CAST 100: Introduction to Comparative American Studies
Fall 2015
MWF 9:00-9:50 // King 321

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Protesters block Mauna Kea telescope access, courtesy Oct. 2014.Occupy Hilo

**This course serves as a gateway course in the Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies major**

“The great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do.” J. Baldwin 1965

A year after sweeping protests against police violence in Ferguson, Cleveland, Staten Island and elsewhere across the nation, mainstream newspapers were also reporting about protests by Native Hawai’ians against the installation of a new telescope on top of Mauna Kea. Why these protests? And why now? In other words, what defines the United States in this particular historical moment that enshrines individualism and democratic rights while normalizing violence against bodies marked as deviant, unproductive, or otherwise antinational? How do people “carry history within us,” as James Baldwin says, and how might that insight help us to understand the complexities of the nation, both for those living within its borders and beyond?

This course introduces students to major questions, concerns, and approaches in the interdisciplinary field of Comparative American Studies, while also developing informed perspectives on some of the pressing national issues of the day. We will study U.S. political, cultural and social practices and formations, paying particular attention to voices and groups that have been historically marginalized and disenfranchised. Rather than providing a comprehensive survey of US history, course materials will explore case studies through which to gain an introduction to key theoretical and methodological approaches used in American Studies. In class meetings, lectures will contextualize topics while discussions will encourage students to work through and debate ideas together. Assignments are designed to create opportunities for critical reading, writing, and thinking.
Course objectives:
• to provide an introduction to the field of Comparative American Studies;
• to introduce comparative approaches to methodologies, histories, and identities;
• to situate the U.S. in a global perspective through analytical frameworks such as nationalism, imperialism, militarization, and globalization;
• to understand and utilize key terms in the field of American studies;
• to explore the diversity of experiences across various social and identity groups;
• to develop visual, reading, writing and communications skills.

REQUIRED TEXTS
Books are available at the Oberlin College Bookstore and on reserve at Mudd Library:


Articles marked with (BB) in the schedule of readings are available through Blackboard under the “Course Readings” link.

This course will use Blackboard for announcements, handouts, articles, and assignments.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Learning Community
The academic study of privilege and inequality often raises issues that are controversial or evoke strong personal feelings. There are few right answers to the questions we are exploring. Therefore, I ask that everyone in this course commit to making this classroom a learning community – a space for people to explore new ideas, take intellectual risks, and engage in open debate. Certainly, people will have different opinions and everyone begins the course with a different skill set and knowledge base. Our objective is decidedly not consensus but rather to consider a range of perspectives and to develop our own positions with greater insight. In order for this to occur, we need to hear from a range of perspectives and learn communally from each other.

Content Alert: please be aware that some issues discussed in this course may provoke difficult reactions for some. I cannot always anticipate those reactions, but will always respect any student’s need to take care of themselves in response to them.

Reading
This course requires significant reading. Do not try to read every word; focus on key arguments, methods, and sources. If you find you are having trouble finishing the reading, please see me so we can identify effective strategies for completing the assignments.
ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION (10%)
Students are expected to participate in classroom discussions. It is thus crucial that you keep up with the course reading and come to class prepared to discuss the readings listed for each class session. Since an important component of the course is class discussions, **regular attendance is required** (see attendance policy below). Attendance in class, however, does not in itself constitute participation. If you are uncomfortable speaking in class, please see me to discuss strategies for your participation.

**Discussion Board:** In addition, students can participate in the class by posting responses to course readings, themes, discussions, etc. to the Discussion Board (on BB). The Discussion Board provides a place for you to reflect on course materials, to connect what we are learning to your own lives or the contemporary world, to raise discussions of current political or cultural events, and to post outside materials that you think your classmates might find interesting. Postings at the Discussion Board will count as much as in-class participation.

**ONLINE LEARNING GROUPS (5%)**
In order to extend our discussions beyond the classroom, students will be required to participate in an online learning group. (These groups will be assigned during the second week of class). Each week, I will post one or two discussion questions. You are required to post an analytical response to the questions to your online group forum by 9:00 p.m. on Thursday evening. You should read all of the responses posted to your learning group forum before coming to class on Friday. Postings will be checked each week and will be graded on a scale of 0-2. We will sometimes begin class on Friday with short learning group discussions.

