

# Introduction to American Studies

## THEME: Culture, Power, and Citizenship in America

American Studies 201, Summer 2016 Session A

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If you have any questions about any aspect of the course, please feel free to contact me or come to office hours. If you cannot come at the time I have listed, I am happy to schedule an appointment.

### Course Description

At its heart, American Studies tries to answer two central questions about American history, culture, and identity: what is America and who are Americans. The central premise of this course is that those questions are fundamentally political; how they are answered both shapes and is shaped by the changing power relations of United States society. The questions are important, the course shows, because how they are answered directly affects the rights, privileges, and ultimately, lives of millions of individuals. Rather than giving specific answers to those questions, this course concentrates on a series of moments in which different groups of Americans—especially women, African Americans, Native Americans, Queer Americans, industrial laborers, and conservatives—debated and fought for the power to expand or, in some cases, contract the definition of America and its people. Sometimes we will examine debates that occurred in explicitly political contexts; more often, however, we will analyze debates as they unfolded in the country's popular culture, in its short stories, novels, poems, advertisements, paintings, photographs, theme parks, films, theater performances, television shows, and music. Regardless of the type of source we are analyzing, our focus will remain on how it defined America and sought to adjust the concept of citizenship to the realities of power.

To help understand the importance of these questions, we will explore four critical moments in American history when they inspired large cultural and political debates that reshaped the nature of America and its people. First, we will explore the period around the American Revolution when a very select group of Americans possessed the power to translate their ideal vision of the country into the structures and institutions of the United States. We will then turn our attention to the decades surrounding the Civil War when Americans fought a tremendously destructive but ultimately liberating war over whether their country would be defined by slavery or freedom and, ultimately, whether people of African descent deserved the full rights and privileges of white Americans. We will next examine efforts to adjust conceptions of America and citizenship to the realities of an increasingly diverse urban, industrial, and commercial world. Finally, we will conclude by looking at contemporary issues of multiculturalism and diversity in a “globalized” America.

### Learning Goals

American Studies 201 meets General Education, “American History, Institutions and Values” requirement (D.3). In line with CSUF’s “Goals of General Education,” this course will encourage students to:

- Explore the historical development of American institutions and values and their impact on the individual and collective lives of Americans;
- Assess the ways in which the Constitution of the United States and government under the Constitution have shaped American democracy and contemporary American society;
- Explore the political culture of citizen participation in a democracy;
- Examine important cultural, intellectual, moral, and political struggles that have shaped contemporary American society; and
- Recognize the significance of the contributions of various ethnic and gender groups to American history, political institutions, and values within contexts of cultural accommodation and resistance.

## **Course Format**

This course will achieve its goals through a combination of lectures, discussion, and outside readings and assignments. Rather than designating particular days for discussion or lecture, each day will combine elements of both. Because of this, be sure to come each day prepared to listen and participate. I have designed lectures to convey information and model how scholars ask questions, analyze source materials, and construct arguments. Because these lectures are meant to be interactive, feel free to ask questions or make relevant comments during them. Discussion portions of each class are the most critical for your intellectual development and success in the course. In discussion, we will piece together the various different parts of the course to help you develop a better understanding of the past and the skills necessary to succeed in the class.

## **Assigned Readings, Films, and Music**

### **Readings**

I have assigned three books for this course. All are available for purchase at the local bookstores. They are:

Frederick Douglass, *A Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*  
L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*  
Gene Luen Tang, *American Born Chinese*

In addition to these books, I have assigned several primary and secondary sources that can be found on TITANium. All readings should be completed by the day listed on the course syllabus. With the exception of the four books, the readings are fairly concise. This means, however, that I expect you to read them very closely and come prepared to discuss. To help guide your reading, I will provide you with several discussion questions in advance.

### **Films**

You are also required to view three films. These can be viewed on the web or during scheduled screenings. It is your responsibility to view these films before the date listed on the syllabus.

*12 Years a Slave*  
*The Grapes of Wrath*  
*Harold and Kumar*  
*Thelma and Louise*

## Grading

### Formula

Midterm Exam	400
Final Exam	400
<u>Engagement/Discussion</u>	<u>200</u>
Total	1000

### Graded Exercises

You will be evaluated on three different kinds of assignments in this course: essays, short answer questions, and engagement/discussion. Everything except for the Engagement/Discussion grade is completed outside of class.

