

Methods in American Studies
Spring 2022, Mondays, 4-6
420 Hamilton
Columbia University
Dr. Matt Sandler
Office Hours: Mondays, 2-4 and by appt.

Description:

The question of methods in American Studies has long been vexed. As long ago as 1957, the venerable Americanist Henry Nash Smith, long since associated with consensus, wrote a controversial essay entitled, “Can ‘American Studies’ Develop a Method?” Things have hardly improved since then, if one is concerned with formulating a singular method. In the intervening decades, American Studies scholars have tended to incorporate both more social scientific and more creative approaches.

This course will take on the question with a deceptively simple tool drawn from elementary level education, known as “I do, we do, you do.” So the first few weeks of class will work as a kind of studio visit with my research practice—I’ll share with you some of my own past projects, proposals, and current plans, in the hopes that that might help you think about your own. The next few weeks will focus on the history of the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race, and other matters related to the recent history of Columbia, with the idea that that is a shared standpoint or perspective from which we can begin to think collaboratively. The last month of the class will comprise a series of units on subjects I know to be of interest you all, we can discuss revisions to this portion as we approach it as needed.

Throughout, we’ll focus our conversations and our reading on how disciplinary and interdisciplinary practice is undertaken. Often, people hear “methods” and think that the class will be easily practical, so we’ll do some of that, but the question of “methods” is also unavoidable philosophical and theoretical. So we’ll have to face that too. The writing assignments for the course, described in brief below, should focus on your research interests; the reading assignments are all pretext to conversations about how to achieve your intellectual goals.

Requirements:

First you must attend class and have something to say about the readings on a regular basis. Don’t be a wallflower. Second you must complete one of the following three requirements:
--2 7-10 page short research papers (the length roughly of a conference presentation) the first due March 7th and the second due May 2nd.
--1 20 page seminar paper (not quite the length of a publishable article but getting there), due May 2nd.
--1 creative project in a format of your choice, involving an identifiable research component, due on May 2nd.

Each of the three of these must be undertaken in consultation (email or talk) with me. As for grades, you get an A unless you stop showing up or don't do the work. The consultation and substantive feedback is the purpose, not the grade.

Texts:

The reading material for the class is mostly linked via the courseworks page, either in pdf form or fully online. If you have trouble finding anything, let me know! You should approach this reading with a sense of yourself as a practitioner and think about the way the writer achieved the work. I'll ask you to read 3 books whole, listed below, and available to anyone with an internet connection and a credit card. The McKay is now out of copyright, and so I'll provide you with a pdf of the whole thing but there is a nice new paperback out. And the Said is not so new, and so there should be plenty of very cheap used copies and copies at the library. Also it was initially delivered as lectures, which the BBC still has online as podcasts, if you'd prefer to do it that way.

Claude McKay, *Harlem Shadows* (Modern Library, 2022)

Davarian Baldwin, *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower: How Universities Are Plundering Our Cities* (Bold Type, 2021)

Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (Vintage, 1996)

Schedule:

Jan. 24: Introductions

Discussion of the syllabus, assignments, expectations, virtual library tour

Jan. 31: PROPOSALS

Matt Sandler, selection of proposals; Matt Sandler, "The Necessity of Abolition"; Matt Sandler, selections from *The Black Romantic Revolution*

Feb. 7: CLOSE READING POETRY UPTOWN

Claude McKay, *Harlem Shadows*; William J. Maxwell, "Introduction" to McKay's *Complete Poems*; Selections from Maureen Honey, ed. *Shadowed Dreams*

Feb. 14: ARCHIVE FEVER

Alfred Gibbs Campbell, *The Alarm Bell*; Donald Yacovone, "The Transformation of the Black Temperance Movement, 1827-1854: An Interpretation"; Michael Warner, "Whitman Drunk"; Robert Levine, "Slaves of Appetite: Temperate Revolutionism in Douglass's My Bondage and My Freedom"

Feb. 21: PERIODICAL CULTURE AND MASS PSYCHOLOGY

Leo Lowenthal, "The Triumph of Mass Idols"; Warren Susman, "Personality and the Making of Twentieth Century Culture"; TJ Jackson Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880-1930"; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Epidemics of the Will"

Feb. 28: THE HISTORY OF THE CENTER, or ARCHIVE FEVER PT. 2

CSER Archive (Google Drive link); Audrey Oh's CSER History website; Robin DG Kelley talk on "2nd Wave Ethnic Studies"; Jodi Melamed, "Being Together Subversively, Outside in the University of Hegemonic Affirmation and Repressive Violence, as Things Heat Up (Again)"

Mar. 7: LOCAL HISTORY, URBAN HISTORY, AND THE HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY

Davarian Baldwin, *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower*

Mar. 14: SPRING BREAK

Mar. 21: THE UNIVERSITY IN THE WORLD

Nicholas De Genova "Within and Against the Imperial University"; Ashley Dawson, "Crisis at Columbia: Academic Freedom, Area Studies, and Contingent Labor in the Contemporary Academy"; Gary Okihiro, "The Future of Ethnic Studies"; Katherine Franke, "Columbia University Has Lost Its Way"; Amy Kaplan, "Violent Belongings and the Question of Empire Today, Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, 2003"

Mar. 28: INTELLECTUALS

Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*; selections from Melani McAlistar, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000*

Apr. 4: FEMINIST SCIENCE STUDIES

Donna Haraway, "The Cyborg Manifesto"; Elizabeth Wilson, "Gut Feminism"; Diedre Cooper Owens and Sharla Fett, "Black Maternal and Infant Health: Historical Legacies of Slavery"; Banu Subramaniam, "The Aliens Have Landed! Reflections on the Rhetoric of Biological Invasions"

Apr. 11: FIELDWORK AND NIGHTLIFE

Elijah Anderson, selections from *A Place on the Corner*, Sunaina Maira, selections from *Desis in the House*, Ashley Mears, selections from *Very Important People: Status and Beauty in the Global Party Circuit*, Richard Ocejo, selections from *Upscaling Downtown: From Bowery Saloons to Cocktail Bars in New York City*

Apr. 18: PARANOIA AND SECRECY

Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics"; Francis Stonor Saunders, selections from *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*; Kathleen Belew, selections from *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America*

Apr. 25: U.S. TRANSNATIONALISMS IN 2 DIRECTIONS

Herbert Bolton, "The Epic of Greater America"; Kristen Silva Gruesz, "The Gulf of Mexico System and the "Latinness" of New Orleans"; Ramón A. Gutiérrez, "A History of Latina/o Sexualities"

May 2: Last Day of Class