

Approaches: Surviving in America

Fall 2020

050:310:02



Alexis Rockman, Newtown Creek, 2014

As an approaches course, this class explores how scholars, thinkers, and artists engage with the interdisciplinary field of American Studies, and the sources, methods, and perspectives they use to interpret the American experience in all its complexity. We'll address how American Studies scholars utilize approaches from a range of disciplines and fields – such as history, literature, anthropology, geography, sociology, ethnic studies, cultural studies, and gender and sexuality studies, among others – to answer questions about American politics, culture, economics, and society in both the past and the present.

In this particular course, we'll examine American Studies' approaches while also focusing on the theme, "Surviving in America," a topic on everyone's minds. We'll discuss how Americans and the representative literature, art, and culture they have produced, have endeavored to survive – and overcome – the different economic, political, and social crises they have faced.

This course fulfills an SAS Core Requirement goal in the area of Writing and Communication, and students will be required to write a research paper, 16-20 pages in length, exploring a subject related to “Surviving in America.” Students will be evaluated on their success in using an American Studies approach to writing about and conduct secondary source research on their chosen topic.

This is an asynchronous, online course. There is no specific class meeting time. Weekly deadlines for completing course work are explained below.

Required Readings:

- Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2008), ISBN #9780374531157
- Kathryn J. Edin and H. Luke Shaefer, *\$2.00 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2015), ISBN #9780544811959
- David Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration* (New York: Vintage, 1991), ISBN #9780679732273
- Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking* (New York: New Books, 2007), ISBN # 9781400078431.

Additional readings will be posted as .pdf files to the course’s SAKAI site in the section titled “Resources.”

Asynchronous Course Format:

- ❖ A weekly video lecture will be posted to the “Lectures” folder in the Resources section of SAKAI on Monday (except where “Student-Led Group Discussion”)
 - Students are required to download and view the lecture, to take notes on its contents, and to respond to the prompts and questions posed in the lecture
- ❖ Student responses to lectures or to student-led group discussions need to be submitted to the Forum section of SAKAI, in that week’s folder, by no later than 5PM on Thursday
 - Responses can either be written, or they can be recorded as video or audio files and submitted as attachments. Specific instructions for completing responses will be provided in the lectures and student-led group discussions.
- ❖ A weekly “Professor Responds” video will be posted to the “Lectures” folder in the Resources section of SAKAI on Friday

- Students are not required to submit any work in response to the second video, but still need to watch it. Material from these videos will be evaluated on the exams.

Assignment and Grading Summary:

- Research Paper, four to five thousand words in length, 40%
 - Outline due Friday, September 25
 - First Draft, with integrated secondary sources, due Friday, October 30
 - Final Paper due Wednesday, December 16
- Final Exam, 35% - Sunday, Dec. 20, or Tuesday, Dec. 22 – 4-7PM
- Student-Led Group Discussion, 15%
- Responses, 10%

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 and to conduct investigations into American culture and history. Students will learn to use scholarship in history, politics, literature, and art to analyze and 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.

SAS Degree Requirements Met by this Course:

Cognitive Skills and Processes: Writing and Communication (WCd).

Students will:

- Communicate effectively in modes appropriate to a discipline or area of inquiry; evaluate and critically assess sources and use the conventions of attribution and citation correctly; and analyze and synthesize information and ideas from multiple sources to generate new insights. [WCd]



Class Policies:

SAKAI and Class Announcements:

Please make sure that you are receiving and checking SAKAI announcements, since I will be using this tool to post important information relating to class. You are responsible for knowing the information and instructions posted to SAKAI.

Technology Requirements:

For this course, you will need the ability to get online and post comments to SAKAI. You will also need to be able to download videos (.mov format) from SAKAI and watch them. All course communication will take place via email or SAKAI. There are three films students will be required to watch, which are streaming or available to rent.

Please visit the Rutgers Student Tech Guide page for resources available to all students.

If you do not have the appropriate technology for financial reasons, please email Dean of Students deanofstudents@echo.rutgers.edu for assistance. If you are facing other financial hardships, please visit the Office of Financial Aid at <https://financialaid.rutgers.edu/>.

