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

American Studies 26:050:501
History 26:510:551:01
Fall 2017
Conklin 447
Meeting Time: Tuesday, 5:30-8:10 pm

Summary:

This graduate seminar is intended to introduce graduate students to scholarship in American Studies. We will be reading influential older articles and books; theoretical work that has had a particularly significant impact on American Studies; and more recent scholarship that highlights the issues with which scholars of American Studies are currently engaged.

Objectives and Goals:

Students will explore and consider answers to the following questions:

- What is interdisciplinary study? What are some of the different methods, approaches, and assumptions that scholars who identify with American Studies bring to interdisciplinary work?
- Where has the field of American Studies been, and where is it going? What are the debates animating the field-- particularly with regard to nation, culture and power--and why?
- How do we, as scholars of American Studies, read and write in the “language” of the field? What skills are necessary to analyze different kinds of primary and secondary sources, including written texts, material objects, visual, oral and aural cultures, and more?

Required Books:

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (REVISED EDITION), NY: Verso, 1991; 1983)
- Chauncey, George. *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (NY: Basic Books, 1994)
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, v. 1: An Introduction* (Vintage, 1990)
- McAlister, Melani. *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and US Interests in the Middle East Since 1945* (University of CA, SECOND EDITION, 2005; orig. 2001)
- Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (NY: Vintage, 1993)
- Ngai, Mae. *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America: Updated Edition* (Princeton, 2014; orig. 2004).

Note: We will only be reading sections of Morrison and Ngai; these sections will be available on BB, so purchase is optional.

Required Films:

- Out in the Night* (2014)
The Ten Commandments (1956)

Grading and Class Requirements:

The requirements are designed to develop (and strengthen) reading, writing, and verbal skills. This course requires students to read books not only for content, but for how a given author forges an argument, interprets and uses evidence, and organizes the subject matter. The course requires students to write papers that not only summarize a subject in clear prose, but which grapple with how and why scholars have approached a subject in the ways that they

have. This approach to reading and writing may be very different from what you've done in the past; some people compare it to learning a new language, and it is a process that requires patience, effort, and persistence. Finally, this course requires students to come together as a scholarly community; assignments are oriented toward learning how to work together as part of this larger community of scholars.

- Participation and Responses to Readings (25%)
- One article/book review essay, 5-6 pages (25%)
- One short essay/close reading of primary source, 3 pages (15%)
- Final Essay, approximately 15 pages, double spaced, (250 words pp), footnotes required, including paper proposal and draft (35%)

1. Participation. 25%

This crucial component of the class includes:

- Attendance, completing assignments by the designated dates, and thoughtful participation in class discussions. Your comments must suggest that you've done the reading thoughtfully and thoroughly (including attending to footnotes/endnotes). **Please let me know in advance if you will not be in class.** Because participation is so important, missing more than two classes will affect your final grade.

- Depending on class size and interest, we may include required oral presentations/starting questions. If so, 2-3 students each week will work together to start the seminar discussion. Students will offer a **brief** overview (10 minutes maximum) and three to four questions to the class as a starting point for our discussion. MORE TBA.

- Three short 2-page response papers (double spaced). At any three points during the semester, you will submit a response to any of the readings. Use these responses to test out ideas and ask questions, to react (pro or con) to what you've read, and to stretch your writing "muscles." You may respond to the "big picture" idea or argument in a given reading, or you may hone in on a specific passage that you think is particularly important and worth considering further. A first response is *required* by **September 19**. You may submit the other two responses at any other points in the semester; however, you must submit the response on the week that we are discussing the material you write about. While I prefer to receive these responses before class via bb, you may bring hard copy to class and then also submit on blackboard.

Note: You will not get a letter grade on these responses, but I will respond about content and style, and they will "count" toward your participation grade.

- Three sets of questions. At any three points in the semester, you must each post several questions on blackboard based on the weekly assignments. These questions must be posted by Tuesday at NOON; each week, you should all plan to check bb before class to see what questions have been posted. I encourage you to respond as well, but this is not required.

2. Short essays. 40%

- Article/book review essay (5-6 pages), 25%.

With a focus on one article or book, write an essay in which you evaluate the required reading (secondary sources only), and offer your own thesis about this reading. To develop your thesis, consider the following questions:

1. What questions does this book or article seek to answer? What are the author's main concerns? What story does this author seek to tell?
2. What is the larger professional, intellectual, and political context in which the author developed these questions and approached this topic? With whom is the author in dialogue? What intervention is this author trying to make?
3. What METHODS does the author employ? What are his/her sources? Why these and not others? How does the author use these sources and organize information to answer the main questions?
4. What are the primary benefits and/or problems with this method of doing research? What is most and least convincing about how the author uses the evidence and develops the argument? What might a given approach allow, and/or disallow?
5. What do you like and not like about this book/article, and why?

