

**Decades in American Culture: Revisiting the '90s**  
**American Studies, 050:303:01**

**M/W, 5:35 – 6:55PM, Ruth Adams Building 208**



*Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton on the Arsenio Hall Show, June 3, 1992*

Prof. Andy Urban  
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Office Hours:  
11AM to 1PM Mondays, or by appointment

\*Office hours will be held in the Starbucks  
that is part of the College Avenue bookstore

## Course Description

This course surveys the cultural, economic, political, and social trends that defined American life in the 1890s and 1990s. Throughout the semester, we will compare how these last decades can (or cannot) be seen as fitting ends to their respective centuries and how they share common themes with each other.

In our study of the 1890s, we will touch on key moments such as the Massacre at Wounded Knee; the Chicago World Fair; populism; anti-Chinese immigration activism; the strikes of 1894; and, the advent of overseas American imperialism marked by the War of 1898. We will focus on important contexts such as Gilded Age capitalism; growing income inequality; settler colonialism and overseas imperialism; the triumph of “Jim Crow” segregation; women rights’ activism; and, the commercialization of leisure.

Turning our attention to the 1990s, we will address, among other topics, the first Gulf War; the rise of hip hop and “alternative” music; the HIV/AIDS crisis; Rodney King; the O.J. Simpson Trial; Clinton’s America; and, anxieties about Y2K and the digital future.

This class will be structured around a set of guiding questions: how did people of various classes, races, and backgrounds express themselves during these periods while navigating the world around them? What were the major points of social tension and conflict that marked these periods?

## American Studies Department Learning Goals Met by this Course

Students will learn to:

- Critically analyze interdisciplinary primary and secondary sources relating to these periods
- Interpret primary and secondary sources in their broader social, economic, and political contexts
- Curate online blog posts that examine documents, media, and texts that capture key moments and historic events from the 1890s and 1990s.
- Connect and compare the significance of the 1890s and 1990s to each other, and to other decades and periods in the American past
- Write well; speak articulately; and think critically, analytically, and creatively.

## Required Readings

- Kate Chopin, *The Awakening and Selected Stories* (Penguin Classics, 2003 [1899]), ISBN#: 9780142437322
- Sarah Schulman, *Rat Bohemia* (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2008 [1996]), ISBN#: 9781551522357

In addition to the books listed above, there will also be chapters, articles, and other readings that you will be required to read and bring to class, either as print-outs or in a digital format.

Readings correspond to the day they will be discussed and need to be completed before class.

## Assignment and Grading Overview

*Additional information on the assignments will be provided in separate handouts.*

**Exam - 20%**

**Digital Media Project - 45%** (each post is worth 15% of your total grade)

**Essay on *Awakening* & *Rat Bohemia* - 20%**

**In-Class Participation - 15%**

### 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.

## Class Policies

**Please make sure that you are receiving and checking SAKAI announcements via email.**

I regularly use the site to update class information, assignments, etc. **You are responsible for keeping up-to-date with class information and making sure that you are connected.**

**Attendance in the seminar is mandatory.**

This is a seminar, and the expectation is that you will both attend all the classes, and regularly participate.

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.

Unexcused late assignments will receive a deduction.

**Please do not use smartphones.** If I see you using a smartphone I reserve the right to call you on it before the class, and, at the very least, I will mark you for a deduction in your participation grade.

**Special Accommodation Requests:**

I want to ensure that all special accommodation requests are met, following Rutgers guidelines.

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>

## Class Schedule and Readings

### **Wednesday, Sept. 6**

Introducing the 1890s and 1990s

### Unit One - State Violence

### **Monday, Sept. 11**

- David Grua, "Race War and Wounded Knee," in *Surviving Wounded Knee: The Lakotas and the Politics of Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 11-29.
- Shelly Fisher Fishkin, "Native American Voices Remember Wounded Knee," in *Writing America: Literary Landmarks from Walden to Wounded Knee* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 147-70.

### **Wednesday, Sept. 13**

- Sherman Alexie, "A Drug Called Tradition," "Distances," and "The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven," in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1993), 12-23; 104-109; 181-90

### **Monday, Sept. 18**

- Timothy Tyson and David Cecelski, "Introduction," and Glenda E. Gilmore, "Murder, Memory, and the Flight of the Incubus," in *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy*, eds. Cecelski and Tyson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 3-13; 73-94.

### **Wednesday, Sept. 20**

In-class screening: *Burn Motherfucker, Burn!* Dir. Sacha Jenkins, 2017.

### **Monday, Sept. 25.**

- Janet L. Abu-Lughod, "Riot Redux: South Central, 1992," in *Race, Space, and Riots in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 227-268.

