

ACS recommends

North American news stories and politics fill our screens; the chances are the last film you saw was made there; and if you have studied English Literature, History or Politics you are likely to have encountered some American or Canadian topics or texts.

Maybe some of this caught your eye and got you thinking about a degree in American and Canadian Studies. Here are some recommendations from lecturers at Birmingham to get you thinking harder, further, and in lots of different directions:

Scott Lucas recommends:

Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_People%27s_History_of_the_United_States).



Barack Obama Inaugural Speech

(http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/01/20/president-obamas-inauguration_159370.html) (2009)

After listening to the speech Scott wrote: "Is Obama's invocation of "America", one which stemmed from and added to the hope of today, one that is going to be offered to others, both friend and foe? Or will it be delivered in the terms of "you lead, we follow"? Freedom is a wonderful concept, but in the current conflicts that always face the Obama Administration, it is an abstraction beyond political, economic, and military realities."

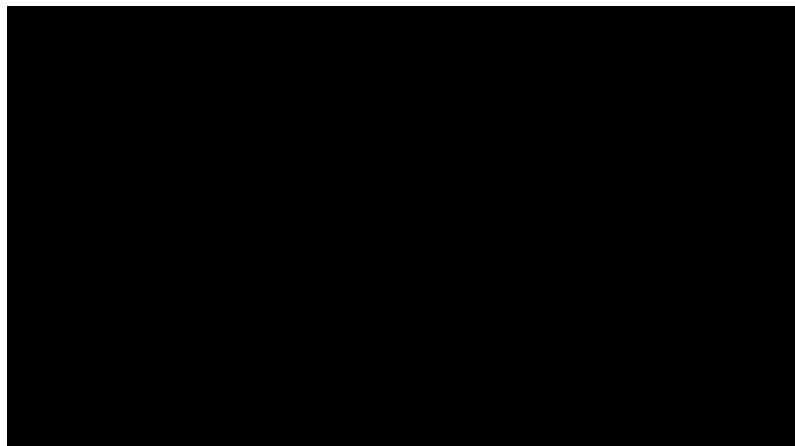
You can read Scott's January 2009 '**gut reaction**' at **EA WorldView** (<http://www.enduringamerica.com/january-2009/2009/1/20/a-gut-reaction-to-the-obama-inaugural-speech.html>).

Dick Ellis recommends:

Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/On_the_Road) (1957).

Dick discusses Kerouac's novel and the 2008 exhibition "Jack Kerouac: Back

on the Road" here:



Steve Hewitt recommends:

John Mueller (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Mueller), *Overblown: How Politicians and the Terrorism Industry Inflate National Security Threats, and Why We Believe Them* - this courageous 2006 book by a political scientist challenged conventional wisdom around the US "war on terror" and as time passes has been increasingly proven to be right.

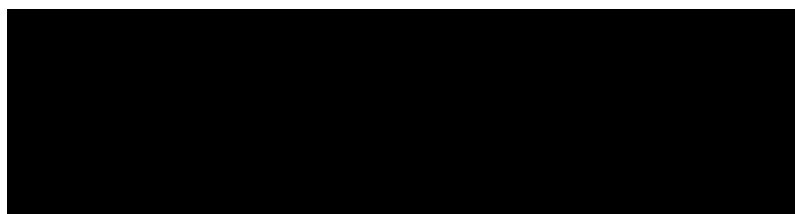
Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Handmaid%27s_Tale) (1985) - a Canadian dystopian vision of the future of the United States that can be read as indulging in a certain kind of anti-Americanism or a certain kind of Americanism.

Helen Laville recommends:

Tony Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confederates_in_the_Attic) (1998) - a great account of the legacy of the Civil War and the ideology of the American South

Marilyn French, *The Women's Room* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Women%27s_Room) (1977) - a novel which describes the life of American women and the birth of feminism - the best example of how 'the personal is political.'

Oliver Stone's *JFK* ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/JFK_\(film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/JFK_(film))) (1991) – this film reveals much about the importance of Vietnam in the modern American psyche and the American obsession with conspiracy.



John Fagg recommends:

I'm most excited by stuff where at first I have no idea what is going on and I have to figure it out – or enjoy the confusion. To this end I recommend **Das Racist** (<http://dasracist.net/>) for lyrics that reference Howard Zinn, General Hospital, police brutality, Justin Bieber, Arundhati Roy, White Castle burgers, Ralph Ellison, Donkey Kong Country...

Adobe Flash Player or QuickTime is required for video playback. [Get the latest Flash Player](#) [Get the latest version of QuickTime](#)

For a very different effect, I recommend looking at the clarity of vision and purpose that the FSA photographers brought to the task of **documenting Depression Era America** (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsahtml/fadocamer.html>).



[Image above: Russell Lee, Negro Boys on Easter morning. Southside, Chicago, Illinois. Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsc-00256]

And some recent-ish novels to help think about why you can't separate literature from history or history from literature:

Don DeLillo, **Libra** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libra_\(novel\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libra_(novel))) (1988)

Colson Whitehead, **John Henry Days** (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Henry_Days) (2001)

EL Doctorow, **The March** ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_March_\(novel\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_March_(novel))) (2005)

Dana Spiotta, **Eat The Document** (<http://www.danaspiotta.com/eat-the-document>) (2006)

Sara Wood recommends:



Walt Whitman, **Leaves of Grass** (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leaves_of_Grass) (1855) - an original and effusive poet attempting to capture the boundless energy of the United States.

Harriet Jacobs, **Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl**

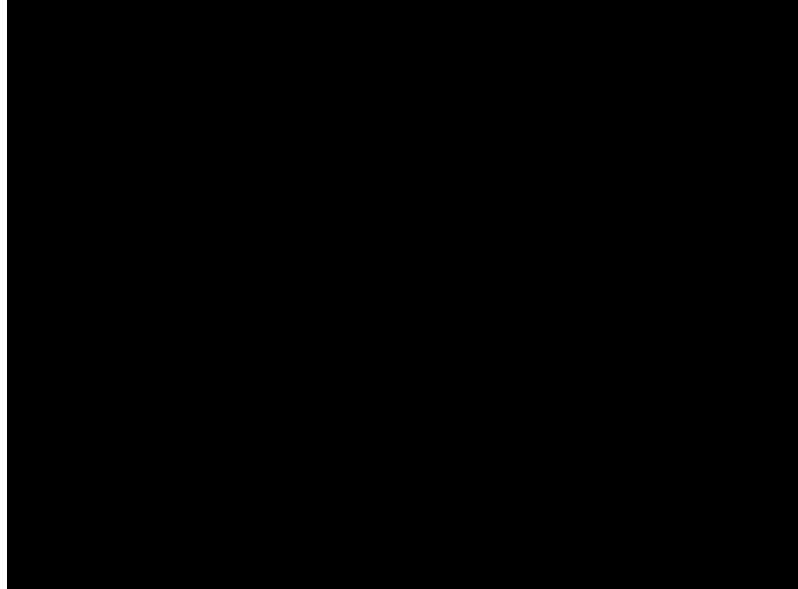
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Incidents_in_the_Life_of_a_Slave_Girl) (1861); and Frederick Douglass, **Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave** (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narrative_of_the_Life_of_Frederick_Douglass,_an_American_Slave) (1845). These two eloquent and stirring accounts of slavery and freedom are both important historical documents and literary classics.

Woody Guthrie, "**This Land is Your Land** (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wxiMrvDbq3s>)" (1940) - an alternative anthem for the United States.

African American Art: Harlem Renaissance, Civil Rights Era and Beyond (<http://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/online/aaa/>) - an online exhibition featuring some wonderful artworks by African American artists in this dynamic period of American history.

Michele Aaron recommends:

There is an astonishing number and array of early films now available online. Eadweard Muybridge's 'Race Horse' of 1878, considered to be the first ever 'film', is on YouTube:



So too are many films by Edison from the 1890s. I use his telling but gruesome 1903 film, 'Electrocuting an Elephant' (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCx89BRbVeU>) as a benchmark for cinema's romance with the spectacle death.

In terms of North American Studies, my favourite/recommended read from the last few years is Frank B. Wilderson III's, *Red, White and Black: Cinema and the Structure of US Antagonisms* (Duke, 2010).

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