Note: You absolutely need not focus in depth on all 4 of those questions to write a successful review essay, but these are the types of questions you should have in mind as you write an essay that has a thesis and does not simply

summarize the book or article; indeed, **these are the questions you should be asking yourselves as you do the required reading each week.**

- Primary source close reading essay (3 pages), 15%.

With a focus on one primary source, write an essay in which you develop a thesis about this source based on your close reading and contextualization of it.

One of these essays is due by **October 24** (at the latest... I encourage you to submit prior to that date). The second essay is due by **November 14** (at the latest... again, I encourage you to submit prior to that date). You may choose to write the secondary source review essay first and the primary source close reading essay second, or the reverse.

3. Final essay. (35%)

Draw on 2-3 secondary sources to write a comparative book/article review essay. This essay should address the four questions above and consider them with a focus on several sources. All of the sources may come from the syllabus and the required readings we have done together, or you may write about one source from the syllabus and 1-2 sources that are not on the syllabus but relate in some way to the issues and themes that you want to consider. If you are going to look beyond the syllabus, you must plan ahead and discuss the options you are considering with me in advance. You may draw on the recommended readings to develop your comparative frameworks (many of which are by R-N faculty), but you are not restricted to that list.

- 1- 2-pg. proposal: **Monday November 20.**
- Draft: **SATURDAY, December 9.**
- Peer Review: **December 12.**
- Final essay: **December 19**

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 have certain problems, but they can also be very useful). Options include (among others), Mari Jo Buhle et al., *Out of Many*, Mary Beth Norton, et al., *A People and a Nation*, and Jacqueline Jones, et al., *Created Equal*; for a useful collection of essays oriented toward political history Manisha Sinha, ed., *Contested Democracy: Freedom, Race and Power in American History* (2007).

A few other important points.

--Rutgers University treats cheating and plagiarism as serious offenses. In your papers, you must cite and provide a reference for all language **and/or** ideas that are not your own. While this should be understood in a graduate seminar, it is important to note that violations of the university honor code will be prosecuted to the full extent that is permitted. As graduate students, you must take the initiative and ask questions about what to cite, and how to cite sources correctly if you have any questions about what is or is not plagiarism.

--In this course, we will be reading and discussing material on which we may not all agree; some of the themes and imagery we encounter in the sources may seem offensive or otherwise controversial. In this context especially, it is crucial for us to combine the free expression of ideas with respect for each other. **This is your community and your class; each one of you has a responsibility to that community.**

--Please turn cell phones off and **put phones (etc.)**, away before class begins. If you take notes on a laptop, please remember that only that document (or related required sources) may be open. Texting or emailing or otherwise using technology in an inappropriate way at any time during class is absolutely **prohibited**. Again, this should be a given in a graduate seminar, but it worth emphasizing. If I see a student using technology in inappropriate ways during class, I will ask that student to leave and mark them absent for the day.

--Food and drink are permissible as long as neither is disruptive. We will usually (though not always) have a 5-10-minute break.

-- Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports

your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.

For more information please contact Kate Torres at (973) 353-5375 or in the Office of Disability Services in the Paul Robeson Campus Center, in suite 219 or by contacting odsnewark@rutgers.edu.

--Finally, note that this syllabus is a work in progress and we will very likely be making modifications along the way, based both on scheduling issues and on all of your interests and priorities. I will communicate with all of you via bb, so please make sure that you receive email through blackboard regularly.

Class Schedule

Tuesday, September 5. Introductions. What was/is American Studies?

- Janice Radway, “What’s in a Name?” (Presidential Address, November 20, 1998), *American Quarterly* 51 (March 1999): 1-32.

- Shelly Fisher Fishkin, “Crossroads of Culture: The Transnational Turn in American Studies: Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, 12, November 2004,” *American Quarterly* 57:1 (2005): 17-57.

- Rebecca Hill, “What Is This Thing Called Interdisciplinarity? Teaching Interdisciplinary Methods Courses in American Studies,” *American Quarterly* 68 (June 2016): 361-365.

- Mary Rizzo, “Reading Against the Grain, Finding the Voices of the Detained,” *Museums and Social Issues* 12:1 (March 2017), 26-32.

Recommended Reading: Lucy Maddox, ed., *Locating American Studies: The Evolution of a Discipline* (1998); Janice Radway and Penny Von Eschen eds., *American Studies: An Anthology* (2009); Glenn Hendler and Bruce Burgett, eds., *Keywords in American Cultural Studies* (2d edition, 2014).

