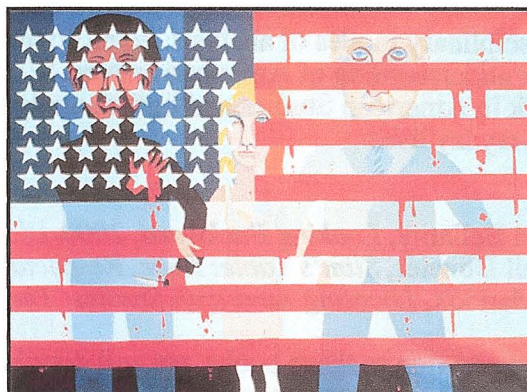


AM 221, Methods and Approaches
Spring 2008, TLC 301
TTH, 11:10-12:30

Prof. Daniel A. Nathan
Office: TLC 330, x5023
Office Hours: TTH, 12:35-2:00,
W, 4:00-5:30 & by appointment
E-mail: dnathan@skidmore.edu

Prof. andré carrington
Office: LIB 230C, x5022
Office Hours: TTH, 2:00-4:30 by appointment
E-mail: acarrington@skidmore.edu



Faith Ringgold, *The Flag is Bleeding* (1967)

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

—David Simon, journalist

“Let America be America again. Let it be the
dream it used to be. Let it be the pioneer on the
plain Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)”

—Langston Hughes, poet

Course Description & Objectives

This course is an introduction for 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 and oral history sources, mass and popular culture—with attention to issues of race, ethnicity, gender, class, science and technology. Students will have a variety of opportunities to sharpen their analytical, research, writing, and oral presentation skills from interdisciplinary perspectives. In addition, two primary goals of the course will be to define what American Studies practitioners do and to acquaint students with the rich (and sometimes controversial) history of American Studies as a discipline.

Focusing on multiple approaches to 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 between 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, we 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. We also expect that students will have learned how to do work in American Studies and how to apply the knowledge and skills taught in this course to their everyday lives.

Books

Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward, 2000-1887*

Mitchell Duneier, *Slim's Table: Race, Respectability, and Masculinity*

Lucy Maddox, *Locating American Studies: The Evolution of a Discipline*

Note: In addition to these books, we will distribute numerous other readings. Assignments and readings are subject to minor changes over the course of the semester.

Films

Marlon Riggs, *Ethnic Notions*

John Sayles, *Lone Star*

Course Requirements

Course requirements include three (relatively short, 3-5 page) papers, a group and an individual presentation, active class participation, and in-class writing assignments. You must complete all assignments in order to pass this course. The break down of grades is as follows:

In-class writing assignments	10%	
Individual presentation	15%	
Group project	15%	
Class participation	15%	
First essay	10%	(February 14)
Second essay	15%	(March 25)
Third essay	20%	(April 29)

Attendance & Participation

Because the success of the course depends upon your participation, attendance is mandatory. Four or more absences will negatively affect your final grade. 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

- 1/22: Introductions, goals, policies, reading schedule
What is American Studies? What is Culture?
- 1/24: Watch and discuss *Who Owns History?* (film)

From the American Mind to American Culture(s)

- 1/29: Lenz, "Periodization and American Studies"
Wise, "Paradigm Dramas in American Studies"
- 1/31: Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture"
Levine, "The Historian and the Culture Gap"
- 2/5: 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?"
Kuklick, "Myth and Symbol in American Studies"
- 2/7: Kessler-Harris, "Cultural Locations"
Washington, "Disturbing the Peace"
- 2/12: Kaplan, "Violent Belongings and the Question of Empire"
Wolfe, "Anti-American Studies"
Fishkin, "Crossroads of Cultures"
- 2/14: Trip to library (meet in Scribner Library at the circulation desk)

History/Literature

- 2/19: Spiller, "Preface" to *The Cycle of American Literature*
Kelly, "Literature and the Historian"
- 2/21: Baym, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood"
Bennett, "Texts, Readers, and Reading Formations"
- 2/26: Bellamy, *Looking Backward, 2000-1887*, v-117
- 2/28: Bellamy, *Looking Backward, 2000-1887*, 118-196

Gender and Sexuality

- 3/4: Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood"
Radway, "The Utopian Impulse in Popular Literature"
- 3/6: de Lauretis, "Feminist Studies/Critical Studies: Issues, Terms, Concepts"
Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs"
- 3/11: No Class—Spring Break
- 3/13: No Class—Spring Break
- 3/18: Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* excerpts
- 3/20: Rubin, "Thinking Sex"
Hortense Spillers, "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words"

History of Science/Science and Technology Studies

- 3/25: Somerville, "Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body"
Shah, "Making Medical Borders at Angel Island"
3/27: Wang, "Scientists and the Problem of the Public in Cold War America, 1945-1960"
Kumar, "Temporary Access: The Indian H1-B Worker in the United States"

Oral History and Ethnography

- 4/1: Kuhn and McLellan, "Oral History"
Ritchie, "Oral History: From Sound to Print and Back Again"
4/3: Terkel, "The Good War" *An Oral History of World War Two* excerpts
ACTUP oral history project, <http://www.actuporalhistory.org/>
4/8: Duneier, *Slim's Table: Race, Respectability, and Masculinity*, 3-107
4/10: Duneier, *Slim's Table: Race, Respectability, and Masculinity*, 109-168

Popular Culture and Cultural Studies

- 4/15: Lipsitz, "Popular Culture: This Ain't No Sideshow"
Fisk, "Understanding Popular Culture"
Storey, "Popular Culture as Postmodern Culture"
4/17: Lipsitz, "Listening to Learn and Learning to Listen"
Rose, "Voices from the Margins: Rap Music and Contemporary Black Cultural Production"
Klosterman, "Rock Is Dead"
4/22: Riggs, *Ethnic Notions* (film)
4/24: Sayles, *Lone Star* (film)
West and West, "Border and Boundaries: An Interview with John Sayles"
Sultze, "Rewriting the West as Multicultural"
4/29: Concluding comments, course evaluations
5/5: Group Projects, 1:30-4:30 PM (301 TLC)

Screening Schedule

- 4/21: Riggs, *Ethnic Notions* 301 TLC
4/23: Sayles, *Lone Star* 301 TLC

Field Trip

Date TBD, Molecules that Matter (Tang)