Introduction to American Studies

Spring 2022

Professor: Dr. Kyle Riismandel

Email: kyle.riismandel@rutgers.edu

Time: Tu/Th 10-1120AM

Classroom: Conklin 346

Office: Conklin Hall 243/Zoom

Office Hours:

* Book appointments using: https://calendly.com/kriismandel/fall-2021-student-office-hours
* Monday 2PM-345PM
* Wednesday 11AM-1PM
* If you cannot meet during these times, please email me for an appointment.

**Course Description**

Rather than a survey of all of American history, in this course, we will examine various ways in which groups have attempted to define what is America and who is an American. We will begin with the premise that identity, including that of America and of Americans, is always contingent and contextual. Using interdisciplinary methods, we will analyze how groups contested and shaped these categories at key moments in the history of North America. To do so, we will use the interpretive tools of different disciplines central to the analysis of American culture to understand the stakes and implications of defining Americaness.

**Course Goals**

* Identify and analyze different types of primary sources in their historical context
* Identify and analyze secondary sources with a focus on argument and evidence
* Identify and analyze the social construction of identities such as race, class, gender, nation
* Learn and practice analytical writing
* Practice implementing feedback on written and oral communication

**Course Texts**

All course readings are available via canvas.rutgers.edu.

**Course Grade**

Class Participation 18%

Film Worksheets - 2 x 6% 12%

Primary Source Short Paper – 2 x 14% 28%

Recap Paper 7%

Recap Presentation 7%

Final Exam 25%

Failure to complete all of the above assignments will result in an automatic F for the course.

**Assignments:**

Class participation

Students are expected to participate actively in all class discussions and activities, to be respectful to the instructor and their fellow classmates, to arrive to class on time, and to stay focused on what is happening in our classroom not on chatting or using digital devices. Further, participation will be assessed not just on quantity but also on quality. Quality participation demonstrates knowledge of the issues at hand, completion of that week's assignments, and a willingness to engage in critical assessment of course texts and lectures. The participation grade may also include pop quizzes and short writing assignments done in class.

I encourage students to check in with me over the course of the semester regarding their class participation performance. Further, do not wait to contact me if you are falling behind or having trouble understanding course content. Earlier is always better (I’m looking at you Seniors).

Short Primary Source Papers

This assignment asks you to complete a 400-600 word analysis of a primary source related to a particular week’s theme. You must choose a source or sources from the list provided. You may choose a different source but must get permission from the instructor to do so. Though a short paper, you will want to formulate an argument as to what your source(s) help us understand about the broader theme of American identity and belonging. You must complete one paper before Week 9 and one from Week 9 – Week 15. These papers must be posted to Canvas under the proper week by Sunday at 7PM. Further instructions will be available via Canvas.

Recap Paper

We begin each class with a short discussion of the big takeaways from our last class session. This assignment asks you to lead that recap discussion as well as submit a short (300-600) written recap that will be posted to Canvas.

Your recap should include the key analytical takeaways from a lecture and/or discussion. That means, you should articulate what we learned or now understand about that week’s theme or topic.

The goals of this assignment are to:

* Articulate to yourself and your classmates what we learned or understood about the

previous class’s theme or topic

* Prepare for questions on the final exam that will rely on your knowledge of these larger

analytical points

* Practice historical writing including synthetic description and analysis

**Course Policies**

Attendance

Given the pandemic, I understand that attending class may not always be possible. So, I encourage you to attend class as much as you can because class time is crucial to learning. However, if you miss class to attend a university sponsored event, to observe a religious holiday, or due to a documented illness, those absences will be excused. In addition, I encourage you to contact me if you miss class for any other reason so that you can get caught up on class material.

Classroom Conduct

In this course, we welcome intellectual inquiry and thoughtful discussion of difficult questions, but hate speech and disrespectful comments will not be tolerated. We must to come to class with an open mind, a willingness to learn, and fundamental respect for the humanity of each person in the room and the historical actors we discuss.

Office hours/student appointments

My office hours are times set aside to meet and speak with students. Please use the link on Canvas to book an appointment. I am also available to meet at other times if students are unable to make it to my office during these times. Feel free to send me an email to set up a meeting if you’d like to talk or have any questions about course topics, assignments, or grades.

Academic dishonesty

Students are expected to obey the Rutgers honor code, and I will enforce this code to its fullest extent. The goal of this course is to evaluate your understanding of course materials and ability to express that understanding. Cheating, plagiarizing or otherwise violating the code of academic integrity not only breaks the trust between professor and student but keeps you from learning course content and improving writing and critical thinking skills. I am here to help so if you are having trouble, do not cheat, ask me for help.