Tuesday, September 12. Nation and Nationalism, I

- Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, excerpts

- Frederick Douglass, “The Meaning of July 4th for the Negro,” Speech, July 5, 1852.
<http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/douglassjuly4.html>

- Selected poetry by Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands* (1987)

- Nina Baym, “Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors,” *American Quarterly* 33 (1981): 123-139. (NOTE: This is a “classic” essay with interesting connections to Anderson, but the other three are the main readings for this week.)

Assignment: Please bring in a source (or link)—written, visual, aural, etc.—that illuminates, exemplifies, or engages with Anderson’s ideas about the production of nationalism.

Recommended Reading: Tim Raphael, *The President Electric: Ronald Reagan and the Politics of Performance* (2009); Cathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (1987; 2d edition, 2004); Homi Bhaba, ed., *Nation and Narration* (1990); Arjun Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition* (2013) (and his *Modernity at Large*); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Hometown: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (2002).

Tuesday, September 19. Nation and Nationalism, II: Race, Nation, Cities

- Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, excerpts.
- Anne Petry, "In Darkness and Confusion" (1946), reprinted in Abraham Chapman, ed., *Black Voices: An Anthology of Afro-American Literature* (1968), pp. 125-159.
- Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, excerpts.
- Farah Jasmine Griffin, *Harlem Nocturne: Women Artists and Progressive Politics During World War II* (2013), chapter 2, pp. 79-131.

Recommended Reading: Barbara Foley, *Wrestling with the Left: The Making of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man* (2010); John Keene, *Counternarratives* (2015); Robert Snyder, *Crossing Broadway: Washington Heights and the Promise of New York City* (2014); Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood* (1989); Salamishah Tillet, *Sites of Slavery: Citizenship and Racial Democracy in the Post-Civil Rights Imagination* (2012).

Tuesday, September 26. Race and Ethnicity, I

- Kimberle 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): 139-167; also reprinted in David Kairys, ed., *The Politics of Law: A Progressive Critique 195-217* (2nd ed. 1990).
- Laura Lomas, "On the 'Shock' of Diaspora: Lourdes Casal's Critical Interdisciplinarity and Intersectional Feminism," *Cuban Studies* (forthcoming).
- TBA.

NOTE: Professor Lomas will be joining us for part of class.

Recommended Reading: Belinda Edmondson, *Caribbean Middle Brow: Leisure Culture and the Middle Class* (2009); Laura Lomas, *Translating Empire: Jose Marti, Migrant Latino Subjects, and American Modernities* (2009); Barbara Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the US," *New Left Review* 81 (May/June 1990); Alicia Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (2008); Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (2010); David Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness* (1991).

Tuesday, October 3. Race and Ethnicity, II

- Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, excerpts, and her recent *NYT* article: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/19/opinion/travel-ban-upheld-supreme-court.html>
- "Newest Americans", readings, TBA.

Recommended Reading: Kornel Chang, *Pacific Connections* (2012); Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (2010); Rachel St. John, *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border* (2012); Jack Tchen, *New York Before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture 1776-1882* (2001); E. Patrick Johnson, ed., Dwight Conquergood, *Cultural Struggles: Performance, Ethnography, Praxis* (2013); Shannon Jackson, *Lines of Activity: Performance, Historiography, Hull House* (2001).

Tuesday, October 10. Sexuality, I: Theorizing Sexuality

- Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, excerpts.

• Darnell Moore, et. al. “A Community’s Response to the Problem of Invisibility: The Queer Newark Oral History Project,” *QED* 1 (2014): 1-14.

Recommended Reading: Whit Strub, *Obscenity Rules* (2013); Jason Cortes, *Macho Ethics: Masculinity and Self-Representation in Latino-Caribbean Narrative* (2014); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (1990); Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings* (2003); J. Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011); Jose Munoz, *Cruising Utopia* (2009); Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization* (1996).

Tuesday, October 17. Sexuality, II: Producing and Policing Sexuality

- Chauncey, *Gay New York*, excerpts

• Timothy Stewart-Winter, “Queer Law and Order: Sex, Criminality, and Policing in the Late Twentieth-Century United States,” *Journal of American History* 283 (June 2015): 61-72.

- Film, *Out in the Night* (2014)

• Optional: “History of Sexuality and the Carceral State,” moderated by Regina Kunzel (March 2016), Part I and Part II:

<http://notchesblog.com/2016/03/10/histories-of-sexuality-and-the-carceral-state-part-1/>

<http://notchesblog.com/2016/07/05/histories-of-sexuality-and-the-carceral-state-round-2/#more-8412>

Recommended Reading: Timothy Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout* (2016) Whit Strub, *Perversion for Profit* (2014); Margot Canaday, *The Straight State* (2011); Phil Tiemeyer, *Plane Queer* (2013); Allan Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire* (1991); Regina Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern Sexuality* (2008).

