

AM 221, Methods and Approaches

Prof. Daniel A. Nathan

Spring 2010, TLC 301

TTH, 9:40-11:00 AM

Office: TLC 300, 580-5023

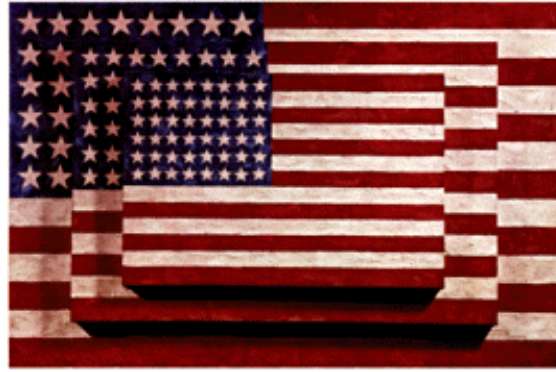
Office Hours: TTH, 3:30-5:00,

W, 10:00-11:45 & by appointment

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“...all the theory in the world means nothing
if you can’t read the street.”

—David Simon, journalist



Jasper Johns, *Three Flags* (1958)

Course Description & Objectives

This course is an introduction for AM majors and minors to American Studies scholarship, methodologies, and approaches to the study of society and culture in the United States. Course materials include American Studies “classics” as well as recent scholarship: the “myth and symbol” school, the culture concept, literary and feminist critiques, material culture, oral history and ethnography, mass and popular culture—with attention to issues of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and community. Students will have many opportunities to sharpen their analytical, research, writing, and oral presentation skills. In addition, two primary goals of the course will be to define and critique what American Studies practitioners do and to acquaint students with the rich (and sometimes controversial) history of American Studies as a discipline.

The study of American culture illustrates that the past and present are not static, but rather dynamic and open to multiple interpretations. In research, writing, and oral presentation assignments, students will shape their own visions of the past and its meanings for the present and future, and make connections among those visions and the understandings of others.

The course will heavily stress class discussion, centering upon considerations of the assigned readings (texts should be brought to class) and moving outward to broader questions of interpretation and cultural meaning. Discussions are collective endeavors that demand everyone’s preparation, attendance, and participation. Learning to participate in a discussion involves social and intellectual skills that are an essential part of one’s education. These include: listening to others and learning to absorb and synthesize their remarks; learning to respond constructively and analytically to others’ ideas; learning to develop and articulate positions of one’s own; responding to criticism; and learning to modify or discard an argument as one comes to see another, more satisfactory one. Students are expected to come to class eager to share their ideas about the topics under consideration and to question our readings and one another.

At the end of the course, I expect that students will have learned some critical skills and interdisciplinary modes of analysis, noted connections between the past and the present, and gained a better understanding of American culture(s). I also expect that students will have learned how to do American Studies work and how to apply the knowledge and skills taught in this course to their future course work and everyday lives.

Books

Mitchell Duneier, *Slim's Table: Race, Respectability, and Masculinity*
Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

Note: There are numerous other readings, which will be distributed in class and/or as PDFs.

Films

Josh Aronson, *Sound and Fury*
David Deutsch, *Who Owns History?*
Jonathan Fein, *Objects and Memory*
Marlon Riggs, *Ethnic Notions*
John Sayles, *Lone Star*

Course Requirements

Course requirements include three papers (the first two will be 4-5 pages, the third will be 6-8 pages), an individual presentation, active class participation, and in-class writing assignments, and a final exam. You must complete all assignments in order to pass this course. The break down of grades is as follows:

In-class writing assignments and quizzes	10%	
Individual presentation	15%	
Class participation	15%	
First essay	10%	(February 26)
Second essay	15%	(March 26)
Third essay	20%	(April 30)
Final Exam	15%	(May 11)

Attendance & Participation

Because the success of the course depends upon your participation, attendance is mandatory. Three or more absences will negatively affect your final grade; six or more absences will result in failure. Active participation requires that you attend class regularly (and on time), that you come to class prepared (i.e., having carefully read and thought about the assigned material), and that you share your perspectives, ideas, and questions.

