

American Studies 350
Theories and Methods in American Studies
Fall 2010

Instructor: Dr. Carrie Lane
Classroom: EC-011
Office Hours: Tuesday 10-11; 2:20-3:20pm; Thursday 10:00-11:00am
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Description:

This undergraduate seminar is intended to familiarize you with some of the core theoretical and methodological approaches to American Studies and to give you a sense of the various ways to **do** American Studies and **be** an American Studies scholar. In this course, you will learn about the discipline's history and the nature of interdisciplinary research. Most weeks' readings pair the work of a major theorist (or theoretical school) with an example of the sort of research guided by that theoretical approach. Course readings are drawn from a variety of disciplines and concern topics such as boxing, globalization, gang girls' makeup, feminist fiction, and U.S. representations of the Middle East. 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*, to read critically in American Studies and related disciplines, to engage in lively and informed debate about American culture, and to undertake innovative, interdisciplinary scholarship of your own.

Requirements:

This course requires a great deal of reading and involves numerous assignments that will challenge you to think critically and independently about American culture. Don't get me wrong, I want this course to be fun, too. But we're grappling with some heavy stuff here, and I expect your complete commitment. Your grade will depend on a number of small but intellectually challenging assignments, as well as on class participation. In order to pass this class you **must** stay up to date on all readings and assignments and actively participate in class discussion. I encourage you to seek support and assistance from me and from your classmates.

Attendance: You are expected to **attend each and every class**. 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 percentage points. **After 3 unexcused absences, you will be dropped from the class.** You must complete **all readings** prior to each class and participate in class discussion and debate **every single class**.

Weekly Reading Response: For **eight** of the weeks in which there are assigned readings, you will post on Blackboard a question or comment in response to that week's readings. **Your posting should demonstrate that you: 1) did the reading; and 2) thought about it.** You can choose for yourself which weeks you'd like to post on, but **you must post your comments by 5pm on the Monday before class.** You will not receive credit for late postings.

I encourage you to read and reply to each others' postings, and to use this forum as an extension of class discussion and debate. **Students who are less comfortable speaking in class may do additional postings to help their participation grade**, although additional postings cannot entirely make up for a lack of in-class participation.

Class Presentation: Each student is expected to kick off one seminar discussion with a five- to ten-minute presentation on that week's readings. In addition to outlining the week's key themes (which is NOT the same thing as summarizing the reading), presenters (who will often work in groups) will offer thoughtful and challenging questions to prompt in-class discussion and debate. Your presentation will be graded on level of preparation and depth of thought.

Assignments: Details on each of these assignments will be provided in class, but here are the basic requirements. **All papers must be submitted in hard copy and through TurnItIn.**

10/19 Historical Articles: Bring to class three newspaper or magazine articles from the turn of the 20th century (1890-1910) along with an approximately 3-page discussion of their contents/form with regard to Gail Bederman's argument about race, gender, and/or masculinity in turn-of-the-century American culture.

11/30 Mini-Ethnography: For this assignment, you'll play the role of an anthropologist looking at a "culture" for the first time. You'll conduct a brief participant-observation and two ethnographic interviews in order to learn more about the culture, its norms, and participants. Your approximately 5-page paper will describe and analyze the culture you observed, drawing on your observation and interviews.

12/16 Final Take-Home Exam: For your final paper, you will write an approximately 5-6 page proposal for an American Studies project of your choice. Your proposal, which will seek to obtain support for your project from the CSUF Dept. of American Studies, will explain the project's theoretical foundations, methodology or methodologies, central research questions, and significance to the field of American Studies.

In grading your assignments and exams, I will pay close attention to both substance and form (grammar, spelling, organization, and clarity of expression). In evaluating the substance of an essay, I will examine whether you have demonstrated a critical understanding of course materials **and** presented and substantiated a coherent thesis or argument. I reserve the right to modify or add assignments throughout the semester.

Required Texts:

- Lydia Alix Fillingham, *Foucault for Beginners*
- Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States*
- Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* [***also available free online**]
- Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*
- Additional **required** course readings are available through the Course Documents section of our Blackboard course website

All books are available at Little Professor Book Center (725 N. Placentia). I don't require specific editions, so feel free to purchase used copies (try half.com). Let me know immediately if you have any trouble getting the books.

Grading Procedures:

Weekly Postings	10%	A = 90-100%
History Articles	20%	B = 80-89%
Mini-Ethnography	25%	C = 70-79%
Final Exam	30%	D = 60-69%
Participation	10%	F = 59% or lower
Class Presentation	5%	

The +/- grading system will **NOT** be used. No extra credit will be offered for this course. Keep all graded assignments so that any discrepancies can be easily and fairly straightened out.

