CAST 200
Theories and Methods in American Studies
Fall 2016
TR 1:30-2:45

Professor Gina M. Pérez
Office Hours: TR 11-12; W 2-4
King 141D, x58982
Email: gina.perez@oberlin.edu

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 learn about both historical developments and current theories and methodologies in the field of American Studies. Throughout the course of the semester, we will identify questions and problems American Studies scholars have taken up and engage with the different ways they have framed and studied such questions. Some of these concerns include: How do we explain the persistence of racism and its various manifestations in contemporary American? What happens when the discourses of safety LGBTQ activists deploy have the unintended consequences of facilitating racialized social control and punitive governance that negatively affect communities of color? How do we understand the structural forces that set in motion displacement and the settlement of displaced peoples in areas of extreme poverty and racial segregation? And how has the long history of U.S. geopolitical and imperial power shaped the lives of residents throughout the world, 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 also pay particular attention to the various ways American Studies scholars have studied and analyzed these problems and focus specifically on answering the following question: What are the different research methods and tools we can use to study inequality, identities, resistance, and political and cultural responses to political economic shifts that shape American cultures both in the U.S. and transnationally? By exploring various methodological approaches and theoretical principles 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 introduce students to the history of American Studies scholarship and understand its development since the 1930s.
• to establish shared keywords, theoretical principles and methodological approaches central to the Comparative American Studies major.
• to understand and apply key concepts in American Studies scholarship
• 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 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 12 class discussions of the 6 required monographs. These groups will consist of 3-4 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 15% of your final grade.

**Reflection Essay #1 Due Friday September 9.**
The first two weeks of the course provide a history of American Studies 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 9
   - Reflection on group discussion due on Blackboard, 5pm Friday September 16.

**Reflection Essay #2 Due October 7th**
According to Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Americans often point to the election of Barak Obama as proof that racism in America no longer exists and that we now live in in a color-blind society. Bonilla-Silva argues that America is not a post-racial society and that, in fact, racism persists in new and subtle ways. What are your thoughts about race and racism in contemporary America? If we do not live in a post-racial or color-blind society, how would you characterize the state of race relations today in the United States? And how might you talk with someone about race and racism who holds ideas different from your own? *Approximately 3 pages.*
• Essay due on Blackboard, 5pm Friday October 7.
• Reflection on group discussion due on Blackboard, 5pm Friday October 14.

**Reflection Essay #3 Due Friday October 30.**
Like Cristina Hanhardt and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Eric Tang is interested in exploring the ways race, class inequality, and public and foreign policy shape the lives of people in profound ways. One of the key features distinguishing Tang’s work is his use of oral history to engage with these questions, a method familiar within American Studies scholarship. What do you see as some of the strengths of oral history in understanding the complexity of people’s lives? What are some of the limitations to this methodological approach? How does this methodological approach allow you to understand the experiences of Cambodian refugees in the context of hypersegregation in a distinctive way? Are there ways that you believe it falls short?
• Essay due on Blackboard, 5pm Friday October 28.
• Reflection on group discussion due on Blackboard, 5pm Friday November 4.

3. **Analytical Papers**
In addition to the reflection essays, you are required to write two 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 23**
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)

4. **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
• **Literature Review, November 18:** Essay locating your research within broader literature and American Studies scholarship
• **Thursday December 15, 4pm:** Final Project Proposal Due.
### SUMMARY OF KEY COURSE DEADLINES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflection Essay #1</td>
<td>Friday September 9, 5pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay #1</td>
<td>Friday September 23, 5pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection Essay #2</td>
<td>Friday October 7, 5pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection Essay #3</td>
<td>Friday October 28, 5pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposal Statement</td>
<td>Sunday November 6, 5pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>Friday November 18, 5pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Project</td>
<td>Thursday December 15, 4pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### REQUIREMENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation and attendance</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Facilitation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Reflection Essays</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Analytical Papers</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Proposal Statement</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final project</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### CLASS SCHEDULE