Tuesday, October 24. No class

Last possible day to submit paper I—either the book/article review essay based on any secondary source we’ve read up to this point, OR the close reading/primary source essay. (If you submit your short primary source analysis on this date, and want to write about *The Ten Commandments*, you may, but you will need to watch it in advance of our discussions about the film.)

Tuesday, October 31. Empire, I

- Edward Said, *Orientalism*, excerpts

- McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, chapters TBA
- Film: *Ten Commandments*

Recommended: Susan Carruthers, *Cold War Captives: Imprisonment, Escape and Brainwashing* (2009); Laura Lomas, *Translating Empire: Jose Marti, Migrant Latino Subjects, and American Modernities* (2009); Alex Lubin, *Geographies of Liberation: The Making of an Afro-Arab Political Imaginary* (2014); Hisham Aidi, *Rebel Music: Race, Empire, and the New Muslim Youth Culture* (2014).

Tuesday, November 7. Empire, II

- Amy Kaplan, “Left Alone with America: The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture,” in Kaplan and D. Pease, eds., *Cultures of U.S. Imperialism* (1993), pp. 3-21.

- Matthew Jacobson, “Where We Stand: U.S. Empire at Street Level and in the Archive,” *American Quarterly* 65 (June 2013): 265-290.

- Michelle Stephens and Brian Roberts, “Archipelagic American Studies: Decontinentalizing the Study of American Culture,” in Stephens and Roberts, eds., *Archipelagic American Studies* (Duke, 2017), pp. 1-56, excerpts.

We will also check in and discuss paper topics and paper/proposal writing. Please come prepared for a brainstorm session.

Recommended Reading: Sadia Abbas, *At Freedom’s Limit: Islam and the Postcolonial Predicament* (2014); Anna Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (2002); Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (2002).

Tuesday, November 14. No class

Last day to submit essays. Extra office hours to discuss final essays.

Tuesday, November 21. No class

Tuesday is Thursday at R-N

Proposal for final essay due on **MONDAY 11/20**.

This brief proposal—1-2 pages—should identify the sources you will be writing about and the themes and questions you want to consider in your final essay.

Tuesday, November 28. Case Studies in Cultural History

- Robin D.G. Kelley, “The Riddle of the Zoot Suit,” in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (1996).

- Penny Von Eschen, “‘Satchmo Blows Up the World’: Jazz, Race, and Empire in the Cold War,” in R. Wagnleitner and E. May, eds., *“Here, There, and Everywhere”: The Foreign Poetics of American Popular Culture* (University Press of New England, 2000) pp. 163-178.

- Andrea Burns, *From Storefront to Monument: Tracing the Public History of the Black Museum Movement* (UMass, 2013), chapter TBA.

- **VISIT:** Express Newark, Main Gallery (54 Halsey Street, 3rd Floor) for the exhibit: “Records at Play: The

Institute of Jazz Studies @50,” <http://artgallery.newark.rutgers.edu/exhibitions/records-at-play-the-institute-of-jazz-studies-50/>.

(NOTE: hours are M-W 12-5; Th 12-8; Sat 12-5).

• Please choose ONE of the following articles to read, and ONE of the following exhibits to visit; please check hours, cost and location of exhibits as you make your choice.

-ARTICLES (choose one):

-Jane Gerhard, “Judy Chicago and the Practice of 1970s Feminism,” *Feminist Studies* 37 (Fall 2011): 591-618.

-Burns, *From Storefront to Monument*, chapter TBA

-Three reviews of the 9/11 museum (Gopnick, Kimmelman, Sagalyn)

EXHIBITS (choose one):

- Judy Chicago, “The Dinner Party,” at the Brooklyn Museum.

https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/dinner_party

-*Black Power!*, at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

<https://www.nypl.org/events/exhibitions/black-power> (Note: to see this exhibit you have to go into the Schomburg Center, walk across the first floor and up the stairs; it is NOT the “Power in Print” posters exhibit that is located in the main lobby (though I’d encourage you to look at that as well).

- 9/11 Memorial and Museum.

<https://www.911memorial.org/exhibitions>

Recommended Reading: Mary Rizzo, *Class Acts: Young Men and the Rise of Lifestyle* (2015); Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (2011); Ramzi Fawaz, *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics* (2016); Jim Goodman, *But Where is the Lamb?* (2013); Lonnie Bunch, *Call the Lost Dream Back: Essays on History, Race and Museums* (2011); Lynne Sagalyn, *Power at Ground Zero: Politics, Money and the Remaking of Lower Manhattan* (2016).

Tuesday, December 5.

TBA

Final Essay Draft Due: **SATURDAY, December 9.**

Tuesday, December 12. Peer Review

Final Essays Due: Tuesday, December 19