CAST 100: Introduction to Comparative American Studies
Fall 2014
MWF 9:00-9:50 // King 337

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Office Hours: MW: 10-12; Th: 2:30-4:30; and by appointment
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**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

The celebrated 2008 presidential election of Barack Obama sparked numerous debates about the nation’s relationship to historical and contemporary inequality. These debates continue today yet with a different inflection as inequalities of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability and citizenship status persist, a persistence made emblematic this summer by the thousands of child immigrants on the border trying to enter the U.S. as well as recent events in Ferguson, Missouri. 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?

This course takes up these questions and contradictions by introducing students to key questions and approaches in the interdisciplinary field of Comparative American Studies. We will learn analytical tools through which to examine U.S. cultural and social formations, paying particular attention to voices and groups that have been historically excluded from power. We will draw on scholarship in Critical Race Studies, Ethnic Studies, Gender and Women’s Studies, and Queer Studies to examine intersections of key axes of identity and power. The texts we read are not meant to provide a comprehensive chronological survey of these topics, but rather to provide case studies to think through various theoretical and methodological approaches to the analysis of the United States. 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 and its relationship to other politicized scholarly projects;
• to introduce comparative approaches to methodologies, histories, and identities;
• to situate the U.S. in a global perspective through analytical frameworks such as nationalism, colonialism, imperialism, militarization, and globalization;
• to understand and utilize key terms in the field of American studies, including: intersectionality, agency and structure, and nation, nationalism, and transnationalism;
• to explore the manifestation of power through historical and social formations such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability;
• 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 and honest 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. For an excellent discussion, see Andrea Smith, “Beyond the Pros and Cons of Trigger Warnings: Collectivizing Healing,” July 13, 2014. http://andrea366.wordpress.com/2014/07/13/beyond-the-pros-and-cons-of-trigger-warnings-collectivizing-healing/

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.

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 (10%)**
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.

**VISUAL ANALYSIS ESSAY (15%), due to BB on September 26 by 9am.**
This assignment asks you to write a 3-4 page paper that analyzes on image from either *Life and Art in Early America*, or *Latin American and Latino Art at the Allen*, currently on display at the Allen Art Museum. You should analyze how various aspects of the image combine to convey particular meanings about identity and nation. This essay should incorporate theoretical constructs and historical frameworks from class discussions and readings. See assignment on BB.

**MIDTERM (20%), due to BB on October 17 by 4pm.**
This 4-6 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 an aspect of social justice movements (see schedule of classes for specific dates). Within this broad topic, each team will identify a particular social movement to research and present to the class. See assignment on BB.

**FINAL PROJECT (30%), due to BB no later than Dec. 17 at 4pm.**
This two-part assignment will include 1) a 3-4 page essay on identity and social justice activism and 2) a 4 page autobiographical graphic narrative about privilege.

**EXTRA CREDIT ASSIGNMENT.**
Attend a CAST-sponsored event 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 word-processed, 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. After I make comments and post grades, I will inform you via email so you may retrieve your essay annotated with my comments and your grade.

Summary of Grading Policy:
 Participation .......................... 10%
 Online Learning Group ............ 10%
 Visual Analysis ......................... 15%
 Midterm ................................. 20%
 Team Presentation ................... 15%
 Final Project ........................... 30%

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. All work must include the statement: “I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment”
For quizzes and exams, this means you must complete the assignment independently of other students. For papers, 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.

Students with Disabilities
If you need disability-related accommodations for your work in this class, please let me know.
Support is available through Student Academic Services. Please contact the Office of Disability Services for assistance in developing a plan to address your academic needs.