Special Accommodation Requests:

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

Missing Class:

If you cannot participate in class due to sickness, an emergency, or another excused reason, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate this. An email is automatically sent to me. You can also email me separately so that we can come up with a plan for making up missed work.

Obviously, these are unique times and none of us really know what the fall will be like in terms of Covid-19. I plan on being understanding and flexible. I just ask that you communicate with me about concerns, challenges, or other issues so we can come up with a plan.

Academic Integrity Policy:

<https://nbprovost.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-students>

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

If you are unsure about how to research and write a paper – the most common cause of violations of the academic integrity policy – please ask me for help!

Intellectual Property:

Lectures and materials utilized in this course, including but not limited to videocasts, podcasts, visual presentations, assessments, and assignments, are protected by United States copyright laws as well as Rutgers University policy. As the instructor of this course, I possess sole copyright ownership. You are permitted to take notes for personal use or to provide to a classmate also currently enrolled in this course.

Under no other circumstances is distribution of recorded or written materials associated with this course permitted to any internet site or similar information-sharing platform without my express written consent. Doing so is a violation of the university's Academic Integrity Policy. Similarly, these copyright protections extend to original papers you produce for this course. In the event that I seek to share your work further, I will first obtain your written consent to do so.

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.

Union Message:

As a member of Rutgers AAUP-AFT, I stand in solidarity with all laid-off workers at Rutgers. They have been sacrificed to management's unnecessary austerity measures, which were carried out unilaterally and without transparency. I believe that the administration has an obligation to respect and protect its lowest-paid, most vulnerable employees. For more information on this subject, please visit:

<https://www.rutgersaaup.org/how-were-confronting-the-crisis/>.

Class Schedule and Assigned Readings

Weeks One & Two (September 1 - 11): Introduction to American Studies and Approaches

- Kirsten Silva Gruesz, “America,” in *Keywords in American Cultural Studies* (2014)
- Raymond Williams, “Culture is Ordinary,” (1958)
- Linda Kerber, “Diversity and the Transformation of American Studies,” *American Quarterly* 41 (1989)
- Sarah Mesle interviews Robert Warrior, “At Home With American Studies: An Interview with ASA President Robert Warrior,” *LA Review of Books*, November 18, 2016, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/home-american-studies-interview-asa-president-robert-warrior/> (read online)

Week Three (September 14 – 18): Survival as a Concept in American Studies: Contemporary Case Studies

- James Baldwin, “A Letter to My Nephew,” *The Progressive*, December 1, 1962
- Alexis Shotwell, “Complexity and Complicity,” in *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (2016)
- Kira Hall, Donna Meryl Goldstein, Matthew Bruce Ingram, “The Hands of Donald Trump: Entertainment, Gesture, Spectacle,” *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6 (2016): 71-100.

Week Four (September 21 – 25)

No Readings, Responses, or Video Lectures

Initial Essay Outline Due, via SAKAI, by Friday, September 25

Week Five (September 28 – October 2): Surviving... Racial Violence

- Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, through chapter 5

Week Six (October 5 – 9) – Student-Led Discussion #1

- Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, chapter six to end

Week Seven (October 12 – 16): Surviving...Poverty

- Edin and Shaefer, *\$2.00 a day*, through chapter 3

Week Eight (October 19 – 23) - Student-Led Discussion #2

- Edin and Shaefer, *\$2.00 a day*, chapter 4 to end

Week Nine (October 26 – 30)

No readings or films; week to work on essays

Week Ten (November 2 - 6): Surviving... as Depicted in Art and Fiction

- Film: *Days of Heaven*, dir. Terence Malick, 1978 (available through Kanopy on the Rutgers Libraries website)
- Hubert Cohen, “The Genesis of *Days of Heaven*” (2003)

Individual Meetings with Prof. Urban

Week Eleven (November 9 – 13): Surviving ... a Plague

- Wojnarowicz , *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration*, pages TBA

Week Twelve (November 16 – 20) - Student-Led Discussion #3

- *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration*, pages TBA

Week Thirteen (November 23 – 27)

No class, Thanksgiving

Week Fourteen (November 30 – December 4): Surviving...Personal Loss

- Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking*, pages TBA

Week Fifteen (December 7 – 11): Student-Led Discussion #4

- Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking*, pages TBA