

American Studies 201
Introduction to American Studies
Fall 2013
Code:10066
University Hall 252
TuTh 11:30-12:45

John Ibson
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Required reading: (All books are available at The Little Professor Book Center.)

Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (2008)

Mary Ting Yi Lui, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder, Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn-of-the-Century New York City* (2005)

Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (2004)

Michael A. Milburn and Sheree D. Conrad, *The Politics of Denial* (1996)

Welcome to American Studies 201! This class will introduce you to the field of American studies, and to the field's particular ways of examining and explaining how people think and behave in our society. Concentrating on four different periods of time, one of which is the present, the class will emphasize how and why Americans' thinking and behaving have in many ways changed but in other respects have not changed so much at all.

As in all American studies classes, our single most important concept, the primary target of all of our investigations, will be *culture*: a group's distinctive beliefs, symbols, and values, the ways that people express themselves and make sense of the world around them. We will study the experiences of Americans of different regions, social classes, and racial identities, and will study people's private lives as well as their public ones.

In all of these investigations of culture throughout the semester, our central, consistent theme will be some Americans' obsession with *the other*. We will, that is, be concentrating on just exactly how and why some groups of Americans have devoted so much time and anxiety to people whom they perceive to be quite different from themselves, and different in fearful and threatening ways. We will observe how some people's very identities as well as some of their fundamental beliefs, symbols, and values seem to have been formed mostly in contrast to "the other." This is, then, a class about how diversity has been experienced over much of our society's history, in particular diversity having to do with race and social class.

This is an introduction to American studies, so we will be considering a vast array of topics, such as: changes in the distribution of various sorts of power; American life in times of war, of prosperity, and of economic distress; shifting patterns of work and leisure; shifting spaces where people spend most of their time, from rural spaces to urban and suburban ones; technology's impact on people's lives; changes in the sorts of sexual expression that are encouraged and discouraged; the role of family and the meanings of parenthood and childhood in everyday life; and the changing nature and extent of political democracy in our society.

As the following Course Outline shows, the class is divided into four sections, each dealing with a different period of our society's history: 1.) the early years of European settlement, with various kinds of encounters between the newer settlers and the land's original inhabitants, the indigenous people; 2.) the late nineteenth century, when the rapidly industrializing United States became markedly more diverse, experiencing immigration of an unprecedented dimension; 3.) the years right after World War II, which would see tremendous movement, economic and geographical, among Americans, seen especially in suburban growth in Southern California; and 4.) our own times, an era that has seen an unusual amount of anger, denunciation, and fearfulness in American political discourse.

Though I'll lecture occasionally, most of our class sessions will be devoted to our discussions together of the assigned reading and of matters related to that reading. The four books are essential elements of the class, and you must have every one of them, bringing to class the particular book we are discussing at a particular time in the semester. Even when I lecture, I'll encourage your active involvement, posing questions to you and welcoming questions and observations from you in return. My teaching assistants will join me in this process of encouraging discussion. Every assignment in this class, both reading and writing, is designed to help you think critically and independently, to develop viewpoints of your own on your own, not just to restate what the authors or I have said. The development of *your skill in critical thinking*—posing questions and developing interpretations, going far beyond and beneath mere memorization and repetition—is a prime goal of this class.

Course requirements:

It's essential that you attend class consistently and do the reading as it's assigned. To encourage attendance and timely reading, to enhance discussion, and also to help you to think on your own about the issues raised in the class, my T.A.'s and I will often pose a **question in class** that is somehow related to the topics designated for that day; we'll collect your written responses to that question, and will (without ever announcing their authors' names) usually read some of these responses to the class. These are not "quizzes," and they will not be graded, but your participation in them will matter.

On Thursday, October 10, when we've finished considering the Silver book, we'll have a **midterm exam in class**: several questions requiring short answers, from a few words to a few paragraphs. You may use your book and notes for the exam. In this exam

and throughout the semester, I'll be encouraging and testing your understanding, not your ability to memorize.

On Thursday, November 14, when we've finished Avila, we'll have another **midterm exam in class**: an essay of around 1,000 words in response to a question based on the books by Mary Ting Yi Lui and Eric Avila. At least a week before the exam day, I'll tell you the general nature of this question. You may consult your class notes and the two books during the exam. You may also consult anything you've written beforehand in response to my previous remarks about the essay question, but the actual essay that you turn in must have been entirely written in an exam book in class on the day of the exam. Ideally, your essay will show understanding, originality, attention to evidence, clear expression, and coherent organization.

Sometime before this exam, my Teaching Assistants will conduct workshops outside of class, with attendance entirely voluntary, that should help you prepare your essay.

The **final exam**, covering the entire course, will also be an essay—of around 1,500 words. It will take place on **Thursday, December 19, from 12 Noon to 1:50 pm**. As with the second midterm, I will discuss ahead of time the general nature of the essay question. Once again, you may use your class notes, books, and any writing prepared beforehand, but the essay you turn in must be written in an exam book in class, entirely within the time set aside for the exam on December 19.

Working with the **Office of Disabled Student Services**, I will accommodate any special needs that you might have, for regular class sessions and on exam days.

Teaching and Learning Outside the Classroom:

As much as I'll encourage your active involvement in our class sessions, this is a large class; my dealing with you individually in the classroom will be difficult. You'll always be welcome to visit me in my office, especially (but not only) if you're having difficulty with the class. I also have three very able teaching assistants who'll be available for consultation throughout the semester, especially as the time for exams draws near.