**WRITTEN WORK:** *Detailed information will be provided in handouts posted on BB*

**VISUAL ANALYSIS ESSAY (15%), due to BB on September 25 by 9am.**
Write a 3 page paper that analyzes one image currently on display at the Allen Art Museum, considering how the image conveys particular meanings about identity and nation.

**MIDTERM TAKE-HOME ESSAY (25%), due to BB on October 16 by 5pm.**
This 5-6 page essay will work with key terms and concepts explored in class discussions and readings.

**TEAM PRESENTATION (15% total).**
Each student will be assigned to a 5-person team that will be give a 20-minute class presentation on a social justice movement (see schedule of classes for specific dates).

**FINAL TAKE-HOME ESSAY (30%), due to BB no later than Dec. 16 at 4pm.**
For this 6-8pg. assignment, you will write two short essays based on prompts provided in advance.

**EXTRA CREDIT ASSIGNMENT**
Attend a CAST-sponsored event (or event approved by me) and write a 1-2 page reflection. See assignment on BB.

**NOTE: ALL ASSIGNMENT DUE DATES ARE FIRM DEADLINES**

**ASSIGNMENT FORMAT**
Written assignments should be double-spaced and use a standard font type and size (12 point Times New Roman or the equivalent). Include your name, the date, a title, and page numbers. Please be sure to proofread carefully for style and grammar and comply with the page limits. Use MLA Style for formatting in-text citations, endnotes or footnotes, and Works Cited. This style guide is available on Mudd Library’s website. An abbreviated version can be found in the “Resources” on BB. Papers that do not follow proper formatting instructions may receive a 1/3-grade deduction.
**All written assignments must be submitted via Blackboard.** You must upload your essays as .doc or .docx files (no Pages, .rtf or .pdf). If your paper is not a .doc or .docx file, it will be counted as late. It is your responsibility to make sure your essay posts correctly to Blackboard. After you attach the file, double-check to be sure you are able to download and open it in Word.

**COURSE POLICIES**  

**Classroom Etiquette**  
Please arrive a few minutes early so that we may start class on time. Turn off all cell phones. No texting. Laptops are great for consulting readings and note taking, but I take great exception to people who use class time to check email, surf the web, or engage in social networking. If you abuse this privilege, I will no longer allow you to use electronic devices in class.

**Absences and Late Policy**  

*Tardiness:* It is your commitment to this class and your classmates that you will be present and ready to begin work at the start of class. Repeated lateness (after three late arrivals) may result in significant deductions to your final grade in this course.  

*Attendance* will be considered in determining your final grade. Students will be allowed two absences, excused or unexcused, over the course of the semester without affecting the final grade for the course. The third absence will result in a loss of two points from the participation grade. Students missing four or more classes can receive no higher than a B+ for the course. Students who miss five or more classes may not receive credit for the course. Under special circumstances (prolonged illness, death in the family, etc.), exceptions can be arranged through consultation with the instructor and the Dean of Students’ office.

**Late Papers and Extension Requests**  

*Papers not turned in by the due date and time* will be penalized and will not receive written comments. I will deduct 1/3 of a grade for each 24 hours an assignment is late (i.e., from B+ to B). Assignments submitted later than 1 week past the original deadline without a written extension will be given credit only at the instructor’s discretion and will generally earn no greater than a minimum-passing grade.  

*Requests for extensions* must be submitted by email at least 48 hours prior to the assignment due date and are generally available only for extraordinary circumstances. If you receive an extension, you must include a copy of my approval (including revised due date) with your assignment in order to receive on-time credit.

**P/NP**  
If you are taking this course P/NP, you must fulfill all course obligations and complete all assignments in order to receive credit for the course.

**Academic Incompletes at the end of the semester**  
Extensions on final projects require an approved incomplete from the Dean of Studies. There are no exceptions to this policy.