Special Needs

Anyone who has a disability which may require some modification of seating, testing, or other class requirements should see me after class or during my office hours so that we can make appropriate arrangements.

Reading Schedule

- 1/26: Introductions, goals, policies, reading schedule
What is American Studies? What is Culture?
1/28: Deutsch, *Who Owns History?* (film)
Begiebing et al, "Interchange: Genres of History"

From the American Mind to American Culture(s)

- 2/2: Wise, "Paradigm Dramas in American Studies"
Lenz, "Periodization and American Studies"
2/4: Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* excerpts
Levine, *The Opening of the American Mind* excerpts

Myth and Symbol

- 2/9: Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* excerpts
Ward, "The Meaning of Lindbergh's Flight"
Smith, "Can 'American Studies' Develop a Method?"
2/11: Kuklick, "Myth and Symbol in American Studies"
Attebery, "American Studies: A Not So Unscientific Method"

Getting Self-Reflexive

- 2/16: Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture"
Levine, "The Historian and the Culture Gap"
2/18: Kessler-Harris, "Cultural Locations"
Washington, "Disturbing the Peace"

The Transnational Turn; or, Cultures in the Age of Globalism

- 2/23: Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* excerpts
Wolfe, "Anti-American Studies"
Fishkin, "Crossroads of Cultures"
2/25: Trip to Scribner Library

What is Community?

- 3/2: Warren, *The Community in America* excerpts
Joseph, "Community," in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*

History/Literature

- 3/4: Gutjahr, "Books"
Kelly, "Literature and the Historian"
Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* excerpt
Bennett, "Texts, Readers, and Reading Formations"

3/9: Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 3-172
3/11: Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 175-281, vii-xxii
Levin, "A Reader's Report"

3/16: No Class—Spring Break
3/18: No Class—Spring Break

Oral History and Ethnography

- 3/23: Kuhn and McLellan, "Oral History"
Ritchie, "Oral History: From Sound to Print and Back Again"
Terkel, *Division Street: America* excerpts
3/25: Duneier, *Slim's Table: Race, Respectability, and Masculinity*, 3-62

3/30: Duneier, *Slim's Table: Race, Respectability, and Masculinity*, 65-168
4/1: Aronson, *Sound and Fury* (film)
Gates, "'Sound and Fury': A Tight Little Island in the World of Deafness"

Material Culture

- 4/6: Glassie, *Material Culture* excerpts
Glenn, and Hayes, *Taking Things Seriously* excerpts
4/8: Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History* excerpts

4/13: Norkunas, *Monuments and Memory* excerpts
4/15: Fein and Danitz, *Objects and Memory* (film)
Deutsch, review of *Objects and Memory*

Popular Culture and Cultural Studies

- 4/20: Lipsitz, "Popular Culture: This Ain't No Sideshow"
Waksman, "Popular Culture in the Public Arena"
Poster, "Cultural Studies"
4/22: Riggs, *Ethnic Notions* (film)
Grant, review of *Ethnic Notions*

4/27: Kernodle, "Music"
Rose, "Voices from the Margins: Rap Music and Contemporary Black Cultural Production"
Klosterman, "Rock Is Dead"
4/29: Sayles, *Lone Star* (film)
Maslin, "Sleepy Texas Town With an Epic Story"
West and West, "Border and Boundaries: An Interview with John Sayles"

- 5/4: Course evaluations and concluding comments

Note: I reserve the right to make minor revisions in the reading schedule.

Screening Schedule

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| 3/31: | Aronson, <i>Sound and Fury</i> | 301 TLC |
| 4/14: | Fein and Danitz, <i>Objects and Memory</i> | 301 TLC |
| 4/21: | Riggs, <i>Ethnic Notions</i> | 301 TLC |
| 4/28: | Sayles, <i>Lone Star</i> | 301 TLC |

Films will be shown at 7 PM. Note: You are *not* required to attend these screening sessions, but you are required to have watched the films in question before we discuss them in class.

Field Trip

Friday, April 16, place TBD