Accommodations for 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

COLONIALISM, IMPERIALISM, AND STATE FORMATION

W Sept. 3  Introductions
F Sept. 5  Settler Colonialism
   Reading: Wilder, “Moving In” and “Indians in the House,” 71-79; 132-146 (BB); King, “Borders” (BB); Kazanjian, “Colonial” (BB)

M Sept. 8  Settler Colonialism
   Reading: Trask, “The Color of Violence,” 8-16 (BB); Mikdashi, "What is Settler Colonialism?" http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/6453/what-is-settler-colonialism

W Sept. 10  Reservation System and Blood Quantum
   Reading: Tallbear, 1-66

F Sept. 12  Identity and Genetics
   Reading: Tallbear, 67-144
**Presentation 1**

**Presentation 2**

**Presentation 3**

**Presentation 4**
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tr>
<td>W Oct. 15</td>
<td>Militarism, the War on Terror and the Prison Industrial Complex</td>
<td>Reading: Rodriguez, “(Non)Scenes of Captivity,” 9-32 (BB)</td>
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<td>F Oct. 17</td>
<td>No Class</td>
<td><strong>Midterm Essay Due to BB by 4pm</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Oct. 20-24</strong></td>
<td>**** NO CLASSES FALL BREAK *****</td>
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<td>W Oct. 29</td>
<td>Biopolitics and Environmental Disasters</td>
<td>Reading: Lipsitz, “Learning from New Orleans” (BB)</td>
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<td>F Oct. 31</td>
<td>Living in a Disaster Zone</td>
<td>Reading: Ward, Salvage the Bones, first half</td>
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<td><strong>Presentation 5</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>M Nov. 3</td>
<td>Living in a Disaster Zone</td>
<td>Reading: Ward, Salvage the Bones, second half</td>
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<td>W Nov. 5</td>
<td>Labor, Globalization, and Environmental Hazards</td>
<td>Reading: Pellow, Resisting Global Toxics, chap. 6 (BB)</td>
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<td><strong>Presentation 6</strong></td>
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<td>F Nov. 7</td>
<td>No Class</td>
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<td>M Nov. 10</td>
<td>Environmental Justice and the Politics of Difference</td>
<td><strong>Presentation 6</strong></td>
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<td>W Nov. 12</td>
<td>Environmental Justice and the Politics of Difference</td>
<td>Reading: Sze, Noxious New York, chap. 6 (BB)</td>
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<td><strong>IV.</strong></td>
<td><strong>IDENTITY, REPRESENTATION, RESISTANCE</strong></td>
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<td>F Nov. 14</td>
<td>Personal/Political Visibilities</td>
<td>Reading: Kaplan, “Identity” (BB); Shaun Tan, The Arrival (all)</td>
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<td>M Nov. 17</td>
<td>Personal/Political Visibilities</td>
<td>Reading: Eli Clare, Exile and Pride, ix-xiv, 1-76</td>
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<td><strong>Presentation 7</strong></td>
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W Nov. 19  Border Crossings and Being Between  
Reading: Eli Clare, Exile and Pride, 119-171

F Nov. 21  Border Crossings and Being Between  
Reading: Abel, La Perdida, 1 – 86

M Nov. 24  Gender, Sexuality, and Selfhood  
Reading: Abel, La Perdida, 87 – 175  
**Presentation 8**

W Nov. 26  The Politics of Social Location  
Reading: Abel, La Perdida, 176 – 256

F Nov. 28  No Class – Thanksgiving Break

M Dec. 1  Identity and Social Justice Activism  
Reading: Bhattacharjya, et al., “Why gender matters” (BB)

W Dec. 3  Making Change Work  
Reading: Cohen, Cathy, “Death and Rebirth of Movement” (BB)

F Dec. 5  Making Change Work  
Reading: Heiliger, “Queer Economies,” (BB)  
Final Project Proposal Due

M Dec. 8  Transnational Activism and Rights Discourse  
Reading: Das Gupta, “Rights in a Transnational Era,” 402-423 (BB)

W Dec. 10  Transnational Activism and Rights Discourse  
Reading: Cacho, Social Death, conclusion (BB); Buff, “The Undergraduate Railroad,” 301-314 (BB)

F Dec 12  Social Justice and the Legacies of Multiculturalism

W Dec 17  Final Exam Essay due to BB by 4pm  
***REMEMBER: No late projects will be accepted without an incomplete form the Dean of Studies***
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ARTICLES


