

Introduction to American Studies
“America” as an Idea
(01:050:101)

Monday/Wednesday, 3:55 to 5:15 PM
Ruth Adams Building 001

Prof. Andy Urban

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Office Hours: 1 – 3PM, Thursday, or by
appointment

Ruth Adams Building 205E

Course Description

This course introduces students to the interdisciplinary field of American Studies. Employing literature, essays, law, film, history, visual culture, philosophy, and politics, the class will examine the concept and idea of “America” in its global, national, community, and bodily/psychic permutations. Students will engage with primary and secondary sources of all kinds dealing with history, literature, culture, law, race, gender and sexuality. The goal of the course is to expose students to intellectual and creative possibilities in the field of American Studies, as well as to provide incoming majors with key concepts and analytical tools that can be used in more advanced courses. Emphasis will be placed on students’ analytical skills, close reading, verbal articulations of interdisciplinary scholarship, and critical thinking.



Braceros, Oregon, 1943

Required Readings

- Nella Larsen, *Quicksand and Passing* (ISBN# 9780813511702)
- Mine Okubo, *Citizen 13660* (ISBN# 9780295959894)
- Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (ISBN# 9780385721677)

In addition to the above books, all of the assigned chapters, articles, and primary sources have been (or will be shortly) posted as .pdf files on the course’s SAKAI site, under the heading “Resources.”

Readings correspond to the day they will be discussed, and need to be completed before lecture. PLEASE BRING THE ASSIGNED BOOKS AND READINGS TO CLASS. *I will reference passages from the readings during lecture, and you will need the texts to follow along.*

Please Note:

Please make sure that you are receiving SAKAI announcement via email, as I regularly use the site to update class information, assignments, extra credit opportunities, etc. You are responsible for keeping up-to-date with class information.

If you email me with a question and I don't respond within 24 hours, this means that I answered your question in class, on SAKAI, etc. This is a large class, and while I am happy to respond to questions that were not already covered, I cannot answer every email that results from students not paying attention.

Assignment and Grading Summary

- *Exams* – 50% (Exam 1, 15%; Exam 2, 15%; Final Exam, 20%)

There will be two short answer and multiple choice exams, each worth 15% of your total grade. Please see the syllabus schedule below for the dates of the in-class exams. The final exam is scheduled for Friday, December 20, and is worth 20% of your grade.

- *Essay Assignment* – 25%

Details TBA – due by 5PM, Friday, Oct. 25, turned in via SAKAI.

- *QUIPS/Participation* – 25%

In order to ensure that you are doing the readings and engaging them critically, students will take turns – according to their assigned group (A-D) – posting QUIPs (Questions, Issues, or Problems). You are free to write on any aspect of the reading(s) that you choose, but we will also provide prompts in the form of questions to help guide you.

In order to receive credit, you must do the QUIP for your group by no later than 11PM on the day before lecture (Sunday for Monday classes; Tuesday for Wednesday classes). Your response should be in the range of three to four sentences.

PLEASE NOTE the group you are in below, and mark on your calendar the class dates for which you must submit a QUIP.

GROUP A: *Last names that begin with A to F*

GROUP B: *G to L*

GROUP C: *M to R*

GROUP D: *S to Z*

Attendance at lectures is mandatory. Each student is allowed one unexcused absence during the semester. Each additional unexcused absence will result in deduction from your participation grade. If I or one of my assistants see you texting, surfing the internet, chatting, etc. during lecture, you will be marked as absent for that class. I also reserve the right to call on you during lecture.

Grading Scale:

92-100=**A**; 87-91=**B+**; 81-86=**B**; 77-80=**C+**; 70-76=**C**; 60-69=**D**; 0-59=**F**

Note: there are no minus grades at Rutgers.

American Studies Department Learning Goals Met by this Course:

Students will learn to synthesize interdisciplinary sources and methods of analysis in order to conduct an investigation of American culture and history. Students will learn to use scholarship in history, politics, literature, and art in order to interpret the varied experiences, perspectives, and events that define American life. Students will be able to write well; speak articulately; and think critically, analytically, and creatively.

This course satisfies the SAS Core Goal: AH (o, p)

- Examine critically philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production. [AHo]
- Analyze arts and/or literatures in themselves and in relation to specific histories, values, languages, cultures, and technologies. [AHp]

Class Policies

If you have to miss class due to sickness, an emergency, or another excused reason, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me.

Again, all cell phones and hand-held devices must be turned off prior to the start of class. **NO TEXTING** - if I catch you texting, you will be counted as absent that class, no exceptions.

Computer use should be limited to looking at the .pdf readings for class (if you choose not to print them out), and taking notes.

Unexcused late assignments will receive a deduction.

Special Accommodation Requests

All special accommodation requests must be brought to my attention during the first two weeks of class. Full disability policies and procedures are available for review at: <http://disabilityservices.rutgers.edu/>.

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations must follow the procedures outlined at <http://disabilityservices.rutgers.edu/request.html>

Academic Integrity Policy

<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity.shtml>

Violations include: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, denying others access to information or material, and facilitating violations of academic integrity.

Honor Pledge:

I pledge on my honor that I will adhere to all aspects of the Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy

By accepting this syllabus and enrolling in this course, you assume responsibility for knowing the above policies and the possible penalties - including suspension and expulsion - should you violate the Honor Pledge.

Take an interactive tutorial on Plagiarism and Academic Integrity:

<http://sccweb.scc-net.rutgers.edu/douglass/sal/plagiarism/Intro.html>

Please see the last page of this syllabus for additional information on plagiarism.

Class Schedule and Assigned Readings

Wednesday, September 4 – Course Introduction

Week Two: Why are we here? Founding Principles?

