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)

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

Feb. 14: ARCHIVE FEVER

Feb. 21: PERIODICAL CULTURE AND MASS PSYCHOLOGY
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

Mar. 28: INTELLECTUALS

Apr. 4: FEMINIST SCIENCE STUDIES

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 Hofstader, “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

May 2: Last Day of Class