

American Studies 201
Becoming and Unbecoming Americans:
An Introduction to American Studies

Spring 2014
M, Th 2:35-3:50
Mérida M. Rúa and Mark Reinhardt

Rúa: 108 Hollander Hall
mrúa@williams.edu
Office Hours: 10 a.m.-12 p.m. & 4-5p.m., Mon.

Reinhardt: 337 Schapiro Hall
mrein@williams.edu
9 a.m.-12 p.m., Wed.

In this course, we critically examine the idea of “America” and what it means to be an “American.” Access to “Americanness” is shaped by factors such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, and region—categories which themselves change in meaning over time. In addition, understanding Americanness requires moving beyond national boundaries and situating the United States and its interventions in the world. Rather than a comprehensive, chronological survey of American history, or a specialized study of any one aspect or period of literature or popular culture, this course is an introduction to the interdisciplinary field of American Studies, a field defined both by the range of artifacts we interpret (essays, literary texts, autobiographies, photographs, films, music, architecture, historical documents, legal texts), and by the questions we ask of them. Those questions include: How have different people imagined what it means to be an American? What ideas about national history, patriotism, and moral character shape visions of Americanness? How do these visions both reflect and help to shape the boundaries that define who belongs within the nation and who gets excluded? What uses have been made of the claim to an American identity, and what is at stake in that claim? How have Americans imagined national citizenship, a national landscape, a national culture, and to what ends? And given the nation’s historically shifting contours, the projection of US power in today’s world, and the global flows of people, money, ideas, cultural artifacts, and capital, where is “America” to be found?

Required Texts:

Bruce Burgett and Glen Hendler, *Key Words in American Studies* (NYU)
Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (NYU)
Linda Gordon and Gary Okihiro, eds., *Impounded: Dorothea Lange and the Censored Images of Japanese American Internment* (Norton)
Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Dover)
Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (Dover)

. Course Reader

Books are available at **Water Street Books**. The course pack is available in the **37 House** (51 Park St.) Selections from the reader are marked by a dot [.] in the syllabus.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Participation in Field Trip (4/19)

Class participation and attendance	20%
4 brief response papers (2 pages)	20%
1 short group assignment/presentation	10%
2 essays (7-8 pages)	50%

** Late assignments will automatically be marked down a full letter grade. Unless arrangements are made with us, we will not accept for credit a paper that is more than a week late.

CLASS PARTICIPATION

The success of this class will be greatly influenced by the level of participation of all class members. Students are expected to attend class having thoroughly read and/or viewed assigned course materials, to be prepared to share their perspectives, critiques, and questions concerning these materials, and to be fully engaged in class discussion (and not working on assignments for other classes or texting/e-mailing friends, etc.) **LAPTOPS AND CELL PHONES MAY NOT BE USED IN CLASS**, unless you have an official accommodation for which they are necessary. Your evaluation is based on the quality of your participation in class discussion along with any in-class writings exercises or small workgroup discussions, etc.

RESPONSE PAPERS

Over the course of the semester, you must prepare **four** brief response papers (chosen from among six options) that reflect critical engagement with the readings. You might use your response as an opportunity to explore concerns that a given reading or set of materials (image, music, video) raises, to work through a problem, query, or argument raised by the readings, to bring different readings into conversation, to speculate on the implications of an author(s)' viewpoints, or to raise questions that you would like to pursue in class discussion. The purpose of these papers is to spark discussion and encourage spontaneous, active thinking by the group. You should not attempt merely to summarize the week's readings. Response papers will be evaluated (√+, √, √-) and will be worth 20% of your final grade. **Papers are due on Glow by 4PM the day before class discussion.**

ESSAYS

You must write two essays (7-8 pages each). Essays will be based on the course materials and class discussions. Please double space, use 12-point font, number your pages, and staple your paper.

**** Hard copies must be submitted to the designated mailbox by 12 noon; no papers will be accepted via e-mail.**

ATTENDANCE POLICY

More than two unexcused absences will lower your final grade (1/4 of a letter grade will be dropped from your final grade per unexcused absence).

Honor Code

All students are expected to abide by the College Honor Code. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the honor code please see one of us. We expect and encourage you to discuss course work with your fellow classmates inside and outside of class, but you must be careful to cite all sources and written work must be your own. If you are at any time uncertain about what this means or how the code applies, please ask one of us. And if you have concerns about your ability to do an assignment, please come talk to us—do not plagiarize.

