

Introduction to American Studies
Spring 2018
(01:050:101)

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

Prof. Andy Urban
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Office Hours: 11AM – 1PM, Wednesdays, or by appointment
Ruth Adams Building 205E

Graders
Patrick Gibson
Daria Martin

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

- Margaret Regan, *Detained and Deported: Stories of Immigrant Families Under Fire* (Beacon Press, 2015), ISBN#: 9780807079836.
- Nella Larsen, *Passing* (Penguin, 2003), ISBN# 9780142437278.
- Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (Grand Central, 2000), ISBN# 9780446675505.

In addition to the above books, readings will be posted as .pdf files to the course’s SAKAI site and are available in the section titled “Resources.”

Readings correspond to the day they will be discussed, and need to be completed before lecture. You are required to bring readings to class, and there will be occasional spot checks to see if you have done this.

Please Note:

Please make sure that you are receiving and checking SAKAI announcements via email, as I regularly use this tool 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%** (Feb. 21, in class)
- **Midterm Exam #2, 15%** (April 4, in class)
- **Final Exam, 25%** (Date TBA)

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

- **Essay Assignment, 25%** (due Friday, April 13)

Your semester-long essay will ask you to explore, through a case study, a site that relates to American culture, history, politics, or society.

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 on 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*

- **Attendance Grade, 5%**

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 attendance grade.

Because this is a lecture class, participation is not required. However, I will try to involve the class in discussion as much as possible. Regular participants in discussion will receive bonus points will be assigned to their attendance 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.

Computer and phone use should be limited to looking at the .pdf readings for class (if you choose not to print them out), and taking notes. If I see you regularly using your phone or computer for reasons other than taking notes, this will result in a deduction from your attendance grade.

Unexcused late assignments and QUIPs 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 17

Introduction to Course

UNIT ONE - MONUMENTS, MYTHS AND CULTURAL TEXTS

Monday, January 22 - QUIP, Group A

- Benedict Anderson, "Introduction," in *Imagined Communities* (1983)
- Thomas Jefferson, "Declaration of Independence" (1776)
- Jill Lepore, "A Nue Merrykin Dikshunary" (2012)

Wednesday, January 24 - QUIP, Group B

- Alfred Crosby, "The Columbian Exchange"
- Michel Rolph Trouillot, "Good Day, Columbus," from *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995)

Monday, January 29 - QUIP, Group C

- Angela Fournoy, "What Does it Mean to Acknowledge the Past?" *New York Times Sunday Review*, December 31, 2016

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

Wednesday, January 31 - QUIP, Group D

- Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" (1852)
- Alan Trachtenberg, "Brooklyn Bridge as a Cultural Text" (1984)

Monday, February 5 - QUIP, Group A

- 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)

"Confederacy," *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, 2017, in-class screening

Wednesday, February 7 - QUIP, Group B

- Densho.org, "Terminology," <https://densho.org/terminology/> (access this reading online)
- Urban, "Digging Up the Backyard: Seabrook Farms and the Importance of Critical Local Histories," *Teaching New Jersey History*, 2017.

UNIT TWO - INCARCERATION, SUBJECTIVITIES, IMMIGRATION

Monday, February 12

In-class screening: *13th*, directed by Ava DuVernay (2016)

Wednesday, February 14 - - QUIP, Group C

- Jennifer Gonnerman, "Before the Law," *New Yorker*, October 6, 2014

Monday, February 19

Class trip to "States of Incarceration" exhibit, Douglass Library

In-class dialogue on incarceration facilitated by Aresty Research Assistants

Wednesday, February 21

In-class exam

Monday, February 26 - QUIP, Group D

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

Wednesday, Feb. 28 - QUIP, Group A

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

Monday, March 5

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

Wednesday, March 7 - QUIP, Group B

- Judith Butler, "Gender is Burning," (1993)
- Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* 3 (1997): 437-65
- Fenton Johnson, "The Future of Queer," *Harper's Monthly*, January 2018

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

Monday, March 19 - QUIP, Group C

- Mae Ngai, Introduction, *Impossible Subjects* (2004)
- María Cristina García, "[America Has Never Actually Welcomed the World's Huddled Masses](#)," *Washington Post*, November 20, 2015 (article online)

Wednesday, March 21 - QUIP, Group D

- Regan, *Detained and Deported*, Prologue, Introduction, and Part One (chapters 1-2)

Monday, March 26 - QUIP, Group A

- Regan, *Detained and Deported*, Part One (chapters 3-5)

Wednesday, March 28 - QUIP, Group B

- Regan, *Detained and Deported*, Part Two

Monday, April 2 - QUIP, Group C

- Regan, *Detained and Deported*, Part Three and Epilogue

Wednesday, April 4

In-Class Exam

UNIT THREE: TECHNOLOGY, CAPITALISM, THE ENVIRONMENT: THE FUTURE

Monday, April 9 - QUIP, Group D

- Andrew Sullivan, "I Used to be a Human," *New York Magazine*, September 18, 2016, <http://nymag.com/selectall/2016/09/andrew-sullivan-technology-almost-killed-me.html> (access online)
- Tim Wu, "Facebook Should Pay All of Us," *The New Yorker*, August 14, 2015

Wednesday, April 11

- Richard B. Primack, preface, chapters 1, 3, and 4, from *Walden Warming: Climate Change Comes to Thoreau's Woods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).
- Benjamin Fong, "The Climate Crisis? It's Capitalism, Stupid," *The New York Times*, November 20, 2017

Monday, April 16

- Jonathan Kirshner, "America, America," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, Jan. 15, 2017, <http://blog.lareviewofbooks.org/essays/america-america/> (access online)

Wednesday, April 18 - QUIP, Group A

- Butler, *The Parable of the Sower*, chs. 1-6

Monday, April 23 - QUIP, Group B

- Butler, *The Parable of the Sower*, chs. 7-12

Wednesday, April 25 - QUIP, Group C

- Butler, *The Parable of the Sower*, chs. 13-19

Monday, April 30 - QUIP, Group D

- Butler, *The Parable of the Sower*, chs. 20 - end