CAST 100
Introduction to Comparative American Studies

Professor Shelley Lee

Spring 2016
MWF 9:00 – 9:50 KING 127

Tailor President McKinley measures an obese Uncle Sam for larger clothing, while Anti-Expansionists unsuccessfully offer Sam a weight-loss elixir. As the nation increased its imperialistic presence and mission, many like Pulitzer worried that America would grow too big for its own good. John S. Pughe, “Declined With Thanks,” in *Puck* (September 5, 1900).

2AR, 2SS, CD
Cross-listed with GSFS

Office hours: MF 10:00-11:30
King 141-G

DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

Discussions about the nature and substance of history, identity, and culture in the United States, as well as the persistence of inequality in this nation, remain as salient and vexing as ever. Whether in the context of campus turmoil around the country, awareness of deepening economic inequalities, or intensifying xenophobia in the current election season, we continually return to questions about who we are as Americans and citizens, 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 issues and approaches in the field of Comparative American Studies (CAS). We begin with an overview of the emergence and evolution of American Studies in the academy, and then--with history as our foundation for each unit--explore different thematic areas representing key directions and approaches in CAS. Working with the guiding
frameworks of empire, the state, freedom, justice, culture, identity, and the transnational/global, students will be exposed to an array of scholarship, synthesize new knowledge, and hone analytical tools with which to examine U.S. political, social, and cultural practices and formations. Particular attention is given to voices and groups that have been historically marginalized and disenfranchised in the U.S.

Because a 14-week course cannot provide comprehensive surveys of every important topic in the field, the syllabus is admittedly subjective and limited; however, it is organized to give students an introduction to broad 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 to engage critically with major American studies concepts, reinforce new knowledge, collaborate with peers, and practice translating academic material for non-academic audiences.

To list the course’s objectives, they are:
- to provide an introduction to the field of Comparative American Studies;
- to situate understandings of the U.S. and its place in the world through 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 an approach to critical learning that is anchored in constant inquiry and intellectual engagement rather than dogmatism and inflexibility; and
- to develop reading, writing and communication skills.

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


Other required readings are available on Blackboard.

**GRADING AND ASSIGNMENTS**
Final grades are calculated from a possible total of 200 points.

193 – 200  A+
153 – 159  C+
Attendance. Do show your respect for your classmates and instructor by being punctual and prepared. This portion of your grade is based on attendance sheets circulated during class, which you are responsible for signing. While attendance doesn’t comprise a fixed percentage of your grade, it is required. Any absences must be made up with an extra assignment (to be arranged with me beforehand), otherwise each will result in three points subtracted from your final grade. Over five absences (made up or not) will result in failing the course. Excessive tardiness and disruptiveness will also negatively affect your grade.

Blackboard posts (10%). At the start of each session, a group will have a brief conversation about the reading. You will sign up for your dates, and over the semester, will have participated in these FOUR times. Prior to the meeting for which you are assigned, you will post to Blackboard a paragraph (300-400 words is fine) on the reading (no later than midnight the day before class) addressing 1) what the readings are about; 2) what is the author’s main idea(s); 3) what you think about what you read; 4) any further questions that are raised. Above all show that you have learned from and thoughtfully considered the materials. Posters should feel free to respond to one another. I will draw on these for our start of class conversations. This requirement is not graded, but comments that are late or fail to demonstrate substance and thoughtfulness will not receive credit.

Team presentations (20%). Working with a team of 4-5 peers, you will prepare and give a presentation, 20-25 minutes in length, on an American Studies keyword that has not been assigned. One purpose of this assignment is to demystify and clarify important concepts (or “buzzwords”) that often get used in confusing and imprecise ways. The goal of the presentation is to not merely provide a concise, contextualized definition of the term or concept, but to explain its importance and its place in American studies, and to offer helpful illustrations so that the rest of the class is able to take away a clear, working understanding of it. You are encouraged to incorporate slides, handouts, and other material, though you should not use up too much of your time with clips. You may even produce a short film or curated exhibit for the class. We will discuss these possible format options further. The team will receive one grade, and you will be evaluated on organization, clarity, use of time, and ability to engage the class.

