CAST 100
Introduction to Comparative American Studies

Professor Shelley Lee
Writing Associate Lara Griffin

Spring 2015
MWF 9:00 – 9:50 KING 327

Mural at Chicano Park, San Diego, CA

2AR, 2SS, CD, W-INT

Instructor office hours: MW 10:00 – 11:30
King 141-G
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DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES
Discussions about the nature and substance of American history, identity, and culture, as well as the persistence of inequality in our society, remain as salient and vexing as ever. Whether it is the United States’ military actions to stop ISIS in the Middle East, debates about immigration reform, or the most recent incident of state-sanctioned racialized violence, we are continually brought back to questions about who we are as Americans, our role in the world, what divides and unites us, and what we believe, owe one another, and envision as our future.

This course introduces students to major questions, concerns, and approaches in the interdisciplinary field of Comparative American Studies, while in the process developing informed perspectives on some of the pressing national issues of the day. We will begin with an overview of the emergence and evolution of American Studies in the academy, and then—with history starting as a foundation for each unit—explore different thematic areas that represent recent directions and critical approaches that have increasingly characterized the field. With empire, the state, justice, culture, identity, and the transnational/post-national as our guiding frameworks, students will develop analytical tools through which to examine U.S. political, social, and cultural practices and formations, with particular attention on voices and groups that have been historically marginalized and disenfranchised.

Rather than providing comprehensive surveys of topics, course materials will explore case studies through which to gain an introduction to the broader themes and puzzle through some of the theoretical and methodological approaches used in American Studies. In class meetings, lectures will contextualize and situate topics and discussions will allow students to work through and debate ideas together. Assignments are designed to create opportunities for critical reading, writing, and thinking.
The objectives of this course are:
- to provide an introduction to the field of Comparative American Studies;  
- to introduce comparative approaches to methodologies, histories, and identities;
- to situate understandings of U.S. history and place in the world through analytical frameworks such as nationalism, colonialism, imperialism, militarization, and globalization;
- to understand and utilize keywords in the field;
- to approach an exploration of the diversity of experiences across various social and identity groups;
- to develop reading, writing and communications skills.

READINGS
The following books are available at Oberlin College Bookstore and on reserve at Mudd.

Carlos Bulosan, *America is in the Heart: A Personal History* (University of Washington Press, 2014)

Other required readings are available on Blackboard.

GRADING

**Blackboard posts (5%)**. A small group will start class with a brief conversation about the day’s reading. You will sign up for your dates ahead of time, and over the semester, will have participated in these four times. Prior to the meeting for which you have signed up, post to Blackboard a short paragraph on the reading by 11:00 PM. Demonstrate that you thoughtfully considered the materials and can relate them to the course’s broader themes. If there is more than one chapter or essay, characterize the readings as a whole. Was there a unifying theme? If you read pieces by different authors, did they have different takes on the subject? If you read chapters from a book, what is the argument the author is developing? In addition to these questions, you should share any other impressions and questions. I will draw on these for our start of class conversations. This requirement is not graded, but posts and comments that fail to demonstrate substance, thoughtfulness, and engagement will not receive credit.

**Team presentations (15%)**. Working with a team of 4-5 peers, you will be responsible for a presentation, roughly 20 minutes in length about a social movement connected to the unit on rights, freedom, and justice. You and your team will decide on which movement to explore (something we have not already covered in class) and present your findings. You are encouraged to incorporate slides, handouts, and other material, though you should not use up too much of your time with clips. The team will receive one grade, and you will be evaluated on organization, clarity, use of time, and ability to engage the class.

**Attendance and participation (10%)**. Attendance and participation are required. Do show your respect for the class by being on time, prepared, and attentive. The attendance portion of your grade will be based on sign up sheets circulated at the beginning of class, so it is your responsibility to sign your name if you were in class. You can clear up to three undocumented absences with a make up assignment (to be arranged with me before or immediately after an absence). Otherwise each unexcused absence will result in a deduction of three points from your final grade. Excessive tardiness and disruptiveness will also negatively affect your grade. On participation, strive to be a thoughtful discussant, active contributor, and attentive listener. Though this is a large class, there will be numerous opportunities in each session for you to participate.
**Reading and lecture quizzes (30%).** These are content based, and are meant to check to see that you are retaining key concepts, information, and debates presented in readings and class.

**Essays (45%).** You will write three 5-page essays, each asking you to discuss an American Studies keyword, but through different methods of analysis. More information will be given in class, but in short, the first will be focused on a primary source, the second on a secondary source, and the third on ethnographic or auto-ethnographic observation and reflection.

Lara Griffin, the class writing associate (History major, CAS minor) will hold workshops for each paper assignment and be available for individual consulting. These workshops are mandatory and you are also required to schedule at least ONE individual meeting with Lara during the semester.