### Wednesday, Sept. 27

- Curtis Hinsley, "The World as Marketplace: Commodification of the Exotic at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven Levine (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 344-365.
- Christopher Robert Reed, "The Black Presence at 'White City': African and African American Participation at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, May 1, 1893 - October 31, 1893," <http://columbus.gliit.edu/>

### Monday, Oct. 2

- Kristin Hoganson, "As Badly off as the Filipinos': U.S. Woman Suffragists and Turn-of-the-Century U.S. Imperialism," *Journal of Women's History* 13 (2001): 9-33.
- "American Soldiers in the Philippines Write Home about the War," excerpted by History Matters (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/58>)
- Amy Kaplan, "Where is Guantánamo?" *American Quarterly* 57.3 (2005): 831-858

### Wednesday, Oct. 4

- Daniel Hallin and Todd Gitlin, "Agon and Ritual: The Gulf War as Popular Culture and as Television Drama," *Political Communication* 10 (1993): 411-24.
- shakomakoNET, "Sinan Antoon and the Gulf War: 25 Years Later," <http://shakomako.net/politics/sinan-antoon-and-the-gulf-war-25-years-later/> (this article is available online; not as pdf)

### Unit Two - Justice for All?

#### \*\*\*\* Sunday, Oct. 8 - SPEICAL CLASS SCREENING \*\*\*\*

- *We'll discuss further, but the idea is to spend Sunday afternoon/evening binge watching the ESPN 30/30 series: OJ, Made in America, dir. Ezra Edelman, 2016.*

### Monday, Oct. 9

No reading; discussion of *OJ: Made in America*.

**Wednesday, Oct. 11**

Lauren Berlant and Lisa Duggan, "Introduction," and Jane Gallop with Berlant, "Loose Lips," in *Our Monica, Ourselves: The Clinton Affair and the National Interest*, ed. Berlant and Duggan (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 1-8; 246-267.

**Unit Three - Technology and Change**

**Monday, Oct. 16**

Guest Lecturer, Paul Israel, Ph.D., Director and General Editor of the Thomas A. Edison Papers

Reading TBA

**Wednesday, Oct. 18**

- Theodore Kaczynski, excerpts from *Industrial Society and Its Future*, published in *Washington Post*, September 22, 1995, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/longterm/unabomber/manifesto.text.htm>
- Alston Chase, "Harvard and the Making of the Unabomber," *Atlantic Monthly*, June 2000
- John Perry Barlow, "Jack In, Young Pioneer!" Keynote Essay for the 1994 Computerworld College Edition, [https://w2.eff.org/Misc/Publications/John\\_Perry\\_Barlow/HTML/jack\\_in\\_young\\_pioneer.html](https://w2.eff.org/Misc/Publications/John_Perry_Barlow/HTML/jack_in_young_pioneer.html)

**Unit Four - Economic and Social Life**

**Monday, Oct. 23**

- "Appeal of the Chinese Equal Rights League" (1892)
- People's Party, Omaha Platform (1892)
- Jane Addams, "A Modern Lear," *Survey* 29, no. 5 (November 2, 1912): 131-37.
- William Jennings Bryan, "Cross of Gold" Speech (1896)



**Wednesday, Oct. 25**

- Godfrey Hodgson, "New Economics," in *More Equal Than Others: America from Nixon to the New Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 87-111.
- Premilla Nadasen, "How a Democrat Killed Welfare," *Jacobin*, February 9, 2016, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/02/welfare-reform-bill-hillary-clinton-tanf-poverty-dlc/>

**Monday, Oct. 30**

- Naomi Klein, "The Discarded Factory: Degraded Production in the Age of the Superbrand," in *No Logo* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2000), 195-229.

**Wednesday, Nov. 1**

In-class exam review

**Monday, Nov. 6**

IN-CLASS EXAM (details TBA)

**Wednesday, Nov. 8**

In-class screening of *Rhyme and Reason*, dir. Peter Spirer (1997)

**\*\*\*\* Saturday, Nov. 11 \*\*\*\***

Optional field trip to Lower East Side Tenement Museum, to learn about urban, tenement life in the 1890s; EC opportunity

**Monday, Nov. 13**

- Robin D.G. Kelley, "Kickin' Reality, Kickin' Ballistics: 'Gangsta Rap and Postindustrial Los Angeles,'" in *Race Rebels* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 183-227.

### **Wednesday, Nov. 15**

- Steven Thompson, "'Smells Like Teen Spirit,' Still Strange And Beautiful," *NPR*, September 23, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/2011/09/23/140739014/smells-like-teen-spirit-still-strange-and-beautiful>

MTV Rocks - in-class activity

### **Unit Five: Literary Representations of Class, Gender, Race, and Sexuality**

### **Monday, Nov. 20**

- Chopin, *The Awakening*, Introduction essay by Sandra Gilbert, "The Second Coming of Aphrodite," 7-33, and chapters i - v, 43-56
- Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wall-Paper," *The New England Magazine*, January 1892, 647-656.

### **Monday, Nov. 27**

- Chopin, *The Awakening*, chapters v to xx, 56-113

### **Wednesday, Nov. 29**

- Chopin, *The Awakening*, chapters xxi to end, 113-176

### **Monday, Dec. 4**

In-class viewing, *Real World: San Francisco*, Episode 1, June 30, 1994

### **Wednesday, Dec. 6**

- Schulman, *Rat Bohemia*, Author's Introduction, Part One

### **Monday, Dec. 11**

- Schulman, *Rat Bohemia*, Part Two

### **Wednesday, Dec. 13**

- Schulman, *Rat Bohemia*, Part Three