- **Exams:** Exams in this course contain two sections. In the first section, I will give you two essay questions; you will have to answer ONE in a 3-5 page paper. In the second section, I will give you a series of short answer questions about particular readings/lectures that you must answer in a ½ to 1 page (double-spaced) paragraph. Both exams are take-home and must be turned in through TITANium. Use of outside sources is strictly forbidden (even with citation) and will result in an automatic C. Use of outside sources without citation will result in an automatic F. Remember that if you can find information online, I can as well (and am probably already familiar with it). You are welcome to exchange thoughts and ideas with other students on these exams but your work should be almost entirely your own.
- **Engagement/Participation:** Though this is mostly a lecture course, it is difficult to sustain an engaging lecture for 3 hours. Accordingly, we will break most days up into discussion and various in-class activities. I expect each of you to come prepared to participate every day of the semester. Generally, I avoid calling on people who do not raise their hand. Your grade will be based on both the quality and quantity of your engagement and responses. This means that one comment that tries to engage deeply with the material (even if it is mistaken) will be more valuable than several attempts to just say something. The easiest way to ensure a high grade here is to come prepared to participate frequently in class and complete any in class assignments I give you.

### Points/Grade Breakdown

This course obviously uses a +/- system of grading.

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

### Grade Explanation

**A (90-100%):** Full and comprehensive knowledge and understanding of class material; excellent oral and written communication skills.

**B (80-89%):** Good knowledge and understanding of class material; proficient oral and written communication.

**C (70-79%):** Adequate knowledge and understanding of class material – some gaps in comprehension; adequate written and oral communication.

**D (60-69%):** Limited knowledge and understanding of class material; poor oral and written communication.

**F (59% and below):** Failure to even try and comprehend class materials. Missing assignments and little attendance in class.

### **Late Papers/Exams, Missed Classes, and Extra Credit**

I have designed the essays and exams as the culmination of each particular portion of the class in a way to both teach you the material and enable me to evaluate your progress. Accordingly, it is crucial for your success that you complete assignments on time. Therefore, late papers may result in a penalty up to a 5% deduction for each day late.

It is your responsibility to contact me if you must miss a class. Be sure to notify me as soon as possible if you must turn in an assignment late so that proper accommodations can be made. I may take attendance a few times throughout the Session and I frequently will collect in class assignments.

Extra Credit will not be offered in this course.

### **Expectations**

To succeed in this class, you must work hard and come each day prepared to concentrate and participate. In the classroom, you should feel free to ask questions and fully participate. Because participation is so 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, use your cell phone, and so forth. All electronic devices, except those used for note taking, should be turned off during class.

### **Office of Disabled Student Services**

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 Office of Disabled Student 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/>

## **Class Schedule**

### **BE SURE TO BRING A COPY OF READINGS TO CLASS**

**Course Schedule is Subject to Change**

## **Part I      A Revolutionary Nation**

### **Week 1**

June 1

**Course Introduction**

#### **A Monarch's World**

READ (In Class) John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity;"

June 2

#### **Becoming English, Remaining American**

READ: *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*, Chapter 1; William Byrd, Diary

### **Week 2**

June 6

#### **The Revolt Against Authority: Paternalism and the Republican Revolution**

READ: Assorted Documents on American Revolution

June 8 **Regretting the Revolution? Power, Identity, and Democracy in Early America**  
 READ: *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* Chapter 5

## **Part II A Divided Nation (1830-1877)**

June 9 **Slavery and Freedom in an Agrarian Empire**  
 READ: Early Slavery and Abolition Sources  
 WATCH: *12 Years a Slave*

### **Week 3**

June 13 **“A House Divided:” Northern and Southern Nationalism and the Coming of the Civil War**

READ: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

ACTIVITY: IN CLASS ASSIGNMENT COMPARING FILM AND MEMOIR

June 15 **“Bringing the Jubilee”: Abraham Lincoln and the Promise of Emancipation**  
 READ: Lincoln, Speech; Alexander Stephens, Cornerstone Speech; Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the 4<sup>th</sup> of July”

June 16 **Reforging the White Republic**  
 READ: Former Slave Letters; Assorted Radical Documents from Reconstruction

June 18 **DUE ON TITANIUM: Mid-Term Exam**

### **Week 4**

## **Part III A Commercial Nation (1890-1945)**

June 20 **Industrial Capitalism and the Transformation of the American Dream**  
 READ: Rose Cohen, *Out of the Shadows*

June 22 **Creating a Land of Desire: The Birth of Consumer America**  
 READ: *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*

June 23 **Power, Culture, and Identity in a Commercial Nation**  
 READ: Langston Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain;” “Are Athletics Mannifying Women?”

### **Week 5**

June 27 **“We’re The People:” American Identity in Depression and War**  
 VIEW: *The Grapes of Wrath*  
 READ: Franklin Roosevelt, State of Union Address, 1944\*\*

## **Part IV A Multicultural Nation**

June 29 **American Identity in a Multicultural World**  
 READ: Gene Luen Tang, *American Born Chinese*

June 30 **The Culture Wars and American Identity**

WATCH: *Harold and Kumar go to White Castle* and *Thelma and Louise*

July 1

**DUE ON TITANIUM: Final Exam**