**Honor Code**  
This course adheres to the policies of the Oberlin College Honor Code and Honor System, which applies to all work submitted for academic credit, whether it is a creative project, a quiz, an exam or a paper. For papers in this class, you must cite all written sources that you use, whether you quote directly or paraphrase. This is true whether you are using electronic or printed materials. Incomplete or improper citations are a form of plagiarism. If you are unfamiliar with proper citation formats, or have questions please consult me, a reference librarian, a writing tutor and/or a style manual. Lack of familiarity with proper procedures is not a defense. See Oberlin Honor Code, [http://www.oberlin.edu/students/student_pages/honor_code2.html](http://www.oberlin.edu/students/student_pages/honor_code2.html), for more information.
All work must include the statement: “I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment”

Educational Access:
I am committed to designing a course in which all students can learn, and I am working to create inclusive learning environments. Please let me know if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in dis/ability-related barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact Disability Services in Peters G-27/G-28.

Student Athletes
If you are a student athlete and member of an Oberlin college sports team and your athletic schedule will cause you to miss class at any point in the semester, please inform me immediately.

CLASS SCHEDULE

WHAT IS AMERICAN STUDIES?

M Aug. 31 Course Overview

W Sept. 2 Initial Forays into American Studies
Reading: Weinbaum, “Nation” (BB); Wise, “Paradigm Dramas” (BB)

F Sept. 4 Recent directions in American Studies
Reading: Deloria, “Broadway and Main” (BB)

M Sept. 7 Labor Day – no class

AMERICAN EMPIRE: Settler Colonialism and State Formation

W Sept 9 Settler Colonialism
Reading: Hixson, American Settler Colonialism (BB); Wilder, “Moving In” and “Indians in the House,” (BB)

EXTRA CREDIT OPPORTUNITY
Convocation “American Injustice: Mercy, Humanity and Making a Difference,” Bryan Stevenson, Author of Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption
Finney, 7:30

F Sept 11 Republic virtue and race in the new nation
Reading King, “Borders” (BB); Singh, “Liberalism” (BB); Smallwood, “Freedom” (BB); and Streeby “Empire” (BB);

M Sept 14 Settler Colonialism Today - an Empire of Liberty?
Reading: Trask, “The Color of Violence,” (BB); and Mikdashi, "What is Settler Colonialism?”
http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/6453/what-is-settler-colonialism

W Sept 16 Class Visit to Allen Art Museum – meet in the back courtyard
No more than 20 students per visit – free day for other students

F Sept 18 Class Visit to Allen Art Museum – meet in the back courtyard
No more than 20 students per visit – free day for other students


M Sept 21  Militourism and Imperial Spectacles  
  Reading: Gonzalez, *Securing Paradise*, 1-47; Lipsitz, “Space”

W Sept 23  Yom Kippur – no class

T Sept 24  **EXTRA CREDIT OPPORTUNITY**  
  Kent Wong, Director, UCLA Labor Center and author of *Dreams Deported: Immigrant Youth and Families Resist Deportation*  
  4:30, location tba

F Sept 25  Guest Speaker Kent Wong, Director, UCLA Labor Center  
  **Visual Analysis due to BB by 9am**

M Sept 28  Militourism and Imperial Spectacles  
  Reading, Gonzalez, *Securing Paradise*, 49-114

W Sept 30  Militourism and Imperial Spectacles  

F Oct 2  Conducting Interdisciplinary Research in American Studies  
  Guest Speaker, Eboni Johnson, Reference & Instruction Librarian

M Oct 5  Native Modernities  
  Reading: Alexie, 1-117; Kauanui, “Indigenous” (BB); and Warrior, “Indian” (BB)

W Oct 7  Native Modernities  
  Reading: Alexie, 118-230

F Oct 9  Reversing the Colonial Gaze  
  Reading: Clare, *Exile and Pride* (BB)

  **CITIZENSHIP AND THE CARCELAR STATE**

M Oct 12  The Violence of Citizenship  

W Oct 14  Criminality, Racialization and the U.S. Political Economy  
  Reading: Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (BB); Romano, *Racial Reckoning* (BB)