*Grades for coursework are based on displayed intellectual content, originality of thought, mastery of materials, and quality of expression. Due dates are firm and the Blackboard threads to which you will upload your papers will disappear after the deadline. Although I will accept late papers, these will be penalized 1/3 of a grade for each day late and not receive extensive written feedback.*

**HONOR SYSTEM**

By enrolling in this class, you agree to abide by Oberlin’s Honor System. This means that you will not plagiarize or cheat on assignments, and that all written work will include a signed honor pledge (“I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in the assignment”). On papers, you must cite all written sources that you consulted, 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. Failure to adhere to the Honor Code will result in a grade penalty, withholding of a grade, and/or reporting to the Student Honor Committee. Oberlin’s honor policy can be viewed at [http://www.oberlin.edu/studentpolicies/honorcode/](http://www.oberlin.edu/studentpolicies/honorcode/)

**CLASSROOM RULES AND ETIQUETTE**

While individual students bring their varied backgrounds, we are also a learning community, brought together by a common interest and desire to learn. I understand that course materials may sometimes raise issues that are controversial or evoke strong feelings. Therefore, I ask that everyone commit to making this classroom a space for people to explore new ideas, take intellectual risks, and engage in open and honest debate.

Please do your part to make the classroom environment a productive and welcoming one. Be mindful of others and refrain from behaving in a way that is willfully disruptive or disrespectful (e.g., interrupting others, badgering, and making ad hominem attacks). It is also distracting and rude to engage in personal conversation or other diversions unrelated to class activity. Students who persist in such behavior may be asked to leave the class.

Leaving the room during class is also distracting, so please take care of your needs before class to avoid this disruption. I understand that compelling personal needs may force you to leave the room, so if this is the case, do inform me of any concerns. Otherwise, habitually leaving the room without explanation will be counted as absences.

The use of cell phones and other mobile devices in class is disruptive, and therefore prohibited, except in emergencies. Turn off your devices or put them on silent mode. Students are permitted to use computers for note-taking purposes or reading reference only. Although recent studies show that
students absorb knowledge more effectively when writing notes by hand and having a laptop open during lectures often inhibits the learning of both the laptop user and students around them, I am not instituting a laptop ban at this time. I do strongly encourage you to take hand notes. If I receive complaints that computers in class are creating a disruptive learning atmosphere, I will have no choice but to implement a ban.

**ACADEMIC INCOMPLETES**
If you find that you will be unable to complete the class for any reason, the College does allow two kinds of incompletes, educational and emergency. To find which applies to you, consult the Dean of Studies website: http://new.oberlin.edu/office/dean-of-studies/policies/incompletes.dot

**DISABILITY SERVICES**
The college will make accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should notify the Office of Disability Services located in Peters G-27/G-28 (440-774-5588) and their instructor of any disability related needs.
WEEK 1: WHAT IS AMERICAN STUDIES?

Feb. 2 Course introduction and overview
Feb. 4 The history of American Studies
   Reading: Wise, “‘Paradigm Dramas’ in American Studies” (Bb); Bulosan, America is in the Heart, Ch. 1-4
Feb. 6 Recent directions and stakes
   Reading: Deloria, “Broadway and Main” (Bb); Bulosan, America is in the Heart, Ch. 5-8

WEEKS 2 & 3: AMERICAN EMPIRE

Feb. 9 Republican virtue and race in the new nation
   Reading: Streeby, “Empire” (Bb); Takaki, “Within the ‘Bowels’ of the Republic” (Bb)
Feb. 11 An empire of liberty?
   Reading: Takaki, “The Masculine Thrust Toward Asia” (Bb); Bulosan, America is in the Heart, Ch. 9-12
Feb. 13 Manifest Destiny then and now
   Reading: Park and Pellow, Slums of Aspen, Ch. 1-2
Feb. 16 Imperial spectacles
   Reading: Bulosan, America is in the Heart, Ch. 13-19; Trask, “Lovely Hula Hands” (Bb)
Feb. 18 QUIZ #1
Feb. 20 Guest speaker Wendy Kozol, Professor and Director of Comparative American Studies
   Reading: Kozol, “Precarity in the Sky” (Bb)

WEEKS 4 & 5: THE STATE

Feb. 23 Writing workshop for paper #1
   Reading: Bulosan, America is in the Heart, Ch. 19-25; Canaday, The Straight State, Ch. 1
Feb. 25 American gatekeeping
   Reading: Thomas, “State” (Bb); Canaday, The Straight State, Ch. 2
Feb. 27 Citizenship
   Reading: Canaday, The Straight State, Ch. 3; Waldinger, “Transforming Foreigners into Americans” (Bb)
Mar. 2 Gender, patriarchy, and the state
   Reading: Bulosan, America is in the Heart, Ch. 26-29; Canaday, The Straight State, Ch. 4
Mar. 4 Criminalization and mass incarceration
   Reading: Rios, “The Hypercriminalization of Black and Latino Male Youth” (Bb)
Mar. 6 State of surveillance
   Reading: Kaplan, “Precision Targets” (Bb)
   PAPER #1 DUE

