

Introduction to American Studies
American Studies 101:02
Tuesday-Thursday, 5:00-6:40, Tillett 257

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Introduction

This course introduces students to the interdisciplinary field of American Studies. Students will analyze key texts in American culture, including works of literature, film, music, art, photography, political essays, and other works in order to explore the diversity of American experiences and identities. Major themes of the course include American distinctiveness, race and ethnicity, violence and spectacle, membership and exclusion, gender and sexuality. The goal of the course is to expose students to intellectual and creative possibilities in the field of American Studies, as well to provide incoming majors with key concepts and analytical tools to prepare them for more advanced courses.

Course Objectives

Students will be able to understand key concepts in American Studies and synthesize some of the different disciplinary methodologies that comprise American Studies—namely, history, literary studies, cultural studies, social science, and critical theory. Students will learn how to investigate American culture across time and space. They will also learn to speak articulately, write clearly and concisely, and think critically and creatively about complicated topics.

Core Curriculum

This course satisfies SAS Core Curriculum goals AHo and AHp.

Required Books

The following books are required for this class:

James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (978-0679744726)
Bernard Malamud, *The Natural* (978-0374502003)

These books are available for purchase via the Rutgers/BN college store, though may be able to find a better deal elsewhere if you comparison-shop online. Limited copies are also on reserve at Kilmer Library, though we cannot guarantee that those copies will be available precisely when you want them. Other reading assignments will be available on our course's Sakai site, and will be identified below on the class schedule with an (S).

Assignments and Grading

This class will have two in-class examinations (20 percent each), a 3-4 page paper requiring a cultural analysis of a public monument or cultural institution (20 percent), a final exam (20 percent), and class participation (20 percent). The class participation grade has two components:

(a) contributions to in-class discussions of reading material; and (b) posting three paragraph-length QUIPs (Questions, Issues, Problems) about the class readings on the class Sakai page before a specific class. Your professors will give you more information about the QUIPs format and expectations in class.

You will be able to receive up to five points of extra credit over the course of the semester if you attend an American Studies event and write a short (2-3 page) analysis. Your professors will offer more details about that option in-class.

Attendance Policy

We expect you to attend class unless you are sick, observing a religious holiday, or dealing with a serious personal emergency. If you do not come to class, you will not learn and will not do well.

We will take attendance in class. You are permitted three absences over the course of the semester for any reason. After that, you will lose 2 points per absence from your final grade. We do not need documentation or a detailed explanation of your reason for missing a class. At the same time, there are no “excused” absences in here. Don’t waste your absences for no good reason in October and expect our sympathy when you get the flu in December.

If you face an extended absence due to a hospitalization or the equivalent, please contact your appropriate dean about how to handle your academic commitments. If you do have to miss a class, please notify us of your absence using the Attendance Self-Reporting System (<https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra>).

Accommodations

If you need accommodations due to a disability or other issue, email one of us or come say hello by the third week of class, so we can plan accordingly. We will not necessarily be able to make accommodations if you spring a request on us at the last minute.

Communication

Your professors may communicate with the class via the Announcement function in Sakai and with individual students by email. We expect you to monitor your university email and to receive those announcements.

Classroom Decorum

Laptops may be used for note-taking only. No cell phones, texting, emailing, game-playing, or web browsing in class. If we catch you using electronic equipment for the wrong purposes, we will mark you absent from class.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to follow the university’s guidelines for academic integrity, which are available for review here: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity.shtml> Come see one of us if you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or fabrication.

Class Schedule

09/02: Course Introduction

Unit I: The American Idea/American Exceptionalism

09/04: Individualism. Turner, “Significance of the Frontier” (S).

09/09: Democracy. Tocqueville, “Democracy in America” (S).

- 09/11: Protestantism. Winthrop, Massachusetts Bay Colony Speech (S), Miller, “Errand into the Wilderness” (S).
- 09/16: Capitalism. Franklin, “Hints for Those That Would Be Rich” (S). QUIPS Group A (Names A-E).
- 09/18: Nation/Nationalism. Anderson, “Imagined Communities” (S), Garvey, “If You Believe the Negro Has a Soul” (S). QUIPS Group B (Names F-J).
Extra Credit Opportunity: Laura Browder, *When Janey Comes Marching Home* (Time and Location TBA)
- 09/23: Cold War Exceptionalism. Lipsitz, “In the Midnight Hour” (S). QUIPS Group C (Names K-O)
- Unit II: Authenticity/Spectacle/Myth**
- 09/25: Humbug. Harris, “P.T. Barnum’s American Museum” (S). QUIPS Group D (Names P-S)
- 09/30: Race and Spectacle: Gold, “Millie-Christine McKoy and the American Freak Show” (S). QUIPS Group E (Names T-Z)
- 10/02: In-Class Exam**
Cultural Event/Extra Credit Opportunity 10/1-3: Asians in the Americas Conference (Schedule and Location TBA)
- 10/07: Celebrity. Malamud, *The Natural*, pp. 3-79. QUIPS Group A
Cultural Event/Extra Credit Opportunity 10/8-10: “Marking Time: Prison Arts and Activism Conference” (Schedule and Location TBA)
- 10/09: National Pastimes. Malamud, *The Natural*, pp. 80-157. QUIPS Group B
- 10/14: Orientalism. Prashad, “Orientalism” (S). Guest Lecturer: Professor Allan P. Isaac (Rutgers University). QUIPS Group C
- 10/16: Hollywood Endings. Malamud, *The Natural*, pp. 158-231. QUIPS Group D
- Unit III: Race/Racism**
- 10/21: Jim Crow. No reading assignment; *The Murder of Emmett Till* (2005) to be screened in class.
- 10/23: Civil Rights. Essay due in Class.**
Extra Credit Opportunity: Income Inequality Conference (Friday, October 24, Alexander Library 4th Floor)
- 10/28: Religion. Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, pp. 3-47. QUIPS Group E
- 10/30: Gender. Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, pp. 47-82. QUIPS Group A
- 11/04: Riot. Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, pp. 82-106. QUIPS Group C
- 11/06: Whiteness. Lipsitz, “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness” (S) QUIPS Group D
- 11/11: The Race Card. No reading assignment; excerpts from *Boogie Man* in class.
- Unit IV: Fear/Terror/Citizenship**
- 11/13: In-Class Exam**
- 11/18: Cities. Guest Lecturer: Professor Craig Wilder (MIT), “The Central Park Five Case: Race, Law and Urban Space.”
- 11/20: Law-and-Order. Philip K. Dick, “The Minority Report” (S). QUIPS Group E
- 11/25: Citizenship. Berlant, “Citizenship” (S).
- 12/02: Violence. Shirley Jackson, “The Lottery” (S).
- 12/04: Terrorism. Leti Volpp “The Citizen and the Terrorist” (S).
- 12/09: Fragmentation. Rick Moody, “A Good Story” (S).
- Final Exam Friday, December 19 at 8:00 a.m.**