



American Studies 200-01

CRITICAL METHODS FOR AMERICAN STUDIES RESEARCH

Spring 2020
T/Th 3-4:30
Theater 213

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CLASS DESCRIPTION

The purpose of this course is to offer a brief history of the methodological questions that developed and informed the field of American Studies and to provide an overview of topics and theoretical frameworks that preoccupy current American Studies scholars. The class begins with an examination of foundational methodological inquiries within the field. We then turn our attention to several research approaches that have distinguished recent American Studies scholarship. We will use the assigned readings to generate conversations about how one can formulate a research plan through an American Studies lens, while interrogating the ethical, cultural, political, and personal factors that should be considered before committing to a particular research methodology.

CLASS POLICIES

Plagiarism

Any instance of plagiarism will result in no credit for the assignment in question and will be reported to the Director of Academic Programs. Please refer to the following website for more on procedures: <http://www.macalester.edu/academicprograms/academicpolicies/academicintegrity/>.

Preferred Gender Pronouns

This course affirms people of all gender expressions and gender identities. If you prefer to be called a different name than what is on the class roster, please let me know. Feel free to correct me on your preferred gender pronoun. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Student Disability Accommodations

Please notify me of any special accommodations you might need as a result of disability, significant medical conditions, or illnesses. Those seeking adaptations to the course based on any of these conditions must submit the following to the office of Student Affairs: a completed Accommodations Request, a Permission for Release of Information form, and documentation of a substantially limiting condition from a physician or other appropriate professionals. See <http://www.macalester.edu/studentaffairs/disabilityservices/> for more information.

REQUIRED TEXTS

1. Deloria, Philip J. *Indians in Unexpected Places*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004.
2. Du Gay, Paul et al. *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman*. Second edition. Los Angeles: Sage, 2013.

GRADING & KEY DATES

All assignments will receive an automatic 10% reduction for each day it is late. Please keep an electronic copy of all assignments submitted. Unless otherwise specified, all papers should be double-spaced with 1" margins and citations in MLA format. With the exception of the research paper, printed copies of assignments are to be submitted at the beginning of class on the day they are due.

1) RESEARCH PAPER

30%

Due Date: May 7, 2020 at 5 PM

This is a significant part of your grade in this course. Each assignment in this class is designed to support the final research project. The grading rubric for the research paper will be distributed at a later date.

Research Paper Requirements:

- a) 8-12 pages (not including bibliography)
- b) Must contain explanation of *interdisciplinary* approach (sources and methods, approximately one paragraph)
- c) Must contain a concise literature review (what have the most important scholars in this field already said about it?)
- d) Your introduction and/or thesis should give some sense of how your research has led to an *original* argument that converses with this literature

- e) Must contain a brief discussion of how your work aligns itself with the discipline of American Studies as described by scholars we have read (reference at least one of the following: Elaine Tyler May, Gene Wise, Barbara Tomlinson/George Lipsitz, Paul Lauter, John Carlos Rowe, or Karen Halttunen)
- f) Minimum of ten reputable sources
- g) Fully documented evidence (endnotes or parenthetical references) and Works Cited page
- h) Consistent use of citation style (MLA)

2) LITERATURE CRITIQUE

15%

Due Date: February 20, 2020

For this assignment select any reading on the syllabus covered prior to the due date of this assignment.

First, provide a two-page close textual reading of the article/reading identifying the author's main arguments and themes, and comment on their most prominent assumptions and oversights.

Second, use research databases to find a secondary source (preferably article-length) published in the last 15 years that would inform an analysis of this reading. In 1-2 pages, describe this source, and explain why it is relevant to contextualizing the writing. You should not select a source that analyzes the article directly.

Third, identify a primary source (created before 1980) that would help historicize the writing. In 1-2 pages, describe this source, and explain how it provides historical context for the piece.

Finally, select two contemporary texts (from 2010 or after) that might be important to fully understand the significance of the writing you have selected. One of these texts should be from a news source, and the other should be from popular culture. In 1-2 pages, describe both of these sources, and explain how they would add context to the author's commentary.

You may use subheadings to divide the paper into four sections. Each section should emphasize explanation over description. Papers should be 4-6 pages.

3) SOURCE CRITIQUE

10%

Due Date: March 26, 2020

For this assignment, analyze a **textual or a non-textual** source. A non-textual source is something that is not primarily comprised of written words. Possible non-textual sources include films/visual media, albums/songs, images, buildings, events/performances, spaces, etc. Analyze your source using at least **two readings** we have discussed as methodological models.

Briefly discuss the approaches you are utilizing in your analysis. You might also critique the course readings you have selected if you feel your analysis demonstrates any oversights on the part of the authors we have read. The primary focus of the paper, however, should be your

“reading” of the source in question—in other words, think of this assignment as your opportunity to “try out” one of the approaches we are discussing in class. Papers should be 3-4 pages.

