

Introduction to American Studies
Fall 2020, 050:101:02



Kerry James Marshall, "Bang," 1994, Courtesy of the MCA Chicago

Prof. Andy Urban
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Virtual Office Hours: 10AM to noon, Wednesdays, or by appointment.

Please email me to set up a meeting or if you have any questions. I will reply to you within 48 hours.

Grader
Amanda Smalfus

Course Description

This course introduces students to the interdisciplinary field of American Studies. Addressing fictional literature, law, film, history, visual culture, popular culture, philosophy, and politics, this class will examine the concept and idea of "America" in its global, national, communal, political, economic, and social permutations.

The goal of the course is to expose students to the intellectual and creative possibilities in the field of American Studies, and the ideas, concepts, and themes that have been central to how Americans understand themselves and the United States as a nation. This course will also provide incoming majors with key analytical tools that can be used in more advanced courses. Emphasis will be placed on students' analytical skills, close reading practices, and critical thinking.

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

Required Readings

- Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014), ISBN# 9781555976903.

You will also be reading entries from the volume, *Keywords for American Cultural Studies, Second Edition*, eds. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler (New York: NYU Press), which is available online to Rutgers libraries' users at: <https://www-jstor-org.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/stable/j.ctt1287j69>.

The entries from the *Keywords* volume and the other readings listed here will also be posted as .pdf files to the course's SAKAI site and are available in the section titled "Resources," unless they include instructions to read online.

Asynchronous Course Format:

- ❖ A weekly video lecture will be posted to the "Lectures" folder in the Resources section of SAKAI on Monday
 - 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 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.
- ❖ 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:

- Midterm, 20%: Thursday, Oct. 22, 4-7PM or Friday, October 23, 9AM to noon
- Documenting the 2020 Election Assignment, 25%: Due Friday, November 6
- Final Essay, 20%: Due Wednesday, Dec. 16
- Final Exam, 20%: Sunday, Dec. 20, or Tuesday, Dec. 22, 4-7PM (times assigned by SAS for async classes)
- Responses to Readings and Lectures, 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.

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:

Areas of Inquiry: Arts and Humanities [AH]. Students will:

- 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:

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): Defining American

- Kirsten Silva Gruesz, "America," and Stephanie Smallwood, "Freedom," in *Keywords*
- Thomas Jefferson, "Declaration of Independence" (1776)
- Angela Fournoy, "What Does it Mean to Acknowledge the Past?" *New York Times*, December 31, 2016
- Jill Lepore, "A Nue Merrykin Dikshunary" (2012)

Week Three (September 14 - 18): Myths and Symbols

- Philip Deloria, "The Invention of Thanksgiving," *New Yorker*, November 18, 2019
- Andrew Cockburn, "Washington is Burning," *Harper's Magazine*, Sept. 2014
- Kiese Laymon, "What I Pledge Allegiance To," *Fader*,
<https://www.thefader.com/2016/09/19/my-mississippi-pledge-kiese-laymon>
(read online)
- Caroline Randall Williams, "You Want a Confederate Monument? My Body Is a Confederate Monument," *New York Times*, June 26, 2020,
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/26/opinion/confederate-monuments-racism.html> (read online)

Week Four (September 21 - 25)

No Readings, Responses, or Video Lectures

Essay Brainstorming Activity Due, via SAKAI, by Friday, September 25

Week Five (September 28 - October 2): Producing American Landscapes

- Lisa Lowe, "Globalization," and Scott Herring, "Rural," in *Keywords*
- William Cronon, "The View from Walden," (1983)
- Anna Clark, "'Nothing to worry about. The water is fine': how Flint poisoned its people," *The Guardian*, July 3, 2018,

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/jul/03/nothing-to-worry-about-the-water-is-fine-how-flint-michigan-poisoned-its-people> (read online)

- Mike Davis, "The Case for Letting Malibu Burn," from *Ecology of Fear* (1998)