READING SCHEDULE

Wed. February 5

Course Introduction And Expectations

In class exercise: “America” as symbol and feeling.

UNIT 1: ORIGIN STORIES AND COUNTER-STORIES

Monday, February 10

- . James Q. Wilson, “American Exceptionalism,” pp. 1-9.
- . Michael Rogin, “Political Repression in the United States,” pp. 44-80 and “Two Declarations of Independence” (excerpt), pp. 23-27.
- . Barack Obama, “Address to the Democratic National Convention”
You may read the Obama, but better to watch it here:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWynt87PaJ0>

Wednesday, February 12

Screening, *The Sopranos*, “Christopher” (60 minutes), 7:30 p.m., Schapiro 129.

Thursday, February 13

- . Christopher Columbus, Journal Excerpts (8 pp.)
 - . Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “Good Day, Columbus,” pp. 108-140.
 - . “Pokagon’s Address at the World Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893,” pp. 191-200
- RESPONSE PAPER, OPTION 1.

Monday, February 17

Keywords for American Cultural Studies: "Indian"

. Daniel K. Richter, "Living with Europeans," pp. 69-109.

. William Apress, *Eulogy on King Philip*, pp. 275-310.

Exercise: Walk to Williams Inn, read historical markers on front lawn.

RESPONSE PAPER, OPTION 2.

Thursday, February 20

Keywords for American Cultural Studies: "Exceptionalism"

. John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," pp. 205-217.

. James Baldwin, "My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew," pp. 291-295.

. George W. Bush, "Second Inaugural" (3 pp.).

Monday, February 24

Keywords for American Cultural Studies: "Nation"

. Benedict Anderson, "Concepts and Definitions," pp. 5-7.

. "A Declaration by the Representatives of the United States of America," pp. 858-862.

. Frederick Douglass, "What to a Slave is the Fourth of July?," pp. 359-388.

Optional: Visit WCMA to view founding documents on display prior to discussion

RESPONSE PAPER, OPTION 3.

Thursday, February 27

Keywords for American Cultural Studies: "Slavery"

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Preface, Introduction, and pp. 1-5, 8-80

Monday, March 3

. Walter Johnson, "Turning People into Products," pp. 116-134

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, pp. 80-164.

UNIT 2: CARTOGRAPHIES OF CITIZENSHIP

A. WHITENESS, "THE FRONTIER," AND THE FRONTIERS OF CITIZENSHIP

Thursday, March 6

Keywords for American Cultural Studies: "West"

. Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," pp. 1-38

. José Martí, "Our America," pp. 288-296

. Brook Thomas, "Frederick Jackson Turner, José Martí, and Finding a Home on the Range," pp. 275-292

Saturday, March 8: Essay #1 due by 12 noon

Monday, March 10

Keywords for American Cultural Studies: "Citizenship"

. Albion Tourg  e, "Brief for Homer Plessy," pp. 80-86, 101-103

Plessy v. Ferguson (including the dissent by Justice Harlan):

<http://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/163/537>

. *Chinese Exclusion Act* (3 pp.)

. Sam Erman, "Meanings of Citizenship in the U.S. Empire: Puerto Rico, Isabel Gonzalez, and the Supreme Court, 1898 to 1905," pp. 5-33.

Thursday, March 13

Keywords for American Cultural Studies: "White"

. George Lipsitz, "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the 'White' Problem in American Studies," pp. 369-387

LISTEN: "House Rules":

<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/512/house-rules> (55 min.)

WATCH: *Race: The Power of an Illusion*, v. 3 *The House We Live In* (Excerpt, 20 min)

B. NEOLIBERAL SPACES, NEOLIBERAL CRISES: DESIRE, DEBT, WORK, RUIN

Monday, March 17

Samuel Delany, *Times Square Blue*, *Times Square Red*, pp. 111-199.

. Iris Marion Young, "City Life and Difference," pp. 226-256.

Thursday, March 20

. Lisa Duggan, "Downsizing Democracy," pp. 1-21.

. Brett Williams, "The Precipice of Debt," pp. 65-59.

. Alexis de Tocqueville, "Why Democratic Nations Show a More Ardent and More Lasting Love for Equality than for Freedom" and "Of Individualism in Democratic Countries," pp. 479-484.