4) CLASS PARTICIPATION

15%

Participation scores will be determined based on your degree of active involvement during course discussions; engagement during workshops, peer reviews, and activities; and outside-of-class preparation evidenced by performance on written work.

Students in this class are **required** to attend the Macalester American Studies Conference held from March 5-8, 2020. For planning purposes, the event schedule is provided below. On March 10, each student will give a 5-minute, in-class presentation on what they learned from the conference.

2020 Macalester American Studies Conference: Precarious Future / Troubled Past / Ethical Return” A collaboration with American Studies, Art and Art History & Latin American Studies

- March 5, 2020 Film Screening/Discussion & Photo/Art Exhibit (Weyerhauser)
- March 6, 2020 --Margaret Randall keynote lecture with Q&A (Weyerhauser)
- March 7, 2020 --Cuban music or cultural event
- March 8, 2020 Saturday brunch--dialogue between Margaret Randall and [Bimbola Akinbola](#), PhD, Macalester College Class of 2011 (Art Commons 102)

5) DISCUSSION LEADERSHIP

10%

Due Date: TBD

This assignment is to be done in groups of two or three. Students will type 1-2 pages of *thought-provoking* questions to help the class understand the assigned readings better. This is a time to be creative. You may bring in audio or video tapes, poetry, magazines, or any other visual or print media. Although this assignment is fun, it should be taken very seriously because its purpose is to demonstrate not just that you understand the material, but how well you can *explain* it. Groups will provide Professor Harris and classmates a handout. What follows are basic guidelines for reading well and making good presentations. The goal is to insure a rich and critical approach to class materials.

- a) What is being said? What is the argument?
- b) What are the premises and the hypothesis of the piece? What are the conclusions? (What is conveyed, how is it put together?)
- c) What is highlighted/hidden in the piece?
- d) Who benefits? Who is left out? Who is included/excluded?
- e) What is your reaction to this? Do you agree with it? Why or why not? What lens informs your reactions?
- f) Context
- g) What was the historical, political, social, and cultural situation at the time of writing the piece (industrial revolution, enlightenment, cold war, apartheid, holy war, etc).
- h) What is the theoretical orientation or lens of the piece (conservative, Marxist, etc.)
- i) Do you agree with what is being said? Why or why not?

6) RESEARCH PROPOSAL

10%

Due Date: March 12

An introductory paragraph (or two) that states your general topic and indicates your primary research question(s) (in other words, you will relate the question or problem that your paper's thesis will ultimately answer). This introduction might also suggest the general significance of your research project in relation to previous studies about the topic.

A brief section on historical and scholarly context that offers relevant background information on your topic and an overview of what other studies have argued about your topic. This component does not have to be comprehensive—however, it should both allow your audience to “catch up” on the important social/cultural/political/economic factors that shape your particular issue and provide a glimpse of the academic conversation that you are entering (i.e. what others have said, and how you imagine your research as a response to what they have said).

A description of the sources and methods you will deploy for your research. This is the “road map” for your project, detailing the types of sources that you know you have access to and *what you will do* with those sources. A good starting point is thinking about what strategies from the course readings you might want to adopt for your analysis (although you should not feel obligated to use the methodologies of the assigned texts).

You may wish to organize this section according to bodies/types of sources (e.g. one paragraph on your use of interviews, another on your archival research, another on literary analysis) or different disciplinary strategies that you are bringing together in your paper (e.g. an explanation of how you will conduct a social history analysis in one paragraph and commentary on how you will add a focus on memory in another). Please be as specific as possible in relating the exact sources you will consult and what information you expect to glean from those sources—you should be convincing your reader (and yourself!) that your project is manageable and coherent.

A brief concluding statement of your ultimate goals and your contribution to preexisting research. This section is also an opportunity to reflect on your personal investment in the topic you are researching and to comment on what distinguishes your project as a work of “American Studies” scholarship.

A working bibliography of primary and secondary sources that you plan to use. There should be no fewer than 8 entries at this point. You do NOT have to have read through all of your sources yet, but you should track down enough sources to demonstrate that you can eventually inform yourself and your audience about the topic.

The paper should be 3-5 pages (not including bibliography).

7) ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

10%

Due Date: April 16

Create an annotated bibliography of at least 10 sources you've chosen for your research paper. You should focus on print sources for this assignment, with an emphasis on secondary sources.

Each entry should include critical commentary about the work in question, usually in the form of one or two short paragraphs. Each annotation should contain the following:

- a) A sentence or two about the rhetorical context of the source. Is it an informative news article, an opinion column, a scholarly essay? Is it intended for a specific audience? What is the bias, if any?
- b) A capsule summary of the content.
- c) A note about why this source seems valuable and how you might use it.

Sample Annotated Bibliography Entry

Ames, Katrine. "Last Rights." *Newsweek* 26 Aug. 1991: 40-41.

