

American Studies 350-01

Theories and Methods of American Studies

Spring 2017

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Course Description

This undergraduate seminar is intended to familiarize you with some of the core theoretical and methodological approaches to American Studies. In this course, you will learn about the discipline's history and the nature of interdisciplinary research. Course readings are drawn from a variety of disciplines and concern topics as diverse as robots, Westerns, Zoot Suits, suburban development and numerous other topics. Each reading demonstrates a different way to study and think about American culture, and prompts you to identify the benefits, challenges, and implications of particular theories and methods. By the semester's end, you will be prepared to describe what American Studies is, read critically in American Studies and related disciplines, engage in lively and informed debate about American culture, and undertake innovative, interdisciplinary scholarship of your own.

Course Prerequisites: American Studies 201 and 301

Learning Goals

Develop a rigorous concept of culture and cultural process as well as an interdisciplinary sensibility, becoming aware of connections among the social sciences and the humanities

Gain a thorough understanding of cultural diversity by examining the creative tension between unity and multiplicity in American experiences.

Understand and interpret the ways in which culture creates meaning and guides behavior.

Learn research, writing, and expressive skills to see connections among complex materials and to clearly communicate an understanding of the underlying meanings and causes of cultural/historical events.

Become informed and engaged American citizens, able to situate current political and social issues within their historical and cultural contexts.

Required Texts

Readings and viewings should be completed by the date on which they appear on the syllabus. Please bring the day's readings to class on the day on which they will be discussed.

Books to Purchase:

- Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*
- Lydia Alix Fillingham, *Foucault for Beginners*
- Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America*

In addition to these sources, you are required to read many secondary sources that can be found on the course TITANIUM site. On the course's main page, you can find all the information and readings/assignments that you will need for each week of the course.

Please do not read too far ahead as I may adjust the readings to fit the development of the course.

Course Assignments

Essay 1	200
Essay 2	200
Essay 3	200
Group Presentations (2)	50
Forum Posts (3)	100
Participation	150
<u>Letter of Application</u>	<u>100</u>
Total	1000

Graded Exercises

Forum Posts: You are required to respond to THREE forum posts over the course of the semester. Your post should be a full paragraph (5-6 sentences at least) and should draw directly from that day's assignment to make an argument that answers the question of the day. Though I encourage you to respond to each other, you must respond to the question I pose. THESE POSTS ARE DUE TWO HOURS BEFORE THE START OF CLASS.

Assignment Goal: Encourage engagement with course materials and begin the process of analyzing theories and methods before the start of class

Group Presentations: You have to do two short group presentations throughout the semester, one near the beginning the other near the end. These presentations should be no longer than 15 minutes and should make use of some kind of presentation software that will be uploaded to Titanium for everyone's future use. In these presentations, you are required to teach the material your group has been assigned for that week. While I will give you significant time in class to work on these, you may need to work outside of class (either in a shared file or in person).

Assignment Goal: In addition to helping you hone presentation skills, these are intended to help you figure out the readings.

Essay 1: In this 4-6-page paper, you will need to analyze a western-themed television show using the theories and methods of at least TWO of the approaches to the Frontier that we encountered in Part I.

Assignment Goal: Learn how to apply multiple American Studies methodologies to the same sources. Learn the historical development of the discipline.

Essay 2: In this 4-6-page paper, you will write a mini-pop or material culture research paper. You will have to choose a particular form of pop or material culture by March 2. Then you will spend the next few weeks applying the theories and methods of studying power, identity, and culture that we have been learning to your selection. The research component of this paper will require you to either conduct interviews of fans/users or use digital archives to find published sources.

Assignment Goal: Learn how to analyze culture, identity, and power.

Essay 3: In this 4-6-page paper, you will have to review Khalil Muhammad's *The Condemnation of Blackness* and contrast his theories and methods with those of the myth and symbol school of American Studies. (*Virgin Land*)

Assignment Goal: Consolidate what you have learned about how AMST methods have changed since the founding of the discipline

Letter of Application: In this final assignment, you will have to write a (no more than 1 page) letter of application to your dream job (or grad school) that explains why American Studies prepares you for that position. We will talk extensively about this over the semester and you will have to bring a draft to class on the last day of the semester for peer review.

Assignment Goal: Prepare you for the job market.

Point/Grade Breakdown

925-1000	A	725-774	C
895-924	A-	695-724	C-
875-894	B+	675-694	D+
825-874	B	625-674	D
795-824	B-	595-624	D-
775-794	C+	594↓	F

Obviously, this course uses a +/- system. No extra credit will be offered. All rounding is already built into the point totals.