F Oct 16  From Reform to Reparative Justice  
  Reading: Meiners, “Ending the School-to-Prison Pipeline/Building Abolitionist Futures,” 547-565, (BB)  
  **Midterm Due by 5pm to BB**

M Oct 19 – F Oct 23  ****** NO CLASSES FALL BREAK *******
ENVIRONMENTAL VIOLENCE: NO “NATURAL” DISASTERS

IV. AMERICAN IDENTITIES

M Oct 26  Personal/Political Visibilities
Reading: Kaplan, “Identity” (BB); Shaun Tan, The Arrival (all)

T Oct 27  EXTRA CREDIT OPPORTUNITY
Sonia Shah, ’90, “Pandemic: Tracking Contagions from Cholera to Ebola and Beyond”
Finney, 7:30

W Oct 28  Border Crossings and Being Between
Reading: Herrera (first half); Molina, How Race Is Made in America (BB).

Th Oct 29  EXTRA CREDIT OPPORTUNITY
Professors Adrian Burgos and Frank Guridy on race and sports
7-9:30pm, location tba

F Oct 30  Border Crossings and Being Between
Reading: Herrera (second half)
**Presentation 1**

M Nov 2  Beyond the ethno-racial pentagon: The meanings of being mixed
Reading: Bettez, “Mixed-Race Women” (BB)

W Nov 4  Being and Becoming
Reading: Eguchi, “Ongoing Cross-National Identity” (BB); and Guralnik, “Being and Having” (BB).

Th Nov 5  EXTRA CREDIT OPPORTUNITY
Historian Marcus Reddiker, screening of “Ghosts of Amistad”
7pm, location tba

ENVIRONMENTAL VIOLENCE: NO “NATURAL” DISASTERS

F Nov 6  Neoliberalism and the debt regime
Reading: Duggan, “Neoliberalism” (BB); Heintz and Balakrishnan, “Debt, Power and Crisis” (BB)
**Presentation 2***

M Nov 9  Biopolitics and Environmental Disasters
Reading: Giroux, “Reading Hurricane Katrina,” 171 – 196 (BB)
EXTRA CREDIT OPPORTUNITY
Poet Justin Torres
Date and Time tba

W Nov 11 Biopolitics and Environmental Disasters
Reading: Lipsitz, “Learning from New Orleans” (BB)
F Nov 13  “Welcome to Blockadia”
Guest Lecture by Janet Fiskio, Associate Prof. of ENVS and CAS

M Nov 16  Living in a Disaster Zone
Reading: Ward, Salvage the Bones, first half
**Presentation 3**

W Nov 18  Living in a Disaster Zone
Reading: Ward, Salvage the Bones, second half

F Nov 20  Labor, Globalization, and Environmental Hazards
Reading: Pellow, Resisting Global Toxics, 1-72
**Presentation 4**

M Nov 23  Environmental Justice and the Politics of Difference
Reading: Pellow, Resisting Global Toxics, 73-146
**Presentation 5**

W Nov 25  Environmental Justice and the Politics of Difference
Reading: Pellow, Resisting Global Toxics, 147-243

F Nov 27  No Class – Thanksgiving Break

ACTIVISM, CITIZENSHIP AND AMERICAN STUDIES

M Nov 30  Identity and Social Justice Activism
Reading: Bhattachariya, et al., “Why gender matters” (BB)

W Dec 2  Identity and Social Justice Activism
**Presentation 6**

F Dec 4  Making Change Work
Reading: Cohen, Cathy, “Death and Rebirth of Movement” (BB)
**Presentation 7**

M Dec 7  Making Change Work
Guest lecture by Evangeline Heiliger, Visiting Asst. Prof. of CAS
Reading: Heiliger, “Queer Economies,” (BB)

W Dec 9  Transnational Activism and Rights Discourse
Reading: Das Gupta, “Rights in a Transnational Era,” 402-423 (BB)

F Dec 11  Social Justice and the Legacies of Multiculturalism
**Presentation 8**

W Dec 16  Final Essay due to BB by 4pm
***REMINDER: No late essays will be accepted without an Incomplete from the Dean of Studies***
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ARTICLES