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

August 30: **Introduction:** *What American Studies Can Teach Us About Orlando*

- [https://library.osu.edu/blogs/mujerestalk/page/2/](https://library.osu.edu/blogs/mujerestalk/page/2/)

September 1: **Developments in American Studies**

- Lipsitz, “What is American Studies?” (BB)
- Sze, “Engaging Contradictions” (BB)
- Tomlinson and Lipsitz, “American Studies as Accompaniment” (BB)

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

September 6: **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 8: **Immigration, Nativism and the Deportation Nation**
- Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo, “Latino Immigrant Men and the Deportation Crisis”

*Reflection Paper #1 Due, Friday September 9.*

**Week 3: Methods, Methodologies and Epistemologies I**

September 13: **Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Approaches in Research**
- Hess-Biber and Leavy, “And Invitation to Qualitative Research” AND “Approaches to Qualitative Research”
- Hill, “What is This Thing Called Interdisciplinarity?”

September 15: **Operationalizing Engaged Research: Critical Race Theory (CRT), Participatory Action Research (PAR), and Critical Prison Studies (CPS)**
- Hough and Kalsem, “Theorizing Legal Participatory Action Research”
- Chun, Lipsitz and Shin, “Intersectionality as a Social Movement Strategy”
- Gilmore, “Forgotten Places and the Seeds of Grassroots Planning”

**Week 4: Methods, Methodology and Epistemologies II**

September 20: **Queering American Studies**
- Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz, “What’s Queer About Queer Studies?”
- Ferguson, “Of Our Normative Strivings”

September 22: **Epistemological Insights from Native American and Native Pacific Studies**
- Kauanui, “Imperial Ocean”
- Denetdale, “No Explanation, No Resolution, No Answers”

*Essay #1 Due September 23*

**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: Race, Racism and Color-Blindness in America**

October 4: Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists*, preface-chapter 6
October 6: Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists*, chapters 7-11

*NB: Professor Bonilla-Silva will give a lecture on campus on Thursday October 6 at 7:30pm. You are required to attend this lecture and can refer to it for your reflection essay.*

*Reflection Paper #2 Due, Friday October 7th, 5pm, Blackboard.*

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

October 11: Hanhardt, *Safe Spaces*, pp. 1-154

***************October 17—October 25 FALL Break***************
Week 9: Oral History and Displacement
October 25: Tang, *Unsettled*, pp. 1-113

*Reflection Paper #2 Due, Friday October 28th, 5pm, Blackboard.*

Week 10: Anthropological Approaches to the Borderlands
November 1: De Leon, *The Land of Open Graves*, 1-201

*Proposal Statement Due Sunday November 6th, 5pm, Blackboard*

Week 11: Media Technologies and Migrant Resistance
November 8: Marez, *Farm Worker Futurism*
November 10: Marez, *Farm Worker Futurism*

Weeks 12: Visualizing War and American Military Power
November 15: Kozol, *Distant Wars Visible*, pp. 1-125
November 17: Kozol, *Distant Wars Visible*, pp. 127-206. Discussion with Professor Kozol, Director, Comparative American Studies Program.

*Literature Review Due, Friday November 18th, 5pm, Blackboard*

Week 13: Peer Writing Workshop
November 22: Peer Writing Workshop on Research Proposal
November 24: THANKSGIVING

Week 14: What American Studies Can Teach Us About Solidarity
December 1: Roediger, “Making Solidarity Uneasy” BB

Week 15: What American Studies Can Teach Us About Diasporas of Empire
December 6: Naber, “Imperial Whiteness and the Diasporas of Empire” BB

*Suggested reading for the break:* Kelley, “Black Study, Black Struggle”
http://www.bostonreview.net/forum/robin-d-g-kelley-black-study-black-struggle

December 8: Final Thoughts

FINAL PROJECTS DUE THURSDAY DECEMBER 15, 4PM, BLACKBOARD