Attendance and Late Assignments

I expect you to attend each and every class. Although any absence will negatively affect your participation, you are allowed ONE unexcused absence. After that, each absence, with an exception for critical and documented emergencies, will reduce your final course grade by 10%. After FOUR missed classes, you may be dropped from the course.

An assignment is considered late if it is not turned in at the beginning of the class session in which it is due. Every student is entitled to ONE extension on a paper's due date (except for the draft of the letter) with no questions asked. To get the extension, all you have to do is email me with the request at least 12 hours before the assignment is due. I will decide the length of the extension on a case-by-case basis. After you have used your one free extension, your grade may be docked up to one letter grade (10%) for each day it is late.

Expectations

To be successful in this class, you must work hard and come to class each day prepared to concentrate and participate. In the classroom, you should feel free to ask questions and fully participate. Because participation is critical to this class, we must work together to establish an atmosphere of tolerance and respect. While we are free to disagree, we should not deride or condemn each other. Additionally, you should avoid all distracting, disrespectful, or disruptive behavior that may inhibit other individuals' performance in the class. In particular, you must not engage in private conversations, newspaper reading, and so forth. All electronic devices, except those used for note taking, must be turned off during class.

Student Accommodations

CSUF complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act by providing a process for disclosing disabilities and arranging for reasonable accommodations. On the CSUF campus, the Disability Support Services has been delegated the authority to certify disabilities and to prescribe specific accommodations for students with documented disabilities. DSS provides support services for students with mobility limitations, learning disabilities, hearing or visual impairments, and other disabilities. Counselors are available to help students plan a CSUF experience to meet their individual needs. Prior to receiving this assistance, documentation from a qualified professional source must be submitted to DSS. For more information, please contact DSS in UH 101; phone: 657-278-3117; website:

<http://www.fullerton.edu/dss/>

Academic Integrity

Integrity is an essential component of all students' academic experience. Students who violate university standards of academic integrity are subject to disciplinary sanctions, including failure in the course and suspension from the university. Since dishonesty in any form harms the individual, other students, and the university, policies on academic integrity are strictly enforced. I expect that you will familiarize yourself with the academic integrity guidelines found in the current student handbook.

[<http://www.fullerton.edu/handbook/>]. Cheating is defined as obtaining or attempting to obtain credit for work by the use of any dishonest, deceptive, fraudulent, or unauthorized means, or helping someone commit an act of academic dishonesty. (UPS 300.021). Examples include, but are not limited to:

Unacceptable examination behavior: communicating with fellow students, copying material from another student's exam or allowing another student to copy from an exam, possessing or using unauthorized materials, or any behavior that defeats the intent of an exam.

Plagiarism: taking the work of another and offering it as one's own without giving credit to that source, whether that material is paraphrased or copied in verbatim or near-verbatim form.

Unauthorized collaboration on a project, homework or other assignment where an instructor expressly forbids such collaboration.

Documentary falsification, including forgery, altering of campus documents or records, tampering with grading procedures, fabricating lab assignments, or altering medical excuses.

If you have any questions about Academic Integrity please consult the following CSUF websites:

<http://www.fullerton.edu/senate/documents/pdf/300/ups300-021.pdf>

<http://www.fullerton.edu/integrity/>

Campus Emergency Procedures

Students should be familiar with campus **emergency procedures**: <http://prepare.fullerton.edu/>

Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to revision.

Part I: American Studies, a History

Week 1: Studying American Studies

1/24 Introduction to Course

READ: Nothing

1/26 **The Birth of American Studies: Analyzing the Frontier**

READ: Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History"; Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land*, Table of Contents and Prologue.

Week 2: Myth and Symbol

1/31 **Creating a Field: Myth and Symbol and American Studies**

READ: Henry Nash Smith, "Can American Studies Develop a Method,"; Henry Nash Smith, Assigned Chapter in *Virgin Land*

ACTIVITY: Work on Group Presentations on Assigned Section of Book

2/2 **Applying Myth and Symbol**

WATCH: *Bonanza*, Episode 1.1

ACTIVITY: 10 Minute Group Presentation on *Virgin Land* Section

Week 3: Myth, Symbol, Power, and Identity

2/7 **A Nation of Gunfighters?**

READ: Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation* (Selection)

2/9 **Domesticity and Empire**

READ: Amy Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity"

