George Lipsitz has described American Studies as a “capacious and sometimes even ungainly configuration” of interdisciplinary inquiry into the national cultures of the United States (Lipsitz, 2015, “What is American Studies?”). This course invites Comparative American Studies majors to explore these “capacious and sometimes even ungainly configurations” and engage with the different ways American Studies scholars have taken up some of the most troubling, controversial, and enduring questions in American intellectual and public life. Some of these concerns include how do young African American girls navigate and resist the ways poverty, racism, and violence shape their lives and how do they imagine and forge alternative different futures for themselves? How and why has radio become an indispensable vehicle for Latin American immigrants to navigate an increasingly hostile and nativist environment? What happens when discourses of safety LGBTQ activists deploy have the unintended consequences of facilitating racialized social control and punitive governance that negatively affect communities of color? And how has the long history of U.S. geopolitical and imperial power shaped the lives of residents in places like Hawaii and the Philippines, and how do they inform Americans’ understandings of war and suffering? These are some of the critical questions we will consider this semester. We will do so by paying particular attention to the various ways American Studies scholars have studied and analyzed these problems and by focusing specifically on answering the following question: What are the different research methods and tools we can use to study inequality, identities, imperial and colonial power, resistance, and political and cultural responses to political economic shifts that shape American cultures both in the U.S. and transnationally? Through rigorous and sustained attention to the various methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks in American Studies, we will develop insight into the relationship between scholarship, activism and social change that has animated and informed much of American Studies scholarship over the past century.

Course Goals:

- to deepen students’ understanding of the history of American Studies scholarship and its development since the 1930s.
- to expand familiarity with theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, and keywords central to the Comparative American Studies major.
- to locate American geopolitical, imperial, and military power within different historical moments
- to explore the relationship between interdisciplinary and disciplinary scholarly approaches to research
• to reflect on the relationship between scholarly work and broader social movements and activism beyond the academy
• to provide students with the skills to engage thoughtfully and rigorously with controversial topics and issues in American public life.

REQUIRED READINGS

All textbooks can be purchased at the college bookstore. Additional articles are available on Blackboard.

I. CLASS POLICIES

Discussions
The success of this course is contingent on your thoughtful engagement with the texts and with the comments, critiques and issues raised by your classmates and your instructor. Therefore, your attendance, timely arrival, and informed participation in class are absolutely required and constitute 10% of your final grade.

Throughout the course, we will explore a number of controversial issues about race, immigration, inequality and identity that may provoke heated debate, discomfort, and disagreement. My goal is not to smooth over these differences; rather it is for us to create collectively a space for respectful, engaged and honest dialogue and to help you develop skills to articulate your positions and engage others respectfully. To that end, I ask that each member of the class respond thoughtfully and carefully with each other and with various course topics.

Please be aware that some issues in this course may be personally difficult for people to discuss. I cannot always anticipate what those difficult topics will be, but I will do my best to respond appropriately if these situations arise, and I encourage you to come and speak with me if you have any concerns.

Attendance Policies
If you anticipate missing class, please inform me by email of your absence prior to class. Two unexcused absences will reduce your participation grade by 1/3 (from an A to an A-, for example).
I absolutely require students to arrive to class on time. This is essential for fostering a respectful learning environment. If you are arrive to class once class has begun, you will be considered absent.

Classroom Etiquette
Once you arrive to seminar, please turn off all cell phones. Texting is not permitted. Laptops are useful (and sometimes necessary) for taking notes and reading assigned articles, and, therefore, are allowed in class. I ask that you use your laptops for that purpose only. Students found to be using class time checking email, surfing the web, or engaging in social networking will be asked not to bring their laptops to class in the future.

I value and welcome honest debate about controversial issues. I may not always agree with various perspectives students may share, nor do I assume everyone will agree with me or with each other at all times. The goal of this class is not unanimity of opinion, but to learn the ways American Studies scholars have theorized and studied American cultural practices, histories and power and to discuss these issues in rigorous and productive ways. I value respectfulness, kindness, and honest engagement with questions that are incredibly important for us as a class to think through carefully. *If these are not values you share or believe will be difficult to abide by, please come and talk with me after the first day of class.*

Meetings Outside of Class
My office hours will be posted on my office door in King 141D. I encourage you all to come and speak with me often. In Week 5 we will not meet as a class; rather I will meet with each of you individually to discuss your experiences in the course and your ideas for your final project proposal.

Course Deadlines
All assignments must be completed on time. Papers not turned in at the specified time on the specified date will be considered late and will be penalized 1/3 grade for each day it is overdue. Late papers will not receive written comments, and must include on the first page the date you turned in the assignment. On the rare occasion I agree to grant an extension on an assignment, you must include a cover sheet stating that you were granted an extension and the new due date. If you fail to do so, the assignment will be regarded as late and penalized accordingly.

