

Introduction to American Studies:
Interdisciplinary Methods in the Study of Nation, Culture, Power

AMST 26:050:501:01 / HIST 26:510:551:01

Fall 2014

Rutgers University-Newark

Class Location: Conklin 233

Class Meeting Time: Wednesdays 5:30-8:10PM

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TENTATIVE SYLLABUS – SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Summary:

This graduate seminar will introduce students to scholarship in American Studies, as we explore together where the field has been and where it is going. We will be reading influential older articles and books; theoretical work that has had a particularly significant impact on American Studies; newer studies which suggest the issues with which scholars of American Studies are currently engaged, and collections of articles addressing the state and future of the field.

Objectives:

The objectives of this course are for students:

- to learn about interdisciplinary study, including ways that interdisciplinarity in American Studies differs from (or is similar to) the study of American history or literature, or from women's and gender studies, and/or cultural studies
- to be able to explain what scholars of American Studies cared about in the past, what kinds of debates presently engage them (particularly with regard to the study of nation, culture, and power), and why
- to develop the skills as scholars to read primary and secondary sources, and to write in the "language" of the field of American studies
- to analyze different kinds of sources, including written, material and visual culture texts, space, and forms of social practices
- to meet a variety of members of the program faculty and discuss the works of scholarship that have shaped their approaches to the field

Required Books

Obviously, you should try to get these books as inexpensively as possible. The books are available at the Rutgers University-Newark Bookstore, at Bradley Hall, 110 Warren Street (973-353-5377). Books are also available on reserve at the Dana Library. It is important to come to class with the books and with print copies of the articles so that we may refer to them in our discussions.

- Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 1983, or second edition, 2006) 978-1844670864
- Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, 2005) 978-0691124292
- George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic, 1994) 978-0465026210
- Susan G. Davis, *Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and the Sea World Experience*

(California, 1997) 978-0520209817

- Timothy Raphael, *The President Electric: Ronald Reagan and the Politics of Performance* (Michigan, 2009) 978-0472050734
- Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (University of California P, 2007) 978-0520242012
- Anna Deavere Smith, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* (Anchor, 1994) 978-0385473767 [**must be Anchor Books edition, not the Dramatists Play Service edition—they are quite different**]
- John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Penguin, 1972, reprint ed. 1990) 978-0140135152

Online Readings

These are available either through the R-N Dana E-Reserves library site (NetID required), on Blackboard under Course Documents, or elsewhere online through JSTOR, Project Muse, etc. (again, available with your NetID from the library). You **must** print out hard copies of these readings and bring them to class. Printing is free at the library. All reading assignments are subject to change; please keep your email address updated on Blackboard so that you will be aware of any revisions.

Grading and Class Requirements:

Attendance and participation: 50%

Written assignments: 50%

Taken together, the requirements for this seminar are designed to develop a range of reading, writing, and verbal skills you will need as a graduate student. We will be talking about how to read books for **more than content**, and how to write papers about books that do **more than summarize** that content. In other words, this course is oriented toward learning how to evaluate scholarship with a focus on how and why books and articles are put together in the ways that they are: the sources and evidence an author uses to construct arguments and interpretations, and the organizational and narrative strategies to represent them. As suggested earlier, this approach can be compared to learning a new language. In this instance, we are learning how to read and write in the “language” of American Studies.

Attendance and Participation (50%)

This crucial component of the class includes:

- **Attendance**, completing reading by assigned dates, and thoughtful, consistent participation in class discussions. Occasionally you will be asked to prepare something in writing for class. These ungraded/informal exercises are designed to help you contribute to the class discussion. More than one unexcused absence may affect your final grade. Please be in touch in advance, when possible, if you know that you will not be able to be in class.

- **Oral presentations:** These should be 5 minutes per person; **I will stop presentations that go over the time limit.** The goal of these weekly presentations is to frame the readings and set the stage for our discussion by giving the rest of the class additional background information. This additional information should help to raise the level of our collective conversation. More specifically, for this oral presentation students will:

- 1) Consider the background of the author. NOTE: This is NOT the same as a personal biography; rather, your focus should be the author’s training, influences, and intellectual trajectory.

- 2) Establish with whom the author is in dialogue: in what debates is the author participating and/or starting? What body of scholarship is the author drawing on to develop his/her perspective? With whom (or with what perspectives) does the author agree or disagree? For this, you may want to consult both the footnotes and the reviews the book received.

3) Evaluate reception: Look at reviews of the book to see how it has been received by others—in the field and/or in related fields. (In preparation for this assignment, we will have a “library field trip” the first night of class.) In addition to highlighting what reviewers regard as the book’s contributions and limitations, please pay attention to the disciplinary and interdisciplinary locations of both authors and the reviewers.

When 2-3 people present, presenters must work together, and each person will have 5 minutes. Even if you divide the tasks listed above, it must be clear from the presentation that you have worked and talked together about the book and what you’ve learned.

• **Footnote assignment:** On certain weeks, to be scheduled, everyone must research a footnote and locate one or two primary sources that the author cites in that note, one of which must be a **written** primary source. Read this source (or sources) and consider the following three questions: 1. Does the author cite and quote this source correctly? 2. How does the author read/interpret and “use” this source? 3. Do you agree? Whether or not you agree, what other possible readings or interpretations does this source lend itself to?

