

Methodologies in American Studies

Wednesdays, 3:55 – 5:15PM
Ruth Adams Building, Seminar Room 018

Professor Andrew Urban
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Office: **Ruth Adams Building 205**
Office Hours: **Wednesdays, 1-3 PM and by appointment**

* Please email me in advance if you plan on coming by during office hours.

Course Description

This course introduces students to classic essays and perspectives on the history, practices, and research methods that comprise American Studies. In addition to exploring how American Studies developed as a field of study, we will also focus on scholarly texts, documentary films, and other forms of cultural and social analysis that provide examples of the application of different American Studies' methodologies. The goal of the course is to familiarize students with important debates in American Studies, and to encourage students to explore and use these theoretical and practical methods in their own work. This course looks at how American Studies' interdisciplinary method engages with other disciplines and fields—such as history, literary theory, anthropology, geography, sociology, ethnic studies, and gender studies, among others.

Some questions that we will consider throughout the semester are: What is interdisciplinary scholarship? What are the benefits and limitations that different methodologies possess as tools for studying American culture and history? What does the study of American popular cultures require? And, what can be gained intellectually and politically by embracing new approaches to understanding what “America” means and represents?

Readings

PLEASE BRING ALL READINGS TO CLASS. The failure to bring readings to class can result in deductions from your participation grade.

- Alessandro Portelli, *They Say in Harlan County: An Oral History* (Oxford University Press, 2010), ISBN: 0199735689
- Karen Ho, *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street* (Duke University Press, 2009), ISBN: 0822345994
- Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Harvard University Press, 2005), ISBN: 0674017595
- Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton University Press, 2011), ISBN: 0691149933

- Carl Wilson, *Let's Talk About Love: A Journey to the End of Taste* (Continuum, 2007), ISBN: 082642788X

In addition to the above books, there are also individual chapters and articles that have been posted as .pdf files on the course's SAKAI site, under the heading "Resources" (the readings appear on the syllabus followed by a *). **You are required to bring a copy of these readings to class for the week they have been assigned.**

Assignment and Grading Summary

- *Reading Quizzes (averaged from four quizzes) – 10%*
 - During the semester, you will be given four unannounced reading comprehension quizzes. These brief quizzes will be designed to assess whether you are completing the required readings for that class meeting, and paying attention to important details in the text(s).
- *Midterm Exam – 15%*
 - Your midterm exam will take place during our normal class period, on Monday, Oct. 22.
- *Final Exam – 15%*
 - Your final exam is scheduled for Friday, Dec. 21, from noon to 3PM. Please note that I did not select this date, nor can I change its scheduling.
- *In-Class Participation – 15%*
- *Group Research Project – 45%*
 - In groups of no more than five students, your final project will require you to work as a team conducting ethnographic field work, oral histories, and archival research, focusing on a Rutgers' student organization or club. The main idea for this assignment is to give you firsthand experience implementing the various methodological skills and practices that we will be studying in the classroom. (Please stay tuned for additional details on this assignment.)
 - Proposal (5%)
 - Final Project Report (20%)
 - Final Reflection Essay (10%)
 - In-Class Presentation (5%)
 - Peer Reviews (5%)

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.

Attendance / In-Class Policies

This is a discussion seminar. **Students are expected to attend all classes.** Attendance and participation are crucial to your success in the course. You are allowed one unexcused absence for any reason whatsoever; each subsequent absence will result in a 3-point deduction from the grade on your final exam and will lower your participation grade as well. If you continually turn up late to class, you will be marked absent. In addition, please note that if a reading quiz is administered during a class you miss, unless the absence is excused, you will receive a zero on that quiz.

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.

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 COMPUTERS ARE ALLOWED IN THE SEMINAR. I have found time and time again that computers distract from discussions and provide too many temptations in terms of email, web-surfing, and so on.

Unexcused late assignments will receive a deduction.

Departmental Learning Goals Met By Course

Students will be able to describe the methods of American Studies and synthesize the debates that have shaped the field. Students will learn to investigate American culture and society across time and space by examining history, politics, literature, and the arts. This course will contribute to the department's long-term goal that students learn to articulate ideas in well-organized oral presentations and clearly written prose. Assignments are designed to help students learn to think critically, analytically, and creatively.

To prepare for senior work in the major, students will learn to apply interdisciplinary research methods. They will understand the intellectual, conceptual, ethical, and political issues associated with interdisciplinary research in the humanities. To this end, students will gain firsthand experience conducting ethnographic field work, oral history, and archival research, and in thinking about how these different methods can work together.

