60s, the pendulum swung back to a more communal orientation under the influence of the radical New Left.

You will also learn about books that left their stamp on American intellectual life, such as Jonathan Edwards's *Freedom of the Will* in the 1700s, Frances Wayland's *Elements of Political Economy* and William James's *Principles of Psychology* in the 1800s, W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* and Henry Adams's *The Education of Henry Adams* in the early 20th century, along with works by Franz Boas, Margaret Mead, B. F. Skinner, Reinhold Niebuhr, Leo Strauss, and others in more recent times.

Professor Guelzo has laid out an intellectual feast made up almost entirely of homegrown American ingredients, with a dash of inspiration from abroad. You will find an abundance of food for thought, and after the first helping, you will definitely be back for more.

Course Lecture Titles

Part 1

1. The Intellectual Geography of America
2. The Technology of Puritan Thinking
3. The Enlightenment in America
4. Jonathan Edwards and the Great Awakening
5. The Colonial Colleges
6. Republican Fundamentals
7. Nature's God and the American Revolution
8. Deism, Science, and Revolution
9. Hamilton and His Money
10. Jefferson and His Debts
11. The Edwardseans—From Hopkins to Finney
12. The Moral Philosophers

Part 2

13. Whigs and Democrats
14. American Romanticism
15. Faith and Reason at Princeton
16. Romanticism in Mercersburg
17. Slaveholders and Abolitionists
18. Lincoln and Liberal Democracy
19. The Failure of the Genteel Elite
20. Darwin in America
21. Liberalism and the Social Gospel
22. The Agony of William James
23. Josiah Royce—The Idealist Dissenter
24. John Dewey and Social Pragmatism

Part 3

25. Socialism in America
26. Populists, Progressives, and War
27. Decade of the Disenchanted
28. The Social Science Revolution
29. The New South versus the New Negro
30. FDR and the Intellectuals
31. Science under the Cloud
32. Ironic Judgments
33. Mass Culture and Mass Consumption
34. Integration and Separation
35. The Rebellion of the Privileged
36. The Neo-Conservatives