

Methods in American Studies
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From its origins in the 1920's and 1930's, American Studies as a field of academic inquiry long sought to make a synoptic account of the "national character." Since the 1960's, the field has turned to focus on various forms of inequality as the defining feature of American exceptionalism. This course surveys the development of the field's current preoccupations, covering a range of periods, regions, groups, and cultural practices that present productive problems for generalizations about U.S. identity. We begin with the first academic movement in American Studies, the myth and symbol school. We then move on to a series of debates centered at intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. In taking this disciplinary and methodological perspective, we'll spend a substantial amount of our time on secondary sources, but we will also undertake a project in primary source research and organization in CSER's archive of its own formation in response to student protest in the late 1990's. We will be guided throughout by questions of method. How does one approach an archive? How does one stake out a claim or formulate an argument, in light of the complex current terrain of the field? We'll balance practical and philosophical questions, from, "how do you formulate a research project?" to, "how is knowledge of the U.S. made?"

Assignments and Grades:

5 2 page response papers (33.3%)
8-10 page literature review essay (33.3%)
Participation in CSER history project (33.3%)

Texts:

All readings are available via the Courseworks site. Please get access to a decent double-sided printer. You may have your laptop in class, to take notes, keep the pdfs open, and chase down research questions.

Schedule:

Jan. 23

THE MYTH AND SYMBOL SCHOOL AND ITS CRITICS

--Leo Marx, "American Studies: A Defense of an Unscientific Method."
--Bruce Kuklick, "Myth and Symbol in American Studies"
--T.J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities"

Jan. 30

MARXISM, RACE, AND PERFORMANCE

--Michael Denning, "The Special Conditions: Marxism and American Studies"
--Eric Lott: "The Seeming Counterfeit: Racial Politics and Early Blackface Minstrelsy"
--Michael Paul Rogin, "Blackface, White Noise: The Jewish Jazz Singer Finds His Voice"

Feb. 6

FEMINISM AND EMPIRE

--Ann Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity"

--Laura Wexler, "Tender Violence: Literary Eavesdropping, Domestic Fiction, and Educational Reform"

--Sunaina Maira, "Belly Dancing: Arab-Face, Orientalist Feminism, and U.S. Empire"

Feb. 13

INTERSECTIONALITY AND RACIALIZATION:

--Kimberle Crenshaw, "Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color"

--Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "We Are All Americans!: the Latin-Americanization of Racial Stratification in the USA"

--Claire Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans"

*****First 2 response papers due in class*****

Feb. 20

QUEER OF COLOR CRITIQUE

--Roderick Ferguson, "The Nightmares of the Heteronormative"

--Jose Esteban Munoz, "The Future in the Present: Sexual Avant Gardes and the Performance of Utopia"

--Jasbir Puar, "Mapping U.S. Homonormativities"

*****Attend Jasbir Puar's talk on February 22nd, 420 Hamilton Hall, 6pm****

Feb. 27

THE CARCERAL STATE AND VISUAL CULTURE

--Nicole Fleetwood, "Posing in Prison: Family Photographs, Emotional Labor and Carceral Intimacy"

--Simone Browne, "Everybody's Got A Little Light Under The Sun: Black Luminosity and the Visual Culture of Surveillance"

--Elizabeth Hinton, "'A War within our own Boundaries: Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and the Rise of the Carceral State'"

Mar. 6

DIGITAL HUMANITIES, SOCIOLOGIES, AND POLITICS

--Lisa Nakamura, "The Unwanted Labour of Social Media: Women of Color Call Out Culture as Venture Community Management"

--Minh-Ha Pham, "I Click and Post and Breathe, Waiting for Others to See What I See": On #FeministSelfies, Outfit Photos, and Networked Vanity"

--Tressie McMillan Cottom, "Black Cyberfeminism: Ways Forward for Intersectionality and Digital Sociology"

*****Remaining 3 response papers due*****

Mar. 13: Spring Break, No Class!

Mar. 20

CSER, ETHNIC STUDIES, AND “DIVERSITY” IN HIGHER EDUCATION

- Darlene Clark Hine, “The Black Studies Movement: Afrocentric- Traditionalist-Feminist Paradigms for the Next Stage”
- Evelyn Hu DeHart, “The History, Development, and Future of Ethnic Studies”
- Walter D. Mignolo, “Capitalism and Geopolitics of Knowledge: Latin American Social Thought and Latino/a American Studies”

*****Attend Nicole Fleetwood’s talk, March 22nd, 420 Hamilton Hall, 6:30pm*****

Mar. 27

PERIODICAL RESEARCH:

[listed here are some of the periodical reports of CSER’s formation]

- Karen Arenson, “Columbia Students Begin Hunger Strike for Ethnic Studies” *New York Times*
- Karen Arenson, “23 Arrested in Columbia Sit-in on Ethnic Issue” *New York Times*
- Sarah Kershaw, “Students at Columbia End Battle for Ethnic Studies” *New York Times*
- Sabra Gandhi Marta Lopez, “Columbia’s Ethnic Studies Protest Isn’t Over” *New York Times*
- Ben Gose, “Little More Than Publicity Is Gained in Ethnic-Studies Protest” *Chronicle of Higher Education*
- Inmotion* collection of Columbia student protestor press releases:
<http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/hunger.html>

Apr. 3

LITERATURE REVIEW DISCUSSION I:

Bring in a topic, 3 possible sources

Apr. 10

VISUAL ARCHIVES DAY

Apr. 17

ORAL HISTORY DAY:

- “Principles and Best Practices” Oral History Association Website
- Check out Columbia Center for Oral History Online Archive, read one oral history relevant to your work prepare to report on it in class.

Apr. 24

Literature Review Topics Discussion II: Bring in a first draft

May. 1

Conclusion: Final Papers Due in Class