Academic Policies

Please review the following policies. Should a situation arise where a violation occurs, it will be assumed that you were aware of this information and its ramifications.

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

Take an interactive tutorial on Plagiarism and Academic Integrity:

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

Consult Don't Plagiarize: Document Your Research! For tips about how to take notes so you don't plagiarize by accident.

http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/lib_instruct/instruct_document.shtml

Class Schedule

Week 1: Sept. 5, 2012 - Introduction

Week 2: Sept. 10 & 12, 2012 – The Origins and Evolution of a Discipline

Monday

- Henry Nash Smith, “Can ‘American Studies’ Develop a Method?” *American Quarterly* [AQ] 9 (Summer 1957): 197-208.*
- Alan Trachtenberg, “Myth and Symbol,” *Massachusetts Review* 25 (Winter 1984): 667-73.*

Wednesday

- George Lipsitz, “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the ‘White Problem’ in American Studies,” *AQ* 47 (Sept. 1995): 369-87.*
- Leti Volpp, “‘Obnoxious To Their Very Nature’: Asian Americans and Constitutional Citizenship,” *Citizenship Studies* 5 (2001): 57-71.*
- Kevin J. Mumford, “Homosex Changes: Race, Cultural Geography, and the Emergence of the Gay,” *AQ* 48 (Sept. 1996): 395-414.*

Week 3: September 17 & 19, 2012 – The Origins and Evolution of a Discipline (cont.); Oral History

Monday

- John Carlos Rowe, “Post-Nationalism, Globalism, and the New American Studies,” *Cultural Critique* 40 (Autumn 1998): 11-28.*
- Donald Pease, “Exceptionalism,” in *Keywords for American Studies* (NYU Press, 2007), 108-111.*

Wednesday

- Portelli, *They Say in Harlan County*, 3-69.

Week 4: September 24 & 26, 2012 – Oral History

Monday

- Portelli, *They Say in Harlan County*, 70-134.

Wednesday

- Portelli, *They Say in Harlan County*, 135-233.

Week 5: October 1 & 3, 2012 – **Oral History**

Monday

- Portelli, *They Say in Harlan County*, 234-306.

Wednesday

- Portelli, *They Say in Harlan County*, 307-65.

In-Class Viewing: “Harlan County, USA” (1976), Dir. Barbara Kopple

Week 6: October 8 & 10, 2012 - **Ethnography**

Monday

- Teresa Gowan, “American Untouchables: Homeless Scavengers in San Francisco's Underground Economy,” *The International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 17 (1997): 159-190.*
- Ho, *Liquidated*, 1-38.

Wednesday

- John Cassidy, “What Good is Wall Street?” *The New Yorker*, November 29, 2010*
- Ho, *Liquidated*, 39-121.

Week 7: October 15 & 17, 2012 - **Ethnography**

Monday

- Ho, *Liquidated*, 122-212.

Wednesday

- Ho, *Liquidated*, 213-324.

Week 8: October 22 & 24 – **Midterm; Empire**

Monday

Midterm Exam

Wednesday

- Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire*, 1-50

Week 9: October 29 & 31 – Empire

Monday

- Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire*, 51-91; 121-45

Wednesday

- Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire*, 146-214.

Week 10: November 5 & 7 – Sexuality and Citizenship

Monday

- Canaday, *The Straight State*, 1-18.

Wednesday

- Canaday, *The Straight State*, 19-90.

Week 11: November 12 & 14, 2012 – Sexuality and Citizenship

Monday

- Canaday, *The Straight State*, 91-173.

Wednesday

- Canaday, *The Straight State*, 174-264.

Week 12: November 19, 2012 – The Sounds of American Studies

Monday

No Reading – In-Class Activity

Wednesday

No Class – Enjoy the Holiday Weekend

Week 13: November 26 & 28 – Deconstructing Popular Culture

Monday

- Wilson, *Let's Talk About Love*, 1-72.

Wednesday

- Wilson, *Let's Talk About Love*, 73-161.

Week 14: December 3 & 5, 2012 – **American Studies in the Public Sphere**

Monday

In-Class Viewing: “Revolution ‘67” (2007), Dir. Marylou Tibaldo-Bongiorno

Wednesday

No Reading: Discussion of Film from Monday

Week 15: December 10 & 12, 2012 – **Conclusions; In-Class Presentations**

Monday

- Wendy Brown, “Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy,” *Theory & Event* 7 (2003).*
- David Samuels, “The Changeling: The Content of Obama’s Character,” *Harper’s Magazine* (Sept. 2012): 29-39.*

Wednesday

No Reading: In-Class Presentations