

Spring 2012

## American Studies 103

# Introduction to American Cultures

Tuesday & Thursday 9:35-10:50 a.m.  
Humanities 202 (Scripps)

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### Course description:

This course will introduce you to important themes and methods in American Studies. We will begin with a discussion of the questions and frameworks/methodologies particular to the field, and then focus on the history and culture of three cities: Chicago; New Orleans; and Los Angeles. We will engage in discussions of race and racism; architecture and the meanings of place; migration and immigration; culture (e.g., art, music, film); environmentalism; labor and class; and globalization. We will examine these subjects across a wide range of academic and popular texts, including social, cultural, and art historical; music; films; short stories; ethnography; and a graphic novel. This class serves as the introductory course in the five-colleges American Studies program, but is open to all students.

### Course aims:

The purpose of this course is to provide you with the analytical tools to become an active participant in the debates surrounding U.S. history and culture within and outside of the academy. Through reading, viewing, and writing assignments you will be exposed to a wide range of approaches to, and thinking about “America.” You will be asked to develop and defend your own opinions on these subjects through blog posts, a book review, and final essays. In addition to these writing assignments, the “activity and response paper” encourages you learn more about Los Angeles outside of the classroom and to connect this experience to our readings. Discussions in class and on the course blog offer another venue in which you will practice analyzing these issues. This course will give you a solid foundation of critical thinking, reading, writing, and discussion skills that you can apply to other American Studies classes and courses across the college curriculum.

### Course requirements

- **Book review** **15%**  
In conversation with one or both instructors, select a scholarly book in the field of American Studies on some aspect of Chicago; New Orleans; or Los Angeles of interest to you. We will provide a list of book suggestions. If you would like to read a book that is not on this list, please check with us first. Your review should do three things: 1) Identify the thesis of the book; 2) Identify the evidence the author uses to support her/his thesis; and 3) Identify at least one topic the book addresses about which you would like to learn more. Your review

should be between 750-1000 words. Your book review should be uploaded to your Sakai dropbox by the end of the day on Friday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>.

- **Class blog: <http://amst103-2012.blogspot.com/> 15%**  
Post on the class blog once before the end of each unit. Your posts should provide contemporary links to the topic for each unit. You might post about recent news story, an interesting exhibition, or a song or film from or about the city. Your post should explain what your example is and any connections you see to the course. Posts do not need to be academic and formal. They should be thoughtful, analytical, and interesting. Your posts should be ~250 words. We have dedicated four classes to the discussion of these blog posts. You should read your classmates' blog posts before these discussions.
  
- **In-class writing: 20%**  
The readings and film screenings are an extremely important part of this course and are weighted accordingly. You are expected to complete the reading/viewing assignments outlined below and to attend every class prepared to be a thoughtful contributor and active listener in class discussions. Each day for which there is a reading/viewing assignment, we will start class with a short writing assignment. You will be asked to write for five minutes on a question related to that day's reading. The questions will ask you to explore one of the main themes, terms, and/or examples in that day's reading/film. These will not be trick questions and should be accessible if you have done the reading. These writings will be given one of the following three grades: 1 (thoughtful answer to question that indicates you have done the reading); .5 (some indication in your writing that you have done the reading); 0 (no indication you have done the reading). Your writings will be handed back at the start of the next class. These writing assignments are intended to facilitate an informed discussion of the readings in class. They will also function as our attendance roster. If you are sick or miss a class, you will need to e-mail Prof. Pohl or Prof. Delmont a 300-word summary of that day's reading before the next class to receive credit.
  
- **Attendance at American Studies Events: 5%**  
There are two American Studies events this semester that are related to the class, which you are expected to attend.  
The first is a visit by Los Angeles filmmaker Charles Burnett. We will be viewing and discussing his film *Killer of Sheep* in class on April 5<sup>th</sup>. He will be on campus at 4:15 for a Q&A discussion of this film with students. There will also be a screening and discussion of one of his other films, *To Sleep With Anger*, at 6:30 on April 5<sup>th</sup>. You are required to attend one of these two discussions.  
The second event is the California American Studies Association meeting, which will be held at the Claremont Colleges on April 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>. You are required to attend at least one of the panel presentations (~2 hours).  
Please check in with either Professor Delmont or Professor Pohl at the two events you attend so we can mark you as present.

- **LA Activity and response paper** **15%**  
 Participate in one event or activity in Los Angeles and write a response paper. The paper must describe the activity, your participation in it, and include analysis of some aspect or issue related to it that we have discussed in class. The Pomona College Museum of Art is sponsoring a series of bus trips that you can choose from as your LA activity if you like (check the museum website: <http://www.pomona.edu/museum/>). Your response paper should be between 750-1000 words. Guidelines will be discussed in class. Your LA Activity and response paper should be uploaded to your Sakai dropbox by the end of the day on Friday, April 6.
  
- **Final essays** **30%**  
 Two take home essays. Each essay will require synthesis of several readings and an original argument. Approximate length: 4-5 pages each. Final essay topics will be distributed by week 14. Seniors should upload their final essays to their Sakai dropbox by Wednesday May 2<sup>nd</sup>. Everyone else should upload their final essays to their Sakai dropbox by Monday, May 7th.