Midterm and final (35%). These are in-class exams that draw from lectures, in-class discussion, and readings (including team presentations). They will consist of a mix of questions, including short answer, identifications, and essays. If you keep up with the readings and pay attention in
class, these will be a breeze. The midterm, will cover material from the first half of class and the final will be cumulative, though emphasizing material from the second half.

**Op-ed essays (35%).** What does it mean to be a public intellectual in American studies? You will explore this question by writing two opinion essays (700 to 800 words). For these you should connect course material to a recent event or subject of current interest. Think about what is salient about class readings and discussions and then link those insights to a timely question or issue. Then translate your academic knowledge for a nonacademic audience, making a clear argument supported with compelling evidence and written clearly and concisely.

Grades for coursework are based on displayed intellectual content, originality of thought, mastery of materials, and quality of expression. 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/

**CLASSROOM RULES, ETIQUETTE, AND USE OF TECHNOLOGY**
While individual students bring their varied backgrounds, we are also a learning community, brought together by a common interest and desire to learn. The course materials and discussions will provoke a range of reactions, and in-class discussions may reveal disagreements with classmates. I expect everyone to commit to making our classroom a space for each person to explore new ideas, ask questions of me and each other, take intellectual risks, and engage in open, honest, respectful debate.

Everyone must do their part to ensure a productive and focused learning environment. In this regard, 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 do take care of your needs beforehand to avoid this disruption. I
understand that compelling 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. Regarding laptops, the education research overwhelmingly shows that students learn and absorb information more effectively when taking notes by hand. The use of laptops in class has been shown to undermine the learning not only of the laptop user, but of nearby classmates, due to the distraction they can pose (see links below for more). At the same time, I understand that students increasingly do their readings on computers, and that they can facilitate certain in-class activities. Because of this, I have not instituted a ban on laptops, though I strongly encourage you to take notes by hand and refrain from taking your computer out, unless specifically advised. If I receive complaints about computers creating a distracting learning atmosphere, I will implement a ban.


ACADEMIC INCOMPLETES
If you are unable to complete the class, the College allows two kinds of incompletes, educational and emergency. You can read about these on 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.
SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 What is American Studies?

2/1 Course introduction and overview
2/3 The history of American Studies
   Reading: Wise, “Paradigm Dramas’ in American Studies” (Bb); Deloria, “Broadway and Main” (Bb)
2/5 Discussion
   Reading: White papers on “What is American Studies?” (Bb) and “How to Position American Studies” (Bb)

WEEKS 2 & 3: American Empire

2/8 Race and republicanism in the new nation
   Reading: Streeby, “Empire” (Bb); Takaki, “Within the Bowels of the Republic” (Bb)
2/10 An empire of liberty
   Reading: Slotkin, “Nostalgia and Progress” (Bb); Hoganson, “The Problem of Male Degeneracy and Allure of the Philippines” (Bb)
2/12 Workshop on op-ed writing
   Reading: Hobbs, “Rachel Dolezal’s Unintended Gift to America” (Bb); Carrigan and Webb, “When Americans Lynched Mexicans” (Bb)
2/15 Imperial reverberations
   Reading: Chang, We Will Be Comparable to the Indian Peoples” (Bb); Camacho, “Homomilitarism” (Bb)
2/17 Guest lecture by Wendy Kozol, Director and Professor of CAS
   Reading: Kozol, “Precarity in the Sky” (Bb)
2/19 Workshop on team presentations
   Reading: Instead of readings, view the two student-produced digital narratives on CAS’s Facebook page, and view the Powerpoint file titled “Minimum wage movement” (Bb)