A 1- to 2-page short summary is required (ungraded). Scheduling for this assignment will be done in class on September 10.

Written assignments

• **Response Papers (Due Weekly):** Because the course depends on thoughtful engagement with the material, students will prepare for each class by writing a brief, 1-2 page responses to the readings assigned for each class. Papers must be posted to Blackboard by noon on the day of class.

• **Final Essay of 15-20 pages (Due Mon, Dec 22):** This comparative essay must encompass elements of the two shorter essays (argument, intellectual context of author, and method), and address these questions with a focus on one required book *in relation to* one or two books on related topics that are *not* required. In particular, you may use this essay to consider how two scholars adapt and “use” certain theoretical and methodological frameworks in similar or different ways, or to consider how two scholars have responded in similar or different ways to the same primary source or sources. This final comparative book review essay may build on or extend one of the short essays, but you may also pick new books and topics.

• A **one-page proposal** for this essay is due via Blackboard on Friday, Nov 21. In this proposal that you must submit via the Blackboard drop box, you should identify your sources and the themes or the main questions that you will be focusing on in your comparative discussion.

• A well-developed draft of the final essay (three copies) is due on Mon, Dec 1.

• You will discuss drafts of each other’s papers in class on Wed, Dec 10.

• The final grade for this essay will be based upon your engagement with the process as a whole.

Finally, while I assume some familiarity with the events in the periods we will be discussing, we all have our gaps. If you are not familiar with events in a given period—and that’s okay!—you may find it helpful to consult textbooks. (Textbooks do have many problems, but they can also be very useful!) Useful textbooks include: Mari Jo Buhle et. al., *Out of Many*, Mary Beth Norton, et al., *A People and a Nation*; Jacqueline Jones, et al., *Created Equal*. For more historiographically-oriented collections of essays, Howard Sitkoff, ed., *Perspectives on Modern America: Making Sense of the Twentieth Century*; Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*; and especially, Penny Von Eschen et. al, eds., *American Studies: An Anthology*.

Class Schedule

PART I

Wed, Sep 3: Introduction

Wed, Sep 10: Library Tour

What Was/Is American Studies?

- Janice Radway, "What's in a Name? Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, 20 November, 1998" *American Quarterly* 51:1 (1999), 1-32
- Mary Lee Washington, "Disturbing The Peace: What Happens to American Studies if You Put African-American Studies at the Center? Presidential Address to the American Studies association, October 29, 1997," *American Quarterly* 50:1 (1998), 1-23
- Mae M. Ngai, "Transnationalism and the Transformation of the 'Other': Response to the Presidential Address," *American Quarterly*, 57:1 (2005), 59-65
- David G. Gutiérrez and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, "Introduction: Nation and Migration," *American Quarterly* 60:3 (September 2008), 503-521

Wed, Sep 17: American Studies and the Imagi-Nation

- Anderson, *Imagined Communities*
- *The Simpsons*, "Mr. Lisa Goes to Washington":
[http://www.wtso.net/movie/173-The Simpsons 302 Mr Lisa Goes to Washin.html](http://www.wtso.net/movie/173-The_Simpsons_302_Mr_Lisa_Goes_to_Washin.html)

Wed, Sep 24:

- Chauncey, *Gay New York*

Wed, Oct 1:

- Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*

Wed, Oct 8:

- Davis, *Spectacular Nature*

Wed, Oct 15:

- Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*

Wed, Oct 22:

- Timothy Raphael, *The President Electric: Ronald Reagan and the Politics of Performance* (Michigan, 2009) 978-0472050734

Wed, Oct 29:

- Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor," *Signs* 18:1 (Autumn 1992), 1-43
- Amy Dru Stanley, "Home Life and the Morality of the Market," in *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800-1880*, ed. Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 74-96
- Kornel Chang, "Enforcing Transnational White Solidarity: Asian Migration and the Formation of the U.S.-Canadian Boundary," *American Quarterly* 60:3 (September 2008), 671-696

Wed, Nov 5:

- George Lipsitz, “Sent For You Yesterday, Here You Come Today: American Studies Scholarship and the New Social Movements,” *Cultural Critique* 40 (1998), 203-225
- Ruth Feldstein, “‘I Don’t Trust You Anymore’: Nina Simone, Culture, and Black Activism in the 1960s,” *Journal of American History* 91:4 (March 2005), 1349-1379
- Whitney Strub, “The Clearly Obscene and the Queerly Obscene: Heteronormativity and Obscenity in Cold War Los Angeles,” *American Quarterly* 60:2 (June 2008), 373-398
- Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989), 139-67

Wed, Nov 12:

- Smith, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*

Wed, Nov 19:

- Michael B. Katz, “Why Don’t American Cities Burn Very Often?” *Journal of Urban History* 34:2 (January 2008), 185-208
- Robert W. Snyder, “A Useless and Terrible Death: The Michael Farmer Case, ‘Hidden Violence,’ and New York City in the Fifties,” *Journal of Urban History*
- Alison Lefkowitz, “Men in the House: Race, Welfare, and the Regulation of Men’s Sexuality in the United States, 1961-1972,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20:3 (September 2011), 594-614

Fri, Nov 21: final paper proposal due on Blackboard

[Wed, Nov 26: NO CLASS – Thanksgiving break]

Wed, Dec 3:

- Berger, *Ways of Seeing*

Wed, Dec 10: Peer review of paper drafts