

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

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

Fall 2015 – Rutgers University-Newark

Class Location: Conklin 233

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

Professor Timothy Stewart-Winter

Office Location: 314 Conklin Hall

Office hours: Mon 1-2pm and Wed 11:30am-12:30pm

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**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; and newer studies which suggest the issues with which scholars of American Studies are currently engaged.

**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**

The books are available at the Rutgers University-Newark Bookstore, at Bradley Hall, 110 Warren Street (973-353-5377). Of course, you should try to get these books as inexpensively as possible. It is important to come to class with the book and/or articles so we may refer to them in our discussions (ideally the print copy so you may refer to common page numbers).

- 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
- Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (California, 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]**

### **Online Readings**

These are available on Blackboard. You *must* have copies of these readings available to you during class in either hard-copy or electronic form. 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**

This crucial component of the class includes *attendance*, completing reading by assigned dates, and thoughtful, consistent participation in class discussions. 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.

### **Discussion Facilitation**

Twice during the semester, on a schedule that will be set at the second class meeting, you will, working with a colleague, launch and facilitate our discussion. The major part of this task is to frame the readings and set the stage. In order to prepare for this role, you will need to delve somewhat more deeply into the texts during these two sessions than during the other weeks by acquiring additional information and, where appropriate, offering it to help raise the level of our collective conversation. In particular, you should do all of the following *before* class:

1) Research the background of the author(s), so that you'll be ready to provide contextual information if and when it's appropriate to aid in our discussion. This doesn't mean researching personal biographies, but rather the training, influences, and intellectual trajectory of the author(s). 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.

2) 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" during the second 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.

4) Prepare several *questions for discussion* and post them on Blackboard **by noon on the day of class**. These questions should be at least potentially *controversial* questions suitable for discussion and debate – not ones that have a clear-cut answer.

### **Written assignments**

1) **Response papers** (Due weekly, except weeks when you're facilitating discussion): 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. If you are facilitating discussion you do **not** also have to write a response paper that week.

2) **Final essay** of 15-20 pages (Due Tue, 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.

- A one-page proposal for this essay is due via Blackboard on Friday, November 20. In this proposal that you must submit via the Blackboard drop box, you should identify the sources and themes/questions for your comparative discussion.
- A well-developed draft of the final essay is due on Monday, November 30.
- You will discuss drafts of each other's papers in class on December 2 and December 9.
- Your grade for the essay will be based on 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 perfectly okay—you may find it helpful to consult textbooks. (Textbooks do have many problems, but they can also be very useful.) Some survey texts to consider looking at include 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*.

## Class Schedule

(I reserve the right to make changes to syllabus.)

Wed, Sep 2: Introduction

Wed, Sep 9: 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
- 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
- ***Optional/Suggested:*** 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, Sep 16:

- Anderson, *Imagined Communities*

Wed, Sep 23:

- Chauncey, *Gay New York*

Wed, Sep 30:

- Herman Melville, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids" (1855)
- 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

Wed, Oct 7:

- Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*

Wed, Oct 14:

- Robin D.G. Kelley, "The Riddle of the Zoot: Malcolm Little and Black Cultural Politics During World War II," chapter 7 in Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics and the Black Working Class* (1994), 161-182
- Penny Von Eschen, "'Satchmo Blows Up the World': Jazz, Race, and Empire in the Cold War," in *"Here, There, and Everywhere": The Foreign Poetics of American Popular Culture*, ed. Reinhold Wagnleitner and Elaine Tyler May (University Press of New England, 2000), 163-178

- 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

Wed, Oct 21:

- Screening of *Out in the Night*
- Queer Newark readings

Wed, Oct 28:

- Davis, *Spectacular Nature*

Wed, Nov 4:

- Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*

Wed, Nov 11:

**5:30pm, location TBA: Lecture/workshop on campus by Miriam Frank, author of *Out in the Union: A Labor History of Queer America* (2014)**

Wed, Nov 18:

- Smith, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*
- Michael B. Katz, "Why Don't American Cities Burn Very Often?," *Journal of Urban History* 34:2 (January 2008), 185-208

*Fri, Nov 20: Final paper proposal due on Blackboard*

*[Wed, Nov 25: NO CLASS – Friday schedule during the week of Thanksgiving]*

Wed, Dec 2: Peer review of paper drafts

Wed, Dec 9: Peer review of paper drafts