WEEKS 6 & 7: JUSTICE, RIGHTS, AND FREEDOM

Mar. 9 Understanding and challenging inequality
   Reading: Smallwood, “Freedom” (Bb) Bulosan, America is in the Heart, Ch. 30-37
Mar. 11 Racial liberation in the 20th and 21st centuries
Reading: Raiford, “Come Let Us Build a New World Together” (Bb); Tang, “A Gulf Unites Us” (Bb)

Mar. 13 Intersectional justice
Reading: Chun, Lipsitz, Chin, “Intersectionality as a Social Movement Strategy” (Bb); Bulosan, *America is in the Heart*, Ch. 38-41
GROUP PRESENTATION

Mar. 16 Immigrant rights
Reading: Park and Pellow, *Slums of Aspen*, Ch. 3; Bulosan, *America is in the Heart*, Ch. 42-49

Mar. 18 Guest lecture by Renee Romano, Professor of History, Africana Studies, and Comparative American Studies
Reading: Romano, “Reopening Civil Rights Era Murder Cases,” and “From Legal Justice to Social Justice (Bb)

Mar. 20 Environmental justice as social justice
Reading: Park and Pellow, *Slums of Aspen*, Ch. 4-5
GROUP PRESENTATION

****WEEK 8: SPRING BREAK****

**WEEK 9: JUSTICE AND RIGHTS (cont’d)**

Mar. 30 Neoliberalism and the debt regime
Reading: Duggan, “Neoliberalism” (Bb); Heintz and Balakrishnan, “Debt, Power and Crisis” (Bb)

Apr. 1 Protest in postmodern times
Reading: Bennett, *The Personalization of Politics,* (Bb) Millner-Larsen, “Demandless Times” (Bb)

Apr. 3 QUIZ #2

**WEEKS 10 & 11: AMERICAN CULTURES**

Apr. 6 The role of racial appropriation in American culture
Reading: Roediger, “White Skins, Black Masks” (Bb); Deloria, “Counterculture Indians in the New Age” (Bb); Yudice, “Culture” (Bb)

Apr. 8 Culture of whiteness
Reading: Jacobson, “Golden Door, Silver Screen” (Bb); Lipsitz, “White Fear: OJ Simpson” (Bb)

Apr. 10 Our racial customs
Reading: Bonilla-Silva, “The Strange Enigma of Race in Contemporary America” (Bb)
GROUP PRESENTATION
PAPER #2 DUE

Apr. 13 Art and social transformation
Reading: Collins, “Activists Who Yearn for Art that Transforms” (Bb)
EXTRA CREDIT OPPORTUNITY: Roger Waldinger talk, April 14 (*more info in class*)

Apr. 15 Music, community, and identity
Reading: Luhr, “Metal Missionaries to the Nation” (Bb); Cowie and Boehm, “Dead Man’s Town” (Bb)
GROUP PRESENTATION

Apr. 17 Consumer culture
Reading: Johnson, “Physique Pioneers” (Bb); Cheng, “SGV Dreamgirl” (Bb)
GROUP PRESENTATION

WEEKS 12 & 13: AMERICAN IDENTITIES

Apr. 20 Culture wars and the search for American identity
   Reading: Kaplan, “Identity” (Bb); Levine, “From the Melting Pot to the Pluralist Vision” (Bb)

Apr. 22 Writing workshop for Paper #3
   Reading: Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins” (Bb); Giroux, “Living Dangerously” (Bb)

Apr. 24 No class

Apr. 27 Guest lecture with Pablo Mitchell, Professor of History
   Reading: TBA

Apr. 29 Claiming and challenging normativity
   Reading: Pascoe, “Dude, You’re a Fag” (Bb); Bettie, “Women Without Class” (Bb)
   GROUP PRESENTATION

May 1 Beyond the ethno-racial pentagon: The meanings of being mixed
   Reading: Rockquemore, Brunsma, Delgado, “Racing to Theory or Retheorizing Race?” (Bb)
   Jones, “Who Are We?” (Bb)
   GROUP PRESENTATION

WEEK 14: BEYOND THE NATION: GLOBAL AND POST-NATIONAL AMERICAN STUDIES

May 4 Imagining a post-national American Studies
   Smith, “American Studies Without America” (Bb); Rowe, “Post-nationalism, Globalism, and the New American Studies”

May 6 QUIZ #3

May 8 Course wrap-up
   GROUP PRESENTATION

Final paper (paper #3) is due Thursday, May 14 at 11:00 AM