Since this is a course about the society in which we all live, I strongly encourage you to pay fresh attention to the world around you, looking for things that challenge or confirm, contradict or reflect, points we'll have made in class—and then to feel free to discuss those things in your exams and in our class discussions.

Grading:

I use the university's plus-minus grading system.

Each midterm will constitute 30% of your grade for written work, the final 40%.

American Studies 201**John Ibson**

To determine your course grade, I may raise or lower your overall grade for written work up to a full letter, depending on the quality and extent of your *class participation*: attendance and attentive listening, comments in class discussions, emails and in-person consultation with me or my T.A.'s, and your written responses to the questions posed in class to enhance discussion.

I will give a *make-up exam* only for a genuinely serious reason for which I might require documentation.

Academic dishonesty is an extremely serious matter: either the presentation of assigned written work actually done by someone else as if it were one's own work, or else the preparation of assigned written work for a classmate. Penalty for such deceit will range, depending on my judgment of the severity of the offense, from a failing grade on a particular assignment to failure in the course. An even more severe penalty might result should I decide to report an instance of dishonesty to the Dean of Students Office.

American Studies 201 in the CSUF General Education Program

This class is part of the university's general education program, a structured group of courses designed to give you a broad range of knowledge and skills beyond the much more specialized focus of your particular major. I believe that general education courses are at the very heart of a good university education. If the general education program works as it should, you will be a more thoughtful, interesting, and versatile person because of your GE courses. I have arranged to teach at least one GE course in nearly every semester (now nearly 80!) that I have been at Cal State Fullerton, and have taken tremendous pleasure from the diversity of students that a GE course attracts.

Most of you are taking this class to meet the specific general education requirement for coursework in "American History, Institutions, and Values." Like all American Studies classes, this one is intended to enhance your understanding of the workings of American culture and your ability to think critically and express yourself clearly in writing and speech. Additionally, the class has these particular objectives for all students:

1. Recognize the significance of cultural, intellectual, ethical, economic, and political struggles that have shaped American society over time.
2. Understand critically the historical development of American institutions and values and their impact on the individual and collective lives of Americans.
3. Recognize the significance of the interaction of ethnic and other social groups to the historical development of American society, institutions, and values within contexts of accommodation and resistance.
4. Understand critically how government under the Constitution of the United States has shaped American society.

5. Critically situate changes in American society within the context of global events.
6. Analyze primary source materials, engage in critical and constructive discussions, and communicate effectively in writing.

Course Outline

Introduction to the Course

Tu 8/27 What We're Doing and Why We're Doing It

*****With no assigned reading due until September 19, you should take advantage of these first three weeks to get a good start on reading Silver's challenging book. If you are able to have completed reading all (or even several) of the assignments in Silver by the day of our first discussion of the book, your comprehension of the discussion will be greatly strengthened.*****

Th 8/29 Making Sense of It All: The Concept of Culture and the
Tu 9/3 Understanding of Human Behavior

Th 9/5 The Useful Deviant: Setting Cultural Boundaries by Focusing on "the
Tu 9/10 Other"

Th 9/12 The Concept of "Modernization" and The Understanding of
Our Society's Past and Present

I. THE LURE OF A COMMON ENEMY: THE BIRTH OF WHITENESS AND AN AMERICAN IDENTITY IN COLONIAL AMERICA

Tu 9/17 The Image of the Indian in American Culture

Th 9/19 Silver, pp. xvii-xxvi; 3-71.

Tu 9/24 Silver, pp. 73-160.

Th 9/26 Silver, pp. 161-190.

Tu 10/1 Time Out: The "Savages" of Today

Th 10/3 Silver, pp. 191-260.

Tu 10/8 Silver, pp. 261-301.

Th 10/10 **First Examination**

**II. CULTURAL BOUNDARY CRISES IN URBAN SPACES: RACE, GENDER,
AND SEXUALITY IN A NEWLY MODERN UNITED STATES**

- Tu 10/15** Lui, pp. 1-51.
Th 10/17 Lui, pp. 52-110.
Tu 10/22 Lui, pp. 111-174.
Th 10/24 Lui, pp. 175-226.

**III. FLEEING DIVERSITY? THE CULTURE OF SUBURBIA IN MID-
TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICA**

- Tu 10/29** Avila, pp. 1-64.
Th 10/31 Avila, pp. 65-105.
Tu 11/5 Avila, pp. 106-144.
Th 11/7 Avila, pp. 145-184.

Exam Preparation Workshops: Times and Locations To Be Announced

- Tu 11/12** Avila, pp. 185-242.
Th 11/14 **Second Examination**

**IV. THE NEED FOR FRESH ENEMIES: CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF
TODAY'S "POLITICS OF DENIAL"**

- Tu 11/19** Milburn & Conrad, pp. 1-51.
Th 11/21 Milburn & Conrad, pp. 53-106.

*****Fall Recess*****

- Tu 12/3** Milburn & Conrad, pp. 107-144.
Th 12/5 Milburn & Conrad, pp. 145-199.
Tu 12/10 Milburn & Conrad, pp. 201-237.

Th 12/12 Conclusions and Course Evaluations

Th 12/19 **Final Examination: 12 Noon-1:50 pm.**