WEEKS 4 & 5: Citizenship and the State

2/22 Immigration and gatekeeping
   Reading: Berlant, “Citizenship” (Bb); Pegler-Gordon, “Chinese Exclusion, Photography, and the Development of U.S. Immigration Policy” (Bb)
2/24 Regulating citizenship and normativity
   Reading: Canaday, “Building a Straight State” (Bb)
2/26 Discussion
Reading: Hong, “The Law That Created Illegal Immigration” (Bb); Stewart-Winter, “The Price of Gay Marriage” (Bb)

2/29 The carceral state and criminalization
Reading: Smith, “Prison” (Bb); Rios, “The Hypercriminalization of Black and Latino Male Youth” (Bb)

3/2 Guest lecture by Gina Perez, Professor of CAS
Reading: Perez, Introduction and Ch. 1 (Bb)

3/4 Group presentation
FIRST PAPER DUE

WEEKS 6 & 7 American Freedom

3/7 Racism and the pursuit of legal equality
Reading: Smallwood, “Freedom” (Bb); Hobbs, A Chosen Exile, Ch. 1

3/9 Daily practices and transgressions
Reading: Hobbs, A Chosen Exile, Ch. 2-3

3/11 Group presentation
Reading: Hobbs, A Chosen Exile, Ch. 4-5

3/14 From equal rights to liberation
Reading: Moten, “Democracy” (Bb); Spade, “What’s Wrong with Rights?” (Bb)

3/16 In-class midterm

3/18 No class

Week 8 Spring Recess March 19-March 27

WEEKS 9 & 10 American Cultures and Identities

3/28 Post-1965 immigration and demographic transformation
Reading: Vo, “Refugee” (Bb); Tang, Unsettled. Ch. 1-2

3/30 Space and place
Reading: Tang, Unsettled, Ch. 3-4

4/1 Group presentation
Reading: Tang, Unsettled, Ch. 5-6

4/4 Culture wars and identity politics
Reading: Kaplan, “Identity” (Bb); Levine, “Multiculturalism” (Bb)
4/6 Cross-cultural encounters and essentialism  
Reading: Condry, “Yellow B-Boys, Black Culture and Hip Hop in Japan” (Bb); Maira, “Henna and Hip Hop” (Bb)  
4/8 Group presentation

**WEEKS 11 & 12 Organizing for Justice in the 20th and 21st Centuries**

4/11 Guest lecture by Janet Fiskio, Associate Professor of Environmental Studies  
Reading: Pellow, *Resisting Global Toxics*, Ch. 1-2

4/13 Global and transnational dimensions  
Reading: Pellow, *Resisting Global Toxics*, Ch. 3-4

4/15 Group presentation

4/18 Occupy Wall Street and the fight for economic justice  
Reading: Milkman, “Revolt of the College Educated Millenials” (Bb); Cohen et al., “Reflections on Legal Support and Occupy Wall Street” (Bb)

4/20 Campus turmoil and student protest  
Joseph, “Dashikis and Democracy” (Bb) Volk, “Season of Anger” (Bb)

4/22 Group presentation  
SECOND PAPER DUE

**WEEKS 13 & 14 Transnationalism and Globalization in American Studies**

4/25 Impact on the field  
Reading: Lowe, “Globalization” (Bb); Mergen, “Can American Studies be Globalized?” (Bb)

4/27 Group presentation

4/29 NO CLASS

5/2 Transnational approaches to race and inequality  
Reading: Frazier, “Thunder in the East” (Bb); Yetman, “Ejidos, Land Sales and Free Trade in Northwest Mexico” (Bb)

5/4 The possibilities of post-nationalism  
Reading: Rowe, “Postnationalism and the New American Studies” (Bb); Teixeira, “Cheering the Death of American Exceptionalism” (Bb); Ferguson, “America the Fragile Empire” (Bb)

5/6 Group presentation

Final exam Thursday, May 12, 9:00 to 11:00 AM. Location TBA.