March 22-April 6, Spring Recess
--

Monday, April 7

. Katherine S. Newman, *No Shame in My Game: The Working Poor in the Inner City*, pp. 1-13, 36-38, 62-121, 150-185

LISTEN: Kanye West, "We Don't Care": <http://en.musicplayon.com/play?v=391185>

WATCH: Dave Chappell, "WacArnolds" Skit:

<http://www.comedycentral.com/video-clips/czvwdf/chappelle-s-show-wacarnold-s>

Thursday, April 10

. Karen Ho, *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*, pp. 73-121, 213-248

Monday, April 14

. Kevin Boyle, "The Ruins of Detroit: Exploring the Urban Crisis in the Motor City"

Daniel Okrent, "Detroit: the Death and Possible Life of a Great City,"

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1926017,00.html>

Bruce Gilden, "Detroit the Troubled City" (photographs)

<http://www.magnumphotos.com/C.aspx?VP3=SearchResult&ALID=2K7O3RTFMQ1Z>

"Remains of Detroit" (photographs),

http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,1864272_1810099,00.html

John Patrick Leary, "Detroitism: What does 'ruin porn' tell us about the motor city, ourselves, other American cities?,"

http://www.guernicamag.com/features/2281/leary_1_15_11/

WATCH: Chrysler's "Born of Fire" commercial

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3guZ7dMAkc>

RESPONSE PAPER, OPTION 4.

C. Picturing Immigrant New York

Thursday, April 17

Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*

Preface, Introduction, chs. 1-5, 9, 10, 13, 15, 17, 20, 23, 25.

"Visual Rhetoric/Visual Literacy: Writing About Photography,"

<http://twp.duke.edu/uploads/assets/photography.pdf>

. Robert Harriman and John Louis Lucaites, "Public Culture, Icons, and Iconoclasts," (excerpt) pp. 28-39

Saturday, April 19

NYC Field Trip: Visit to Tenement Museum, followed by documentary photo project in Astoria, Queens (long day trip).

Monday, April 21

Post-trip photo presentations and discussion

UNIT 3: CARCERAL EMPIRE, OR: THE MILITARY-PRISON-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

Thursday, April 24

. *Time* magazine piece (1941) and Executive Order 9066 (1942)

Impounded: Dorothea Lange and the Censored Images of Japanese American Internment

Watch: Rea Tajiri's video "History and Memory" (1991)—on reserve in Sawyer

Monday, April 28

. Anne McClintock, "Paranoid Empire: Specters from Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib," pp. 50-74.

. Mahmood Mamdani, "Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and

Terrorism,” 766-775.

. Manu Vimalassery “Antecedents of Imperial Incarceration: Fort Marion to Guantánamo.”

Please also take at least 15 minutes to review some of the Abu Ghraib photos:

http://www.salon.com/news/abu_ghraib/2006/03/14/introduction/

RESPONSE PAPER, OPTION 5.

Wednesday, April 30

Screening: *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Standard Operating Procedure*. 7:00 p.m., Schapiro 129.

Thursday, May 1

Discuss the films

Monday, May 5

. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, pp. 1-139.

Thursday, May 8

. Loïc Wacquant, “Class, race & hyperincarceration in revanchist America,” pp. 74-90.

. Colin Dayan, “Civil Death,” pp. 39-70.

RESPONSE PAPER, OPTION 6.

Monday, May 12

. Dorothy Roberts, *Fatal Invention*, pp. ix-xii, 261-312

Thursday, May 15

WRAP UP

Wednesday, May 21: Essay #2 due by 12 noon

Bibliography For Course Reader

- A Declaration by the Representatives of the United States of America" (1776). Reprinted in *The English Literatures of America*, edited by Myra Jehlen and Michael Warner (1997), 858-862.
- Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Revised Edition (New York: the New Press), 1-139.
- Anderson, Benedict. Concepts and Definitions. In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso Press, 1983), 5-7.
- Apress, William. *Eulogy on King Philip* (1836), in Barry O'Connell, ed., *On Our Own Ground: the Complete Writings of William Apress, A Pequot* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 275-310.
- Baldwin, James. "My Dungeon Shook," in James Baldwin, *Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 291-295).
- Boyle, Kevin. "The Ruins of Detroit: Exploring the Urban Crisis in the Motor City." *Michigan Historical Review* 27, 1, (2001): 109-127.
- Bush, George W. "Inaugural Address," 2005. From *The American Presidency Project*.
- Dayan, Colin. "Civil Death," in *The Law is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 39-70.
- Douglass, Frederick. "What to a Slave is the Fourth of July?," in *The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews, Volume 2, 1847-54*, edited by John Blassingame (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).
- Lisa Duggan, *Downsizing Democracy*. In *Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 1-21.
- Erman, Sam. "Meanings of Citizenship in the U.S. Empire: Puerto Rico, Isabel Gonzalez, and the Supreme Court, 1898 to 1905." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 27, 4 (2008): 5-33.
- Harriman, Robert and John Lucaites. *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 28-39.
- Ho, Karen. "Wall Street's Orientation: Exploitation, Empowerment, and the Politics of Hard Work," and "Downsizers Downsized: Job Insecurity and the Investment Banking Corporate Culture, in *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street* (New York: NYU, 2009), 73-121, 213-248.
- Johnson, Walter. "Turning People into Products," In *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 116-134.
- Leary, John Patrick. "Detroitism: What does 'ruin porn' tell us about the motor city, ourselves, other American cities?" *Guernica: A Magazine of Arts and Politics* (January 2011) http://www.guernicamag.com/features/2281/leary_1_15_11/
- Lipsitz, George. "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the 'White' Problem in American Studies." *American Quarterly* 47 (Sept. 1995): 369-87.
- Mamdani, Mahmood. "Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism," *American Anthropologist* (104) 3 (2002): 766-775.

- Martí, José. "Our America" (1891). In *José Martí Reader: Selected Writings*. Edited and translated by Esther Allen (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 288-296.
- McClintock, Anne. "Paranoid Empire: Specters from Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib," *Small Axe* (March) 2009, 13(1): 50-74.
- Newman, Katherine S. *No Shame in My Game: The Working Poor in the Inner City* (New York: Knopf/Russell Sage, 1999), 1-13, 36-38, 62-121.
- Okrent, Daniel. 2009. "Detroit: the Death and Possible Life of a Great City." *Time* 24 September 2009.
- "Pokagon's Address at the World Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893," in Simon Pokagon, *Ojibawkwé Mitigwaki* (1899), Kiara Vigil et al., eds. (Lansing: Michigan St. University Press, 2011), 191-205.
- Richter, Daniel K. "Living with Europeans," in *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 69-109.
- Roberts, Dorothy. *Fatal Invention: How Science, Politics, and Big Business Re-create Race in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: the New Press, 2012), ix-xii, 261-312.
- Rogin, Michael. "Political Repression in the United States," in *Ronald Reagan, the Movie, And Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 44-80.
- Rogin, Michael. "Two Declarations of Independence," in *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 7-13.
- Thomas, Brook. Frederick Jackson Turner, José Martí, and Finding a Home on the Range. In *José Martí's "Our America": From National to Hemispheric Cultural Studies*. Edited by Jeffrey Belnap and Raúl Fernández (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press. 1998), 275-292.
- Tocqueville, Alexis de. "Why Democratic Nations Show a More Ardent and Enduring Love for Equality than for Liberty" and "Of Individualism in Democracies" (1840), in *Democracy in America* (Chicago, 2000), 479-485.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. Good Day, Columbus. In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 108-140.
- Turner, Frederick Jackson. "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893), in *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1921), 1-38.
- Vimalassery, Manu. Antecedents of Imperial Incarceration: Fort Marion to Guantánamo," in Vimalassery et al. *The Sun Never Sets: South Asian Migrants in an Age of U.S. Power* (New York: NYU, 2013), 350-373.
- Wacquant, Loïc. "Class, race & hyperincarceration in revanchist America," *Deadalus* (Summer) 2010: 74-90.
- Williams, Brett. "The Precipice of Debt," in Williams et.al, eds., *New Landscapes of Inequality: Neoliberalism and the Erosion of Democracy in America* (Santa Fe: SAR Press, 2008), 65-89.
- Wilson, James Q. "American Exceptionalism," *The American Spectator*, October, 2, 2006.
- Winthrop, John. A Model of Christian Charity. In *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* Vol. A. Edited by Nina Baym, (New York: W. W. Norton 2003), 205-217.
- Young, Iris Marion. "City Life and Difference," in *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.