Monday, September 9 (GROUP A)

- Thomas Frank, “Academy Fight Song”

Wednesday, September 11 (GROUP B)

Guest Lecturer: Allan Punzalan Isaac, Chair, American Studies Department

- Jonathan Edwards, “Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God”
 - Thomas Jefferson, “Declaration of Independence”
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Week Three: Imagining the Nation

Monday, September 16 – **NO CLASS**

Wednesday, September 18 (GROUP C)

- Benedict Anderson, “Imagined Communities”
 - Eric Posner, “Why Originalism is So Popular”
 - Jill Lepore, “A Nue Merrykin Dikshunary”
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Week Four: Cultural Texts and Contested Knowledge

Monday, September 23 (GROUP D)

- Alan Trachtenberg, “Brooklyn Bridge as a Cultural Text”
- Frederick Jackson Turner, “The West and American Ideals”

Wednesday, September 25 (GROUP A)

- Dolores Hayden, “Claiming Urban Landscapes as Public Space”
 - Ben McGrath, “Strangers on the Mountain”
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Week Five: Empire of Liberty?

Monday, September 30 (GROUP B)

- Paul Schroeder, "Is the U.S. an Empire?"
- Paul Kramer, "A Useful Corner of the World: Guantánamo" – please view the online slideshow in addition to reading the article:
http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/newsdesk/2013/07/a-useful-corner-of-the-world-a-history-of-guantanamo-base.html#slide_ss_0=1

Wednesday, October 2

No reading; in-class movie screening of *Our Brand is Crisis*

Week Six: Exam 1

Monday, October 7 (GROUP C – please post on film from last Wednesday)

No reading; discussion of film

Wednesday, October 9

❖ *EXAM ONE – In-class*

Week Seven: Race and American Identities

Monday, October 14 (GROUP D)

- Larsen, *Passing*, Section 1

Wednesday, October 16 (GROUP A)

- Larsen, *Passing*, Sections 2 & 3
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Week Eight: Constructing Gender and Sexuality

Monday, October 21

In-Class Film: *Paris is Burning*

Wednesday, October 23 (GROUP B – on film and reading)

- Judith Butler, “Gender is Burning,”

Week Nine: Immigration and Citizenship: Borders of Belonging

Monday, October 28 (GROUP C)

- Erika Lee, “The Example of Chinese Exclusion: Race, Immigration, and American Gatekeeping, 1882-1924”
- Joel Stein, “My Own Private India”
- Pew Hispanic Center, “A Nation of Immigrants”

Wednesday, October 30 (GROUP D)

- Okubo, *Citizen 13660* (preface to p. 66)
- Excerpts from *Korematsu v. United States*

Week Ten: Immigration and Citizenship: Borders of Belonging

Monday, November 4 (GROUP A)

- Okubo, *Citizen 13660* (p. 67 – end)

Wednesday, November 6 (GROUP B)

- Tram Nguyen, “Becoming Suspects: Brooklyn and New Jersey”
- Official RU-MSA Statement on NYPD Surveillance

Week Eleven: The Rise of the Right; The Sounds of American Studies

Monday, November 11 (GROUP C)

Guest Lecturer, Professor Jefferson Decker

- Bethany Moreton, “Students in Free Enterprise”

Wednesday, November 13

The Sounds of American Studies

Week Twelve: Exam; American Resources?

Monday, November 18

❖ *EXAM TWO - In-class*

Wednesday, November 20 (GROUP D)

- Bill McKibben, "Global Warming's Terrifying New Math"
 - Kristina Hubbard, "Monsanto's Growing Monopoly"
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Week Thirteen: Dystopic Futures?

Monday, November 25 (GROUP A)

- Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (chs. 1-3)

Wednesday, November 27

No Class, Thanksgiving

Week Fourteen: Dystopic Futures?

Monday, December 2 (GROUP B)

- Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (chs. 4-6)

Wednesday, December 4 (GROUP C)

- Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (chs. 7-8)
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Week Fifteen: Dystopic Futures?

Monday, December 9 (GROUP D)

- Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (chs. 9-11)

Wednesday, December 11

- Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (chs. 12 - end)

FINAL EXAM: Friday, December 20 – noon to 3PM, in our regular lecture hall

AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

In this class we will take cheating very seriously. All suspected cases of cheating and plagiarism will be automatically referred to the Office of Judicial Affairs, and we will recommend penalties appropriate to the gravity of the infraction.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the use of another person's words, ideas, or results without giving that person appropriate credit. To avoid plagiarism, every direct quotation must be identified by quotation marks or appropriate indentation and both direct quotation and paraphrasing must be cited properly according to the accepted format for the particular discipline or as required by the instructor

Some common examples of plagiarism are:

- Copying word for word (i.e. quoting directly) from an oral, printed, or electronic source without proper attribution.
- Paraphrasing without proper attribution, i.e., presenting in one's own words another person's written words or ideas as if they were one's own.
- Submitting a purchased or downloaded term paper or other materials to satisfy a course requirement.
- Incorporating into one's work graphs, drawings, photographs, diagrams, tables, spreadsheets, computer programs, or other nontextual material from other sources without proper attribution.

A SPECIAL NOTE: Students often assume that because information is available on the Web it is public information, does not need to be formally referenced, and can be used without attribution. This is a mistake. **All** information and ideas that you derive from other sources, whether written, spoken, or electronic, must be attributed to their original source. Such sources include not just written or electronic materials, but people with whom you may discuss your ideas, such as your roommate, friends, or family members. The more important point: think about what you are basing an argument or assessment on in terms of where it comes from, and how the source must be evaluated.

Judgments about plagiarism can be subtle. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask for guidance from your instructor.