Week Six (October 5 – 9): American Ecosystems

- Meera Subramanian, "The Age of Loneliness," *Guernica*, September 15, 2015, <https://www.guernicamag.com/the-age-of-loneliness/> (read online)
- Abrahm Lustgarten, "Where Will Everyone Go?" *ProPublica*, July 23, 2020 <https://features.propublica.org/climate-migration/model-how-climate-refugees-move-across-continents/> (read online)
- Peter Funch, "Synchronies at Risk," in *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene* (2017)

Week Seven (October 12 – 16): American Citizenship

- Lauren Berlant, "Citizenship," and Nikhil Pal Singh, "Liberalism," in *Keywords*
- Martha Jones, "'Birthright Citizenship and Reconstruction's Unfinished Revolution,'" *Journal of the Civil War Era*, 2017, <https://www.journalofthecivilwarera.org/forum-the-future-of-reconstruction-studies/birthright-citizenship-reconstructions-unfinished-revolution/> (read online)
- Vandana Pawa, "Bhagat Singh Thind's Case Shows the Link Between Whiteness and Citizenship," *Teen Vogue*, August 9, 2019, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/bhagat-singh-thind-supreme-court-whiteness-citizenship> (read online)
- Natalie Molina, "Deportable Citizens," in *Deportations in the Americas* (2018)
- Andy Urban, "From Prisoners to Citizens," exhibit mock-up for "Battles for the Ballot" New Jersey Digital Highway Exhibit, 2020

Week Eight (October 19 – 23): Midterm Review and Exam

Exam Options: Thursday, Oct. 22, 4-7PM or Friday, October 23, 9AM to noon

Week Nine (October 26 – 30): Battles for the Ballot

- Martha Jones, “How Black Suffragists Fought for the Right to Vote and a Modicum of Respect,” *Humanities*, Summer 2019, Volume 40, Number 3, <https://www.neh.gov/article/how-black-suffragists-fought-right-vote-and-modicum-respect> (read online)
- Jim Rutenberg, “A Dream Undone: Inside the 50-year campaign to roll back the Voting Rights Act,” *New York Times*, July 29, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/29/magazine/voting-rights-act-dream-undone.html> (read online)
- Garrett Graff, “8 Big Reasons Election Day 2020 Could Be a Disaster,” *Politico*, July 24, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/07/24/2020-election-disaster-perfect-storm-372778> (read online)

Week Ten (November 2 - 6): Race in America

- Roderick Ferguson, “Race,” in *Keywords*
- Hussein Mohsen, “Race and Genetics: Somber History, Troubled Present,” *Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine* 93 (2020): 215-9.
- James Baldwin, “A Letter to My Nephew,” *The Progressive*, December 1, 1962

Film: *I Am Not Your Negro*, dir. Raoul Peck, 2016. (Available on Netflix and YouTube)

Week Eleven (November 9 – 13): Gender and Sexuality in America

- Siobhan B. Somerville, “Queer,” in *Keywords*
- Stephen Vider, “Public Disclosures of Private Realities: HIV/ AIDS and the Domestic Archive,” in *The Public Historian* 41, no. 2 (2019): 163-89.
- Kathi Weeks, Introduction from *The Problem with Work* (2011)
- Sylvia Federici, excerpt from *Wages Against Housework* (1974)

Week Twelve (November 16 – 20): Poverty and Precarity in America

Film: *World of Tomorrow*, dir. Don Hertzfeldt, 2015, <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/worldoftomorrow> (to rent or purchase)

Film: *The Florida Project*, dir. Sean Baker, 2017 (available on Netflix)

Week Thirteen (November 23 - 27)

No class, Thanksgiving

Week Fourteen (November 30 - December 4): A Nation of Immigrants?

- Eithne Luibhéid, "Immigration," in *Keywords*
- Erika Lee, "The 'Inferior Races' of Europe," in *America for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States* (2019)
- Erika Lee, "Trump's xenophobia is an American tradition — but it doesn't have to be," *Washington Post*, November 26, 2019
- A. Naomi Paik, "Raids," in *Bans, Walls, Raids, Sanctuary: Understanding U.S. Immigration for the Twenty-First Century* (2020)

Week Fifteen (December 7 - 11)

- Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric*