

University of Richmond, Program in American Studies

Introduction to American Studies AMST 201 – Fall, 2009

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Office Hours: 1:15-2:15 Tuesdays by appointment

Meeting Times: Tues/Thurs 12-1:15
Building: Library – Media Resources Center
Room: MRC #4

Overview

AMST 201 introduces students to the University of Richmond's Program in American Studies. This course will primarily focus on 20th century American culture and society, although our readings will provide a 18th and 19th century foundation for much of our discussion. The course is divided into three major units: Visualizing Race, The Margins, and Communicating the Culture, as well as two "topics" units: Women and Guns and Sex on the Margins. Course texts encompass fiction, poetry, photography, art, film, documentary, original underground publications, and reviews. Various secondary, scholarly research excerpts, essays, and articles will support these primary texts.

Course Goals and Objectives

While I hope that you will each find the course and the field of American Studies intriguing and worthy of your concentration, I also hope that your skills as an emerging scholar and social and cultural agent develop during our time together. We will work to improve your analytical, writing, and communication skills through selected texts, a series of papers, and class discussions. Interrogating texts in an economic, social, and cultural context is a learned skill that will continue to develop well beyond your university years. Setting a foundation for this growth will help you excel in this class and in your professional career.

On a weekly basis, we will be:

- Comparing and contrasting primary sources;
- Summarizing, interrogating, and articulating cogent criticism of scholarly arguments;
- Forming coherent arguments and communicating those ideas persuasively to others.

My Teaching Philosophy

Every student brings unique experiences and insights in to the classroom. These individual worldviews often overlap, but they also diverge in key areas. It is on this frontier that I hope we all pitch our tents and delve into an ongoing discussion of American culture and society. Throughout the course, I will work to provide insightful lectures and constructive feedback, and I expect you to keep up with course material and engage in critical thinking—both in class discussions and in written research outside of class. I believe in learning-centered education, which means that the students take an active role in interrogating the fundamental problems and arguments of the course. My participation is required, as is yours.

Course Details

- Texts

- o Roediger, David R., *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, New York: Verso, 1991. ISBN 9781844671458.
- o Browder, Laura. *Her Best Shot*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008. ISBN 0807858897
- o Hammett, Dashiell. *The Maltese Falcon*, New York: Knopf, 1929. ISBN-13 9780679722649.
- o Ginsberg, Allen. *Howl and Other Poems*, San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 1956. ISBN 0425171698.
- o Standage, Tom. *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's Online Pioneers*, New York: Berkley Trade, 1999. ISBN 0802716040.
- o Lessig, Lawrence. *Free Culture: The Nature and Future of Creativity*. New York: Penguin Books, 2004. ISBN 0143034650.
- o Hacker, Diane. *A Pocket Style Manual 5th Edition with 2009 Update*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin, 2009. ISBN 0312593244.

In addition, we will be reading scholarly articles and other documents that are available on Blackboard. You will need to download and print copies of these essays and bring them with you to class.

- Assignments

You are required to complete a paper at the conclusion of each unit. These papers will increase in length and scholarly expectation as the course progresses. You are also expected to participate in daily class discussions. Arriving to each class prepared is crucial to your success in this course.

- o Paper One: Visualizing Race - Due the start of class on Sept. 29th (3-5 pages)
- o Paper Two: The Margins - Due the start of class on Nov. 3rd (5-7 pages)
- o Final Paper: Communicating the Culture – Due by 5pm on Dec. 10th (8-10 pages)

You will have an opportunity to revise the first two papers for a better grade. Your new grade will be averaged with your original grade for a final score on the assignment. I am happy to read drafts for your final paper up to one week before the final due date. You will not have an opportunity to revise the final paper for a better grade.

A completed AMST Declaration Form is also required toward the end of the class. We will discuss this assignment in more detail at a later date. You can find the form here: <http://americanstudies.richmond.edu/program/major.html>.

- Grading Rubric

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

- o Paper One – 20%
- o Paper Two – 25%
- o Final Paper - 35%
- o Participation - 15%
- o Completed AMST Declaration Form – 5%

Class Policies

- Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. Missed classes will negatively impact your participation grade. Also, one point will be deducted from your final grade for each class missed. Please speak with me if you encounter extenuating circumstances.

- Email

I always welcome thoughtful questions and comments via e-mail. I will try to respond to you as quickly as possible.

- Late Work/Late Students

The due dates for each paper are established well in advance. No late work will be accepted.

Students who arrive more than 15 minutes late will be marked absent. If you are consistently 5-10 minutes late, I reserve the right to lower your grade. If you have an extenuating circumstance, please speak with me.

Schedule

Aug. 25th: Introduction to Course

Unit One: Visualizing Race

Aug. 27th: Introduction to Unit and to *The Wages of Whiteness*

Due: Review of "List of Common Fallacies"

Sept. 1st: *The Birth of a Nation*

Due: *The Wages of Whiteness* Part One

Sept. 3rd: Reading Discussion (Paper One Handout)

Due: *The Wages of Whiteness* Part Two

Sept. 8th: The New Left and the Black Panthers

Due: "Black Panthers, New Journalism, and the Rewriting of the Sixties" –M. Staub

"Neo-Transcendentalism in the New Left Counter-Culture: A Vision of the Future Looking Back" –M. Schiff

"Radical Chic: That Party at Lenny's" – T. Wolfe (optional)

Sept. 10th: *Style Wars*

Due: *The Wages of Whiteness* Part Three

"True Heads: Historicizing the Hip-Hop 'Nation' in Context" –R.S. Heath

Sept. 15th: Reading Discussion

Due: *The Wages of Whiteness* Part Four

Sept. 17th: *Rebirth of a Nation* and Final Discussion

Topic: Women and Guns

Sept. 22nd: Reading Discussion

Due: *Her Best Shot* Introduction; Chapters 2 and 6

Sept. 24th: Guest Lecture by Dr. Laura Browder

Unit Two: The Margins

Sept. 29th: Introduction to Unit and to *The Maltese Falcon*

Due: Paper One

Oct. 1st: Pulp Fiction, Weegee and the Depression

Due: *The Maltese Falcon*, chapters 1 through 6

"Weegee's Voyeurism and the Mastery of Urban Disorder" –M. Orvell

Oct. 6th: Reading Discussion (Paper Two Handout)
Due: *The Maltese Falcon*, chapters 7-12

Oct. 8th: No Class – Fall Break

Oct. 13th: *Pulp Fiction*

Due: *The Maltese Falcon*, chapters 12-18

"Film Festival Review: Pulp Fiction; Quentin Tarantino's Wild Ride on Life's Dangerous Road" – J. Maslin

Oct. 15th: Reading Discussion

Due: *The Maltese Falcon*, chapters 19-end

Topic: Sex on the Margins

Oct. 20th: The Miscellaneous M Unit to Stonewall

Due: Listen to "Howl" and "America"

Listen to Thomas Mallon reading from *Fellow Travelers*

Oct. 22nd: Silence = Death

Due: Listen to David Wojnarowicz reading "Fever"

"Requiem for the Degas of the B-boys" -R.F Thompson, and browse through Haring's art database

Oct. 27th: Wrap-up

Oct. 29th: Introduction to American Studies: Dr. Douglas Winiarski

Communicating the Culture

Nov. 3rd: Introduction to Unit and to *The Victorian Internet* and *Free Culture* (Paper Three Handout)

Due: Paper Two

Nov. 5th: "Seeing" America—Frank, Baudrillard, Kerouac, and Kesey

Due: *The Victorian Internet*, chapters 1-5

Excerpts from Baudrillard's *America*

Nov. 10th: Reading Discussion, preparation for Tocqueville Lecture on Nov. 12th

Due: *The Victorian Internet* Chapters 6-8

Nov. 12: No Class – Tocqueville Lecture

Due: *The Victorian Internet*, chapters 8-end

Nov. 17th: Special Collections at VCU

Due: "A Gay Manifesto" –C. Wittman, "Good-bye to All That" – R. Morgan

"The White Race and Its Heroes" –E. Cleaver, and "The New American Revolution" –T. Hayden

Nov. 19th: Discussion—Reading, Special Collections

Due: *Free Culture*, chapters 1-8

Nov. 24th: The Information Age

Due: *Free Culture*, chapters 9-10

Nov. 26th: No Class – Thanksgiving

Dec. 1st: Reading Discussion

Due: *Free Culture*, chapters 11-end

Completed Declaration Forms

Dec. 3rd: Wrap-up

Due: Draft of Final Paper (optional)

**Dec 4th: Available for Individual Meetings

Dec. 10th: Final Ten Page Paper Due

