

Introduction to American Studies (01:050:101)

**Monday/Wednesday, 5:35 to 6:55 PM
Ruth Adams Building 001**

Prof. Andy Urban
aturban@rci.rutgers.edu

Office Hours: 1 – 4PM, Wednesday, or by appointment
Ruth Adams Building 205E

Graders

Emma Pallarino
Carmen Perrone

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.

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.

Required Readings

- Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno* (ISBN# 9781536864175)
- Nella Larsen, *Passing* (ISBN# 9780142437278)
- Emily St. John Mandel, *Station Eleven* (ISBN# 9780804172448)

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.”

They have also been assembled into one pdf course reader, which is titled “Course Reader.”

Readings correspond to the day they will be discussed, and need to be completed before lecture. Please bring readings to class.

Please Note:

Please make sure that you are receiving and checking SAKAI announcement via email, as I regularly use the site to post important information relating to class. You are responsible for the information and instructions posted to SAKAI.

Assignment and Grading Summary

- **Midterm Exam #1, 15%** (March 1, in class)
- **Midterm Exam #2, 15%** (April 10, in class)
- **Final Exam, 20%** (Date TBA)

The exams will consist of multiple choice questions, short analytical essays, and identifications (IDs) of keywords and concepts.

- **Essay Assignment, 25%**

Your semester-long essay will ask you to explore, through a case study, a mythology in American life.

Details to follow.

- **QUIPS, 15%**

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).

Identify questions, issues, or problems that the readings raise. Use these categories to try and help make sense of how the text and the author's argument are significant and important to our understanding of American studies.

In order to receive credit, you must submit your QUIP by no later than 10AM the day of class. 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 (this information is included in the section of the syllabus titled “Class Schedule and Assigned Readings”):

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*

- **Participation Grade, 10%**

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.

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.

Please do not text.

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.

Class Schedule and Assigned Readings

Wednesday, January 18

Introduction to Course

Monday, January 23 - QUIP, Group A

- Alfred Crosby, "The Columbian Exchange"
- William Cronon, "The View from Walden"
- Angela Fournoy, "What Does it Mean to Acknowledge the Past?" *New York Times Sunday Review*, December 31, 2016

Wednesday, January 25 - QUIP, Group B

"Lisa the Iconoclast," *The Simpsons*, S7, E16 (1996), in-class screening

- Michel Rolph Trouillot, "An Unthinkable History: The Haitian Revolution as a Non-Event," and "Good Day, Columbus," from *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995)

Monday, January 30 - QUIP, Group C

- Thomas Jefferson, "Declaration of Independence" (1776)
- Jill Lepore, "A Nue Merrykin Dikshunary" (2012)

Wednesday, February 1 - QUIP, Group D

- Deborah Gray White, "Introduction: Scarlet and Black – A Reconciliation," (2016)
- Amy M. Tyson and Azie Mira Dungey, "'Ask a Slave' and Interpreting Race on Public History's Front Line: Interview with Azie Mira Dungey," *The Public Historian* 36 (2014): 36-60.

Monday, February 6 - QUIP, Group A

- Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno* (1855), 3-34
- Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" (1852)

Wednesday, February 8 - QUIP, Group B

Guest Lecturer: Laura Michel, PhD Student in History, Rutgers University, New Brunswick

- Amanda Moniz, "Saving the Lives of Strangers: Humane Societies and the Cosmopolitan Provision of Charitable Aid," *Journal of the Early Republic* (2009)

Monday, February 13 - QUIP, Group C

- Melville, *Benito Cereno*, 35 – end

---- NO CLASS, Wednesday, February 15 ----

Monday, February 20 - QUIP, Group D

- W. E. B. DuBois, "The Propaganda of History," from *Black Reconstruction* (1935)
- Micki McElya, "Commemorating the Color Line: The National Mammy Monument Controversy of the 1920s" (2003)

Wednesday, February 22 - QUIP, Group A

- Frederick Jackson Turner, excerpts from "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," (1893)
- Patricia Limerick Nelson, "Turnerians All: The Dream of a Helpful History in an Intelligible World" (1995)
- Alan Trachtenberg, "Brooklyn Bridge as a Cultural Text" (1984)

Monday, February 27 - QUIP, Group B

- Amy Kaplan, "Where is Guantánamo?" (2005)

Wednesday, March 1

**** Exam #1, In-Class ****

Monday, March 6

In-class screening: *Blood, Sweat & Tears: A Basketball Exorcism*, director John Hulme (2016)

Wednesday, March 8 - QUIP, Group C

Director John Hulme, Guest

- Chris Rasmussen, "'A Web of Tension': The 1967 Protests in New Brunswick, New Jersey" (2014)

----- NO CLASS, SPRING BREAK -----

Monday, March 20 - QUIP, Group D

- Mae Ngai, "No Human Being is Illegal," *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 2006
- Laura Smith, "Here's the Biggest Immigration Issue That Trump Isn't Talking About," *Mother Jones*, January 12, 2017
- Moustafa Bayoumi, "Preface" and "Rasha," in *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?: Being Young and Arab in America* (2009)

Wednesday, March 22 - QUIP, Group A

- Nella Larsen, *Passing*, Introduction to novel, Part One

Monday, March 27 - QUIP, Group B

- Nella Larsen, *Passing*, Parts Two and Three

Wednesday, March 29

In-class screening: *Paris is Burning*, director Jennie Livingston (1990)

Monday, April 3 - QUIP, Group C

- Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* 3 (1997): 437-65.*
- Kevin Arnovitz, "The Official Coming-Out Party," *ESPN: The Magazine*, October 12, 2016, PLEASE ACCESS ONLINE, HERE:
http://www.espn.com/espn/feature/story/_/id/17764735/nba-referee-bill-kennedy-long-coming-story

Wednesday, April 5 - QUIP, Group D

Guest Lecturer: Katie Singer, PhD candidate in American Studies, Rutgers University, Newark

- Reading TBA

Monday, April 10

**** Exam #2 ****

Wednesday, April 12 - QUIP, Group A

- Ira Katznelson, "When affirmative action was white," (2005)
- Jennifer Gonnerman, "Before the Law," *New Yorker*, October 6, 2014

Monday, April 17 - QUIP, Group B

- Richard Manning, "Over The River: Returning Home to Flint" *Harper's Magazine* (2017)
- Junot Diaz, "Edison, NJ," in *Drown* (1997)
- Annie Waldman, "New Jersey's Student Loan Program is 'State-Sanctioned Loan-Sharking,'" *ProPublica*, July 3, 2016

Wednesday, April 19 - QUIP, Group C

- Andrew Sullivan, "I Used to be a Human," *New York Magazine*, September 18, 2016 - PLEASE ACCESS ONLINE (AND WITH IRONY), HERE: <http://nymag.com/selectall/2016/09/andrew-sullivan-technology-almost-killed-me.html>
- Robert Macfarlane, "Generation Anthropocene," *The Guardian*, April 1, 2016

Monday, April 24 - QUIP, Group D

- Emily St. John Mandel, *Station Eleven*, chs. 1 -18

Wednesday, April 26

- Emily St. John Mandel, *Station Eleven*, chs. 19-37

Monday, May 1

- Emily St. John Mandel, *Station Eleven*, chs. 38 - end