This course satisfies the University's Upper-Division Writing Requirement. Earning a grade of C or better is necessary to meet this requirement.

Academic dishonesty:

Academic dishonesty includes such things as cheating, inventing false information or citations, plagiarism, and helping someone else commit an act of academic dishonesty. When you use information from sources external to yourself, you must reference the source appropriately. **Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated** and will result in a failing grade on that exam/assignment, as well as possible removal from the course or suspension from the university.

Students with special needs:

Please inform me during the first week of classes about any disability or special needs you may have that may require specific arrangements related to attending class, carrying out assignments, or taking examinations. CSUF requires students with disabilities to register with the Office of Disabled Student Services (DSS), located in UH-101 and at 657-278-3112, in order to receive prescribed accommodations appropriate to their disability.

Emergency Procedures:

See http://www.fullerton.edu/emergencypreparedness/ep_students.html.

Office Hours:

I strongly encourage you to attend office hours, or to schedule an individual appointment with me if those hours are not compatible with your schedule. I am always happy to talk with you about the course readings, assignments, and broader questions about American Studies and academic life. It is a true pleasure for me to get to know you and your intellectual interests, so never hesitate to drop by with any questions or to mull over something you've been thinking about.

AMST 350 Course Schedule

*[B] = readings available on Blackboard; all other readings available for purchase in book form

8/24 **Introduction:** What can you get out of this course? What do you need to put into it?

*Sign up for class presentation

8/31 **What is American Studies?**

- Leila Zenderland, "Constructing American Studies," pp. 273-313 in David Hollinger, ed. *The Humanities and the Dynamics of Inclusion since World War II* (2006) [B]

9/7 **Marx & Gramsci**

- Peter Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction* (1980), Chs. 1, 5, 7, 9 [B]
- Kate Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture, and Anthropology* (2002), Chapters 2, part of 4, 5 [B]

9/14 **Applying Marx and Gramsci**

- Paul Johnson (1978) *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, NY, 1815-1837*, excerpt [B]
- Jill Fields (1999) "'Fighting the Corsetless Evil': Shaping Corsets and Culture, 1900-1930," *Journal of Social History* (33)2: 355-384. [B]

9/21 **Weapons of the Weak**

- James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (Yale UP 1990), ix-xiii, 1-44 [B]
- Robin Kelley, "The Riddle of the Zoot: Malcolm Little and Black Cultural Politics During World War II," pp. 161-181 in *Race Rebels* (1994) [B]

9/28 **Foucault on Power and Discourse**

- Lydia Alix Fillingham, *Foucault for Beginners* (entire book)

10/5 **Applying Foucault**

- Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization* (U Chicago 1995), pp. xi-xii, 1-76

WORKSHOP: Locating historical documents

10/12 **Literature, Biography, and Culture**

- Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* [B]
- Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization* (U Chicago 1995), pp. 121-169

10/19 **Ethnography in Theory**

- Clifford Geertz (1973) "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture," pp. 3-30 in *The Interpretation of Cultures* [B]
- Harry Wolcott, *The Art of Fieldwork*, 2nd Edition (AltaMira 2005). pp. 79-114 [B]

DUE: Historical newspaper analysis paper (3 pages, 3 sources), including hard copies of the three articles you discuss.

10/26 **Ethnography in Practice**

- Norma Mendoza-Denton (1996) “‘Muy Macha’: Gender and Ideology in Gang-Girls’ Discourse about Makeup,” *Ethnos* (61: 1-2): 47-63 [B]
- C.J. Pascoe (2007) *Dude You’re A Fag*, Ch. 1-2 [B]
- Mitch Duneier, *Sidewalk* (excerpts) [B]

11/2 **Folk Taxonomies: Ideologies of Race**

- Jefferson Fish, “Mixed Blood” [B]
- Peggy Pascoe (1996) “Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies of ‘Race’ in Twentieth-Century America,” *The Journal of American History* 83(1): 44-69. [B]

11/9 **American Studies outside the University (guest speakers)**

- Catherine Lavender, “What Can I Do with an American Studies Major?” [B]
- John Ibson (around 1973) “What’s the Use?: American Studies after Graduation” [B]
- Katharine Hansen, “Ten Ways to Market Your Liberal Arts Degree” [B]

11/16 **American Studies in Transnational Perspective**

- Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000*, Preface and Introduction

* * * **FALL BREAK** * * *

11/30 **King Tut and 9/11**

- Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, Ch. 3 and Conclusion
- Presentations on Ethnographies

DUE: Mini-Ethnography (5 pages)

12/7 **Exploring Southern California Culture**

- Sample Research Proposals [B]
- Presentations on Ethnographies

12/16 Final Take-Home Exam Due by 5:00pm