Generally speaking, it is a violation of the academic integrity code to:

* Use someone else’s words or ideas without attribution
* Copy content from someone else’s paper, quiz, or exam
* Pay for course assignments to be complete by someone else

The university's policy on academic integrity is available at: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>

Cell phones, Laptops, Tablets, Etc.

Students must turn off and stow their cell phones before class begins. Under no circumstances may students answer their phones, make calls, send text messages, or use their cell phone in any manner during class hours unless approved by me before class begins. I understand that cell phones have become central to many of our lives, but their use in class is a distraction for not just the user but others in class.

Essentially, you are in class approximately 3 hours a week. Please be present and prepared when you are here. If you would rather text or surf the internet, please do not come to class.

Accommodations

If you require an accommodation, please complete the Registration form on the ODS website at https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form. For more information, please visit the Office of Disability Services in the Paul Robeson Campus Center, Suite 219 or contact [odsnewark@rutgers.edu](mailto:odsnewark@rutgers.edu). I am happy to do anything to help you learn so registering with ODS and having them supply instructors with proper guidance will help us do that.

Course Schedule

**Week 1 – Introductions/Course Expectations/What is culture?/Founding Myths**

Tuesday Discussion

Thursday

Primary Source

The Declaration of Independence

Secondary Source

Nikole Hannah Jones, “Introduction,” *1619 Project* https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/black-history-american-democracy.html

**Week 2 –Enslaved Peoples and Belonging**

Tuesday

Primary Source

Harriet Jacobs, [Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Chs. 1-6](https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/jacobs.html)

OR

Olaudah Equiano, The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Chs. 3 and 4

Thursday

Secondary Source

Stephanie Jones-Rodgers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South*, Ch. 1

OR

Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside an Antebellum Slave Market*, Ch. 2

**Week 3 – The Problem of the Color Line**

Tuesday

Primary Source

W.E.B Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, “The Forethought” and “On the Meaning of Progress”

Thursday

Secondary Source

R.A. Lawson, *Jim Crow’s Counterculture: The Blues and Black Southerners, 1890-1945*, Verse 1

**Week 4 – Native Americans and the Frontier**

Tuesday

Primary Sources

George Catlin paintings - <https://www.georgecatlin.org/>

Thursday

Secondary Source

Shari M. Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination*, Ch. 1

**Week 5 – “Civilization,” Gender, and Race**

Tuesday

Primary Source

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper”

Thursday

Secondary Source

Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*, Ch. 4

**Week 6 – Chinatown**

Tuesday

Primary Source

Library of Congress, Chinatown Photo Collection

Thursday

Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides*, Ch. 8

**Week 7 – Negotiating the Border**

Tuesday

Primary Source

TBD

Thursday

Secondary Source

George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, Ch. 4

**Week 8 – The Great Depression**

Tuesday

Primary Source

Screening: *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933)

Thursday

Secondary Source

Susan Glenn, *The Female Spectacle*, Ch. 7

**Week 9 – The American Century**

Tuesday

Primary Sources

Henry Luce, “The American Century,” Life (February 1941)

Henry Wallace, “Century of the Common Man” (1942)

Thursday

Secondary Source

David S. Painter, “Oil and the American Century”

**Week 10 – Urban Crisis**

Tuesday

Primary Sources

Amiri Baraka, “Ten Years Later: Newark/Detroit” in Daggers and Javelins: Essays, 1974-1979 (available electronically via Rutgers Library)

CBS News, “Black in a White World,” 1966

Thursday

Primary Source

The Kerner Commission Report, excerpts

Secondary Source

Jelani Cobb, The Essential Kerner Commission Report, Introduction

**Week 11 – Vietnam**

Tuesday

Primary Source

Screening: *Hearts and Minds* (1974)

Thursday

Secondary Source

Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home*, Ch. 1

**Week 12 – The Culture Wars**

Tuesday

Primary Source

Hip-hop playlist/video playlist

Thursday

Secondary Source

Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars*

**Week 13 – Monuments, Memorials, and Protests in the 21st Century**

Tuesday

Primary Source

TBD

Thursday

Secondary Source

Tony Horowitz, Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War, tbd

**Week 14 – Monuments, Memorials, and Protests, cont./Big Takeaways**

Tuesday

Primary Source

Black Lives Matters Demands

Thursday – Big Takeaways