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
Assignments will not be accepted past the end of reading period without an approved incomplete from the Dean of studies. Extensions of final projects need an approved incomplete from the Dean of Studies. These are College-wide policies and there are no exceptions.
Honor Code
The policies described in the Oberlin College Honor Code and Honor System apply to this class. Written work must include proper citations and must be the product of your own work. You are also required to include the following statement on all written assignments: "I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment."

If you have any questions about how to properly cite sources or about the Honor Code, please feel free to approach me. For more information on the Honor Code, see http://www.oberlin.edu/students/student_pages/honor_code2.html

Students Needing Special Assistance
Please speak with me if you need disability-related accommodations in this course. Student Academic Services is also an important resource for students needing academic assistance. Please contact Jane Boomer, Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities, Peters G27, extension 58467 for assistance developing a plan to address your academic needs

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 a class, please come and speak with me.

II. COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

1. Class Facilitation
By week 3 students will sign up to facilitate the discussion of one of the 10 class discussions of the 5 required monographs. These groups will consist of 2-3 students and you will be required to meet with me prior to your class facilitation. You will also be responsible for writing an essay about the reading for that day.

2. Reflection Essays
In this course you will be asked to write a number of essays that allow you to explore and articulate your thoughts about theoretical and methodological approaches in American Studies. You will share your reflections both online and in person with a small group of students from the class as well as with me. These reflection essays will not receive a grade from me, but you are required to complete all essays that together comprise 10% of your final grade.

Reflection Essay #1 Due Friday September 11.
The first two weeks of the course provide a history of American Studies, Asian American critiques of the field, and examples of American Studies scholars’ engagement with enduring questions of race and immigration. What brings you to American Studies at Oberlin? What motivated you to major in CAS? What are your hopes, expectations and concerns about your choice to pursue CAS as a major? What do you hope to gain from your experiences in CAS?
Approximately 3 pages
• Essay due on Blackboard, 5pm Friday September 11
• Reflection on group discussion due on Blackboard, 5pm Friday September 18.
Reflection Essay #2 Due October 8th
In *Shapeshifters* Aimee Cox explicit in analyzing the promises and pitfalls of activism and advocacy. She also describes at length her own social location as a worker and researcher among young, impoverished girls in Detroit. It is not uncommon for people to frame academic work as diametrically opposed to activism. What is your understanding of the relationship between activism, academic work, and advocacy? How has this text either challenged your thoughts or provided new ways of thinking of this relationship. *Approximately 3 pages.*

- Essay due on Blackboard, 5pm Friday October 8.
- Reflection on group discussion due on Blackboard, 5pm Friday October 17.

Reflection Essay #3 Due Friday October 30.
This week’s readings include various approaches to analyzing and understanding the complexity of transnational adoption. What did you find to be the most useful ways and approaches of the readings and why? What kinds of questions remained and how might you find a way to answer them?

- Essay due on Blackboard, 5pm Friday October 30.
- Reflection on group discussion due on Blackboard, 5pm Friday November 6.

3. Analytical Papers
In addition to the reflection essays, you are required to write three analytical papers exploring specific questions of method, methodology and theories in American Studies. *Each paper constitutes 15% of your final grade.*

**Paper #1 Due Friday September 25**
Choose an essay from Week 2 and explain how it reflects theories and methods in American Studies. Be sure to discuss the methods, methodologies and epistemological questions guiding the analysis as well as the theories and frameworks the author(s) employ. (5 pages maximum)

**Paper #2 Due the day of your group facilitation**
Each of the books we read reflects current scholarship and questions in American Studies. This essay should provide a clear articulation of the author’s argument, a succinct discussion of methods and methodology, and a thoughtful engagement with the theories and frameworks the author employs. Also discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the monograph. (5 pages maximum)

**Paper #3 Due the last day of class**
Choose one of the essays/texts from the class and write an essay about how you would use a different methodological approach and/or theoretical framework from the course to study the same/similar question. *Students will share their analysis with the class on the day corresponding to the essay they choose.* (5 pages maximum)

3. Project Proposal
In addition to the analytical and reflection essays, each student will develop a research proposal that sets out a framework to investigate a specific question/problem in American Studies. To this end, you will be asked to complete two shorter assignments—one essay stating your research question/problem and the methods you propose for this research and a second that locates this
research in a broader scholarly literature. During our individual meetings in Week 5 you will be asked to discuss some of your ideas for your project proposal.

- **Week 5**: Research Statement/question due during individual meetings
- **Proposal Statement, Sunday November 6**: Provide a brief statement of your research question and the methods and methodology with annotated bibliography of 3 sources (NB: Please note that the submission for this essay is a Sunday rather than on a Friday).
- **Literature Review, November 20**: Essay locating your research within broader literature and American Studies scholarship
- **Thursday December 17, 4pm**: Final Project Proposal Due.