**Required books**

- Josh Neufeld, *AD: New Orleans After the Deluge* (2009) (available at the bookstore)
  - Course reader (available for purchase in Balch 216)
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**Introduction**

**Week 1:**

**1/17**

Introduction: What is American Studies? Understanding American Studies through Chicago; New Orleans; & Los Angeles

**1/19**

- ☰ Amy Kaplan, “Violent Belongings and the Question of Empire Today,” (*American Quarterly*, March 2004), pp. 1-18
- ☰ Vicki Ruiz “Citizen Restaurant: American Imaginaries, American Communities – Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, 2007 (*American Quarterly*, March 2008), pp. 1-21

**UNIT 1: FRAMING THE QUESTIONS**

**Week 2:**

**1/24**

- ☰ Wayne Craven, “The Legacy of John Calvin: Christian Virtues and a Doctrine of Prosperity,” in *Colonial American Portraiture*, pp. 3-16
- ☰ Joseph Stiglitz, “Inequality of the 1%, by the 1%, for the 1%,” *Vanity Fair*, May 2011

**1/26**

- ☰ Dell Upton, “An American Icon”, in *Architecture in the United States*, pp. 17-55
- ☰ Vivien Green Fryd, “Introduction,” and “The Rotunda Reliefs,” in *Art and Empire: The Politics of Ethnicity in the U.S. Capitol, 1815-1860*, pp. 4-41

**Week 3:**

**1/31**

- ☰ Annette Gordon-Reed, “The Teenagers and the Woman” in *The Hemingses of Monticello*, pp. 308-325
- ☰ Tiya Miles, Preface, Introduction, and “Captivity,” in *Ties That Bind*, pp. xiii-xvi, 1-43

**2/2**

- ☰ Amanda Cobb, “The National Museum of the American Indian as Cultural Sovereignty” (*AQ*, Vol. 57, no. 2, June 2005), pp. 485-506
- ☰ Allan Wallach, “The Battle Over *The West as America*,” in *Art Apart*, pp. 89-101

**Blog Post #1 Due**

**Week 4:**

**2/7**

- ☰ Henry Yu, “American Studies in a World of Pacific Migrations” (*AQ*, Sept. 2004), pp. 531-543
- ☰ Guillermo Gomez-Pena, “Border Culture: The Multicultural Paradigm,” pp. 93-103

**2/9**

**☰ Discussion of Blog Posts #1**

**UNIT 2: CHICAGO**

**Week 5:**

**2/14**

- ☰ William Cronin, *Nature’s Metropolis*, “Prologue,” “Dreaming the Metropolis,” and “Rails and Water,” pp. 5-93

**2/16**

- ☰ Alan Trachtenberg, “The White City,” in *The Incorporation of America*, pp. 208-234

**Week 6:**

**2/21**

📖 Melissa Dabakis, “Martyrs and Monuments” (about Haymarket Riot 1886)

**2/23**

📖 James Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*, “Migration Stories” and “The Black Metropolis,” pp. 43-79 and 113-152

**Blog Post #2 Due**

**Week 7:**

**2/28**

📖 Carlo Rotella, “The Old Neighborhood” in *Story and Sustainability*, pp. 87-110

**3/1**

🗨️ **Discussion of Blog Posts #2**

**\*\*\*BOOK REVIEW DUE – FRIDAY, MARCH 2<sup>nd</sup>\*\*\***

**UNIT 3: NEW ORLEANS**

**Week 8:**

**3/6**

📖 Clyde Woods, “Katrina’s World: Blues, Bourbon and the Return to the Source,” pp. 427-53

**3/8**

📖 David Ake, “‘Blue Horizon’: Creole Culture and Early New Orleans Jazz,” pp. 10-41

📖 Burton Peretti, “‘He Should Throw That Club at You’: Urban Origins in New Orleans,” pp. 22-38

**Week 9:**

**3/16 and 3/18**

Spring break

**Week 10:**

**3/20**

📖 George Lipsitz, “Mardi Gras Indians,” in *Time Passages*, pp. 233-53

**3/22**

🎧 *Mardi Gras—Made in China* (Streaming on Sakai; discussion in class)

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**Week 11:**

**3/27**

🎧 *Trouble the Water* (Streaming on Sakai; discussion in class)

📖 John McPhee, *The Control of Nature*, pp. 3-92

**3/29**

📖 Josh Neufeld, *A.D.: New Orleans After the Deluge* (graphic novel)  
Episode of *Treme*

**Blog Post #3 Due**

**Week 12:**

**4/3**

🗨️ **Discussion of Blog Posts #3**

**UNIT 4: LOS ANGELES**

**4/5**

🎧 *Killer of Sheep* (Streaming on Sakai; discussion in class)

Discussion with Charles Burnett, 4:15 pm

Screening and discussion of *To Sleep With Anger*, 6:30 pm

**\*\*\*LA ACTIVITY PAPER DUE– FRIDAY, APRIL 6\*\*\***

**Week 13:**

**4/10**

📖 Matt Garcia, *A World of Its Own*, “The ‘Colonia Complex’ Revisited” & “Just Put on that Padua Hills Smile,” pp 47-78 and 121-154

**4/12**

📖 Philip Deloria, “Representation: Indian Wars, the Movie,” in *Indians in Unexpected Places*, pp 52-108

**Week 14:**

**4/17**

📖 Kristine Kuramitsu, “Internment and Identity in Japanese American Art,” pp. 619-58

**4/19**

📖 Hisaye Yamamoto, “Wilshire Bus” and “A Fire in Fontana” (short stories) in *Seventeen Syllables*, pp 34-38; 150-157

**Blog Post #4 Due**

**4/20 & 4/21** – California American Studies Association conference at the 5Cs

**Week 15:**

**4/24**

📄 Sasha Costanza-Chock, “The Immigrant Rights Movement on the Net: Between “Web 2.0” and Comunicación Popular” (*AQ*, Sept. 2008), pp. 851-864

🎧 *Made in LA* (Screening TBD; discussion in class)

**4/26**

🗨️ **Blog Posts Discussion**

**Week 16:**

**5/1**

Closing and evaluations

**\*\*\*Senior Final Essays Due – WEDNESDAY, May 2\*\*\***

**\*\*\*Non-Senior Final Essays Due – Monday, May 7\*\*\***