This is a news article for the general public about the popularity of a book called *Final Exit*, on the politicization of suicide in the United States. Ames explains the interest in the book as resulting from people's perception that doctors, technology, and hospital bureaucrats are making it harder and harder to die with dignity in this country. The article documents with statistics the direction of public opinion on this topic and also outlines some options, besides suicide, that are becoming available to ensure people of the right to die. Ames shows a bias against prolonging life through technology, but she includes quotations from authorities on both sides, thereby establishing a balanced sense of argumentation. This is a valuable source for providing an overview of public and professional opinion regarding contemporary debates on suicide and its political implications.

TENTATIVE READING AND COURSE SCHEDULE

All articles will appear on the course Moodle page, unless otherwise noted

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION

WEEK 2: AMERICANS STUDIES: NEGOTIATING PURPOSES

1/28

- Elaine Tyler May, “The Radical Roots of American Studies.”
- Henry Nash Smith, “Can American Studies Develop a Method?”; Gene Wise, “Some Elementary Axioms for an American Culture Studies.”

1/30

- Paul Lauter, “Reconfiguring Academic Disciplines: The Emergence of American Studies.” Sign up for days to lead discussion.
- Barbara Tomlinson, George Lipsitz, “American Studies as Accompaniment.”

WEEK 3: INTO THE ARCHIVE: HISTORY IN AMERICAN STUDIES

2/4

- Philip Deloria, Alexander I. Olson, “Methods and Methodology.”
- Monica Muñoz Martinez, “Recuperating Histories of Violence in the Americas: Vernacular History-Making on the US-Mexico Border.”

2/6

- Archives/Library visit. Class will meet in DeWitt Wallace Library, Room #320

WEEK 4: RESEARCH AND CATEGORIES OF DIFFERENCE

2/11

- Barbara J. Fields, “Ideology and Race in American History”; Catherine S. Ramírez, “Learning and Unlearning from Ethnic Studies.”
- Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Introduction to *Decolonizing Methodologies*, “Towards Developing Indigenous Methodologies: Kaupapa Maori Research.”

2/13

- Joan Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis.”

WEEK 5: ETHNOGRAPHY AND INTERVIEWING

2/18

- Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash, “Queer Methods and Methodologies: An Introduction”; Michel Foucault, from *The History of Sexuality*.
- Mary Jo Maines, Jennifer L. Pierce, Barbara Laslett, “Personal Narrative Research as Intersubjective Encounter.”

2/20

- Mitchell Duneier with Les Back, “Voices from the Sidewalk: Ethnography and Writing Race.”
- **DUE: Literature Critique**

WEEK 6: CULTURAL DIGGING

2/25

- Paul du Gay et al., *Doing Cultural Studies*, introduction to first edition and Chapter 1.
- *Doing Cultural Studies*, Chapters 2 and 3.

2/27

- *Doing Cultural Studies*, Chapters 5 and 6.

WEEK 7: MEMORY AND PUBLIC HISTORY

3/3

- Eithne Quinn, “Occupy Wall Street, Racial Neoliberalism, and New York’s Hip-Hop Moguls.”
- Marita Sturken, “The Wall and the Screen Memory: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial.”

3/5

- Erika Doss, “*De Oppresso Liber* and *Reflecting Absence*: Ground Zero Memorials and the War on Terror.”

WEEK 8: BORDERS AND TRANSNATIONALISM

3/10

- 5-minute presentations on what you learned at the Macalester American Studies Conference (in-class)

3/12

- John Carlos Rowe, “Post-Nationalism, Globalism, and the New American Studies.”
- Johana Londoño, “Barrio Affinities: Transnational Inspiration and the Geopolitics of Latina/o Design.”
- **DUE: Research proposal**

WEEK 9: THE BODY AND PERFORMANCE

3/24

- Margo DeMello, “Introduction: Theorizing the Body.”
- Diana Taylor, from “Acts of Transfer.”

3/26

- George Lipsitz, “Mardi Gras Indians: Carnival and Counter-Narrative in Black New Orleans.”
- Virginia L. Blum, “The Patient’s Body.”

- **DUE: Source Critique**

WEEK 10: INDEPENDENT RESEARCH WEEK

- NO CLASS 3/31 & 4/2

WEEK 11: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: SAMPLE MONOGRAPH

4/7

- Philip Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*, pp. 2-51.

4/9

- *Indians in Unexpected Places*, pp. 52-108, 136-end.

WEEK 12: ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP

4/14

- Karen Halttunen, "Groundwork: American Studies in Place."

4/16

- **Guest Lecturer:** Professor Kirisitina Sailiata, Macalester College American Studies Alum, Class of 2006.
- **DUE: Annotated bibliography**

WEEK 13: Macalester American Studies~~What is OUR Method?

4/21

- Duchess Harris, "The 1990s in Context: A History of Black Women in American Politics."
- Karin Aguilar-San Juan, "Going Home: Enacting Justice in Queer Asian America."

4/23

- Details to be provided

WEEK 14: WRAPPING IT ALL UP

4/28: Details to be provided

4/30: Details to be provided