WATCH: *Deadwood*, Episode 1.1

Week 4: Exchange and Difference

2/14 **From Frontiers to Exchange: The Middle Ground**

READ: Richard White, *The Middle Ground* (selection)

ACTIVITY: Searching for Academic Articles Online Tutorial

2/16 **Studying Borderlands**

READ: Find and Choose ONE non-review article on "Borderlands" from *The American Quarterly*

DUE: Forum Post on Chosen Article's Theory and Methods

2/19 **DUE ON TITANIUM: ESSAY 1**

Part II: Power, Identity, and Culture

Week 5: Studying Power: Marxism

2/21 **Introducing Marxism**
READ: Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Chapter 1
WATCH: “A Brief Introduction to Marxism,” The Curious Classroom
ACTIVITY: Group Read Through of Marx and Engels

2/23 **Studying Cultural Hegemony**
READ: T.J. Jackson Lears, “The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities,” *The American Historical Review*, (June, 1985)

Week 6: Studying Power: Discourse

2/28 **Reading Foucault**
READ: Lydia Alix Fillingham, *Foucault for Beginners*
ACTIVITY: Applying Foucault in Contemporary Life

3/2 **Applying Foucault**
READ: Mark Silverman and Bart Simon, “Discipline and Dragon Kill Points in the Online Power Game”
WATCH: TBA
DUE: Topic for Paper 2

Week 7: Studying Identity: Community and Difference

3/7 **Community and Identity**
READ: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Selection); Carla Kaplan, “Identity,” from *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*

3/9 **Identifying Difference and Privilege**
READ: Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”;
DUE: Forum Post on Difference and Privilege

Week 8: Studying Identity: Resistance

3/14 ***The Arts of Resistance***
READ: James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (Selection);
ACTIVITY: Everyday Forms of Resistance

3/16 **Resistance in Context**
READ: Robin Kelley, “The Riddle of the Zoot: Malcolm Little and Black Cultural Politics during World War II” in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (1994)

Week 9: Studying Culture: Production

3/21 **Studying the Culture Industry**
READ: Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, “The Culture Industry”

3/23 **Controlling the Masses: Culture as Propaganda**
WATCH: *A Face in the Crowd*
DUE: Forum Post: How does the film echo or challenge Adorno and Horkheimer?
ACTIVITY: In-Class Newspaper Archives Assignment

Week 10: Studying Culture: Reception

4/4 Studying Reception

READ: Janice Radway, "Women Read the Romance: The Interaction of Text and Context," *Feminist Studies*, (Spring, 1983)

ACTIVITY: Analyzing Online Fandoms

4/6 Reception as Resistance?

READ: Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* (Selection)

WATCH: Fan Videos

VIEW: Fan Websites

ACTIVITY: 5-10 Minute Group Presentation on Online Fandom

4/9 DUE ON TITANIUM: Paper 2

Part III: Culture in Contexts

Week 11: Cultural Anthropology

4/11 Thick Description

READ: Clifford Geertz (1973) "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture"; Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cock-fight"

4/13 Communities in Context

READ: Kathryn Dudley, *The End of the Line* (selection)

DUE: Forum Post on Ethnography as a Method

Week 12: Historical Contexts

4/18 Intersectionality in Historical Context

READ: Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization* (Introduction and Conclusion) OR John Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan and the Perfect Man* (Introduction and Chapter 3)

4/20 Culture in Multiple Contexts

READ: Alice Echols, *Hot Stuff*, "Saturday Night Fever: The Little Disco Movie," OR Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*, "The Important Sound of Things Falling Apart"

WATCH: *Saturday Night Fever*

ACTIVITY: Debate over how to interpret *Saturday Night Fever*

Part IV: Contemporary AMST

Week 13: Recent Scholarship

4/25 Current Questions and Topics in AMST

READ: Peruse Last 2 Years of Tables of Contents in *The American Quarterly*

DUE: Forum Post on Current Questions and Topics

4/27 Robots in American Culture

READ: NOTHING

Week 14: Recent Scholarship

5/2 **Award-Winning Recent AMST, Part I**

READ: Khalil Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness*, Introduction, Chapters 1-3

5/4 **Award-Winning Recent AMST, Part II**

READ: Khalil Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness*, Introduction, Chapters 4-6

Week 15: Careers in American Studies

5/9 **What to do with AMST**

READ: Linked articles on Titanium

ACTIVITY: Meet with Former AMST Students

5/11 **Applying for Jobs**

DUE: Letter of Application (Bring to Class)

Week 16: Finals Week

5/19 **DUE ON TITANIUM: Paper 3 and Final Draft of Letter**