

Introduction to American Studies

CSER 5000

420 Hamilton Hall

Mondays, 4-6 pm

Prof. Matt Sandler

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Office: 416 Hamilton Hall

Office Hours: book online via Calendly

Description:

This course offers an introduction to the approaches and themes of American Studies as an interdisciplinary field. It begins with a history of American Studies as it has developed over the last century, and especially since the crisis of the 1960s, with its consequences in the emergence of the identity knowledges (Ethnic Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, Black Studies, Latino Studies, and Indigenous Studies). We will then turn our attention to a primary source, James Baldwin's 1960 novel *Another Country*, and work through it cultural and political contexts. Finally our conversations will be organized around a series of conversations taking place on campus between interdisciplinary scholars, whose work we'll read and discuss in preparation. The writing assignments for the course will be comprised of several short papers, conceived as exercises in response to readings and discussions, followed by a longer final paper, aimed at reviewing the scholarly literature in an interdisciplinary research area of your choice.

Grading Rubric and Attendance Policy:

Students are required to attend each meeting of the course and participate in discussion of the materials. If you cannot make it to class, please communicate to me in the simplest terms your reasons for missing the session and your plans for finding out what we discussed. The writing for the course will include brief response papers through the first half of the semester and a research paper at the end of second half. The grading rubric will then look as follows: 10% participation + 40% 4 2-page response papers + 40% 1 12-page literature review essay. Specific prompts for the responses and the research paper can be found on Courseworks.

Required Readings:

With the exception of James Baldwin's *Another Country* (Vintage), all of the readings for the course will be made available in either pdf or html format via the Courseworks page for the course. Students may want to find access to double-sided printer.

Learning Goals:

- identifying and constructing interdisciplinary projects
- assessing the validity of interdisciplinary arguments
- locating and constructing archives
- following trends in research areas across disciplines
- acquiring minimum-viable disciplinary competencies at speed
- critiquing institutional and ideological power
- narrating the dynamic between historical and present-day social/cultural phenomena
- making interventions in academic and broader cultural conversations

Classroom Accommodations:

If you have a disability and a certified accommodation letter, please come to my office hours to confirm your accommodation needs. If you believe that you might have a disability that requires accommodation, you should contact Disability Services at 212-854-2388 and disability@columbia.edu.

Columbia Statement on Academic Integrity:

“The intellectual venture in which we are all engaged requires of faculty and students alike the highest level of personal and academic integrity. As members of an academic community, each one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity. Scholarship, by its very nature, is an iterative process, with ideas and insights building one upon the other. Collaborative scholarship requires the study of other scholars' work, the free discussion of such work, and the explicit acknowledgement of those ideas in any work that inform our own. This exchange of ideas relies upon a mutual trust that sources, opinions, facts, and insights will be properly noted and carefully credited. In practical terms, this means that, as students, you must be responsible for the full citations of others' ideas in all of your research papers and projects; you must be scrupulously honest when taking your examinations; you must always submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet agent. Any breach of this intellectual responsibility is a breach of faith with the rest of our academic community. It undermines our shared intellectual culture, and it cannot be tolerated. Students failing to meet these responsibilities should anticipate being asked to leave Columbia.”

Schedule**Week1: Sept. 11****Introduction**

--Gene Wise, “Paradigm Dramas in American Studies” (1978)

--Mary Helen Washington, “Disturbing the Peace: What Happens to American Studies If You Put African American Studies at the Center?: Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, October 29, 1997”

Week2: Sept. 18

James Baldwin, *Another Country*, pp. 1-126

Week3: Sept. 25

James Baldwin, *Another Country*, pp. 127-268

Norman Mailer, “The White Negro” (1957)

Eldridge Cleaver, selections from *Soul on Ice* (1968)

Week4: Oct. 2

James Baldwin, *Another Country*, pp. 268-436

Toni Morrison, “James Baldwin Eulogy” (1987)

****Close Reading Response (#1) Due****

Week5: Oct. 9

Archives and Arguments Day

****Archive and Argument Response (#2) Due****

Week6: Oct. 16

On U.S. Colonialism Overseas

Reena Goldthree, "A Greater Enterprise than the Panama Canal": Migrant Labor and Military Recruitment in the World War I–Era Circum-Caribbean" (2016)

Neferti X.M. Tadiar, "Life-Times of Disposability within Global Neoliberalism"

****Neferti Tadiar and Reena Goldthree in conversation (Faculty House, Oct. 18th)**

Week7: Oct. 23

On Performance in the Archive

Miguel Valerio, "'That There Be No Black Brotherhood': The Failed Suppression of Afro-Mexican Confraternities, 1568–1612" (2021)

Diana Taylor, "La Raza Cosmética: Walter Mercado Performs Latino Psychic Space"

****Miguel Valerio and Diana Taylor in conversation (CSER 420, 6pm, Oct. 25th)**

Week8: Oct. 30

The Associational State and the Non-Profit Industrial Complex

Brian Balogh, "Reorganizing the organizational synthesis: Federal-professional relations in modern America" (1991)

Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "In the Shadow of the Shadow State"

****Project Proposal Response (#3) Due****

Week9: Nov. 6

Fall Break

Week10: Nov. 13

On Black Feminism and Visuality

Amber Jamilla Musser, "Queering Sugar: Kara Walker's Sugar Sphinx and the Intractability of Black Female Sexuality" (2016)

Kelli Moore, "Authenticating Domestic Violence: Image and Feeling in Abolitionist Media" (2022)

****Amber Jamilla Musser and Kelli Moore in conversation (Faculty House, Oct. 14th)**

Week11: Nov. 20

Keywords Exercise:

Please consult three terms in one of [the NYU Press Keywords Series volumes](#), all of which are available online via CU Libraries. Come to class prepared to discuss the significance of the words for your work, the way the authors represented the words' history, and any ambivalences within the words' various usages that might complicate their application.

****Keywords Response (#4) Due****

Week12: Nov. 27

Philip J. Deloria and Alexander I. Olson, *American Studies: A User's Guide*

--"An Institutional History of American Studies: Or, What's the Matter With Mixtapes?"

--"Archives: A Curatorial Toolkit"

--"A Few Thoughts on Ideas and Arguments"

Week13: Dec. 4

Is Decolonization A Metaphor, After All?

Edward Said, "Travelling Theory" (1982) and "Travelling Theory, Reconsidered" (1994)

Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor" (2012)

Week14: Dec. 11

Last Day of Class, wrap-up conversation...