### SUMMARY OF KEY COURSE DEADLINES

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>Reflection Essay #1</td>
<td>Friday September 11, 5pm</td>
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<td>Essay #1</td>
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<td>Reflection Essay #2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflection Essay #3</td>
<td>Friday October 30, 5pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proposal Statement and Literature Review</td>
<td>Sunday November 8, 5pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Project</td>
<td>Thursday December 17, 4pm</td>
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### REQUIREMENTS

- Participation and attendance: 10%
- Group Facilitation: 10%
- Three Reflection Essays: 10%
- Three Analytical Papers: 45%
- Project proposal Assignments: 10%
- Final project: 15%

### CLASS SCHEDULE

**Week 1: American Studies as Discipline and Practice**

- **September 1**: Introduction
- **September 3**: Developments in American Studies
  - Lipsitz, “What is American Studies?”
  - Lipsitz, “In the Midnight Hour”
  - Lowe, “The International Within the National”

**Week 2: New and Familiar American Crises: Race and Immigration**

- **September 8**: Black Lives Matter: From Florida to Ferguson
  - Cacho, “Presumption of White Innocence”
  - Bonilla and Rosa, “#Ferguson: Digital Protest, Hashtag Ethnography, and the Racial Politics of Social Media in the United States”
September 10: **Immigration, Nativism and the Deportation Nation**
- Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo, “Latino Immigrant Men and the Deportation Crisis”

*Reflection Paper #1 Due, Friday September 11.*

**Week 3: Methods, Methodologies and Epistemologies I**
September 15: **Feminist Ethnographic Practice**
- Hess-Biber and Leavy, “And Invitation to Qualitative Research” AND “Approaches to Qualitative Research”
- Craven and Davis, “Introduction to Feminist Activist Ethnography”

September 17: **Participatory Action Research in Theory and Practice**
- Hough and Kalsem, “Theorizing Legal Participatory Action Research”
- Chun, Lipsitz and Shin, “Intersectionality as a Social Movement Strategy”

**Week 4: Methods, Methodology and Epistemologies II**
September 22: **Queering American Studies**
- Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz, “What’s Queer About Queer Studies?”
- Ferguson, “Of Our Normative Strivings”

September 24: **Methodological Insights from Native, Arab and Ethnic Studies**
- Simpson and Smith, “Introduction,” *Theorizing Native Studies*
- Naber, “Imperial Whiteness and the Diasporas of Empire”
- Ramirez, “Learning and Unlearning from Ethnic Studies”

*Essay #1 Due September 25*

**Week 5: Individual Meetings**
Each student will meet with me for 20 minutes during Week 5. We will schedule these meetings in the second week of class. You will be required to bring a brief statement of your question/topic for your research proposal.

**Week 6: Ethnographic Insights into Gender, Race and Citizenship**
October 6: Cox, *Shape Shifters*, pp. 1-121
October 8: Cox, *Shape Shifters*, pp. 122-242

*Reflection Paper #2 Due, Friday October 8th, 5pm, Blackboard.*

**Week 7: Sexuality, Race, and Neoliberal Discourses of Safety in Urban America**

**********October 17—October 25 FALL Break**********
Week 9: Multi- and Interdisciplinary Approaches to Analyzing Adoption
October 27: Adoption in Historical and Transnational Context
  http://obis.oberlin.edu/record=b4945245~S4
- Woo, “Imagining Kin”
- Goldstein, “Possessive Investment”
October 29: Researching Transnational Adoption
- Dorow and Swiffen, “Blood and Desire”
- Myers, “‘Real Families’”

Reflection Paper #2 Due, Friday October 30th, 5pm, Blackboard.

Week 10: Locating and Researching Immigrant Struggles and Activism
November 3: Casillas, Sounds of Belonging, pp. 1-82
November 5: Casillas, Sounds of Belonging, pp. 83-152
Proposal Statement Due Sunday November 8th, 5pm, Blackboard

Week 11: Securitization, Tourism and Colonial Legacies
November 10: Vicuña, Securing Paradise, pp. 1-114
November 12: Vicuña, Securing Paradise, pp. 115-223

Weeks 12: Visualizing War and American Military Power
November 17: Kozol, Distant Wars Visible
November 19: Kozol, Distant Wars Visible, discussion with Professor Kozol, Director, Comparative American Studies Program.

Literature Review Due, Friday November 20th, 5pm, Blackboard

Week 13: Peer Writing Workshop
November 24: Peer Writing Workshop on Research Proposal
November 26: THANKSGIVING

Week 14: Debates In and Beyond American Studies Classrooms I
December 1: Spade and Willse, “Sex, Gender, and War in an Age of Multicultural Imperialism”
December 3: Unzueta and Seiff, “Disrupting the Dream

Week 15: Debates In and Beyond American Studies Classrooms II
December 9: Perez Huber and Soloranzo, “Visualizing Everyday Racism”
December 11: Final Thoughts

FINAL PROJECTS DUE THURSDAY DECEMBER 17, 4PM, BLACKBOARD