American Studies 201  
Introduction to American Studies  
Spring 2015  
Tu/Th 10:30-11:50  Seelye 312

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217 Wright Hall  
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W 3-4, Th 1:45-2:45  
and by appointment

Christen Mucher  
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Tu/Th 1-2, Tu 4:20-4:50  
and by appointment

“The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”  
--William Faulkner

“. . . when it comes to creating a multiracial, 
multiethnic, multi-religious democratic society, we 
are still a developing nation.”  
--Vincent Harding

Readings  (available at the Grécourt Bookstore)  
Claudia Rankine, Citizen (Graywolf)  
Theodore Dreiser, Sister Carrie (Simon and Schuster)  
Brook Thomas, ed. Plessy v. Ferguson: A Brief History with Documents (Bedford)  
Jacob Riis, How the Other Half Lives (Bedford)

Additional readings are available on Moodle, the Internet, and as handouts.

Claudia Rankine talk and reading on 2/23 at 4:00 p.m.

Requirements  
4 short (2-page essays)  
1 in-class poster presentation  
1 final project  
in-class low-stakes writing now and then

Evaluation  
20% attendance and participation  
40% (or 10% each) 2-page essays (x4)  
20% poster presentation  
20% final project

What to Expect from this Class  
Together we will ask and begin to answer to the question “What is American Studies?” Corollary 
questions include “What are appropriate objects of study in this field?”, “How do we do American 
Studies?”, and “Why do we do American Studies?” Stimulated by common readings and encounters with
other artifacts, we will have conversations--often messy ones--about these questions. Along the way, we will try to bring some order to our chaos by creating a common concept map and by giving you the opportunity to write down and hence provisionally declare the state of your mind on these questions. Although there are more than forty of you in this class, you should try to speak up several times a week. If, on occasion, you cannot attend or really don’t feel like talking, don’t worry. We all experience illness and quiet days every now and then. But know that studies have shown that the “best learning takes place when learners articulate their own unformed and still developing understanding and continue to articulate it through the process of learning” (R. Keith Sawyer 12). At the end of the semester, we will ask you to provide a self-assessment of your participation and attendance.

After an introductory week organized around *Citizen* by Claudia Rankine, we will proceed through four units, each of which asks a question about America that seems especially pressing to us now. Of course there are other questions, and of course we don’t imagine that we will answer any of these questions fully. The point is to use these questions as a way to practice doing American Studies. Normally, we will begin a unit by asking you to reflect on what you already know. Then we will engage with a few texts that give us a sense of the current state of affairs. Next we will look back to primary sources from the past to gain insight on the present. As Faulkner said, “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.” Along the way, we will read examples of how practitioners of American Studies approach the topic at hand. Finally, we will consider what you have to contribute in terms of additional resources and ideas for intervention. If Harding is right that “when it comes to creating a multiracial, multiethnic, multi-religious democratic society, we are still a developing nation,” there’s hope in our involvement in the process. Here’s a slightly more visual representation of each unit’s structure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>raise awareness</th>
<th>What is going on now?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>research primary sources</td>
<td>How long has this been going on? What are relevant precedents? How have others addressed this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apply methods</td>
<td>What AMS approaches can help us understand, analyze, etc.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>get involved</td>
<td>What can we add? How could we begin to intervene?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Universal Access Statement**

We strive to provide an environment that is equitable and conducive to the learning of all students. To do so, we ask that class members be respectful of each another and the diverse backgrounds, abilities, and opinions that each student brings into the classroom. If there are circumstances affecting your performance in or access to this class, please let us know so that we can work together to develop strategies for adapting assignments or assessments to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. If you have a documented disability and require specific accommodation, be sure to contact the Office of Disability Services in College Hall 104 ods@smith.edu. It is your responsibility to see that we receive all paperwork from ODS.
Remember that the resources and support provided by the Jacobson Center for Writing, Teaching, and Learning (Seeyle 307), the Spinelli Center for Quantitative Learning (Second Level, Neilson Library), and the Libraries are available to all students.

**Academic Integrity**
Smith College has an Honor Code that is enforced by the Smith Academic Honor Board. Faculty have a responsibility to report any suspected violations—such as, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and cheating—to the Honor Board and relevant Deans. For more information, see the Smith College Libraries tutorial: “How to Recognize Plagiarism”

**Semester Schedule**

**Th 1/29**
1. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Speech* in London (1964)

**Tu 2/3**

Unit 1: No Justice, No Peace!?

**Th 2/5**
1. Rankine, *Citizen*

**Tu 2/10**

**Th 2/12**
1. Readings from *Plessy v. Ferguson: A Brief History with Documents*
   a. The Civil War Amendments 11-18
   b. The Majority Decision 31-34
   c. Harlan's Dissent 34-39
   d. Plessy v. Ferguson, May 18, 1896, 41-60
   e. Press Response: Republican (Springfield, Massachusetts), May 20, 1896, 131
   g. Conclusion: In the Wake of Plessy 169-176

In class: clips from *Birth of a Nation*, dir. D. W. Griffith (1915)
Tu 2/17
1. Revisit Rankine

In class: clips from documentary *The House I Live In*, dir., Eugene Jarecki (2012)

Th 2/19
2-page essay due
In-class poster-session #1

M 2/23 Claudia Rankine visits Smith College: reading and talk at 4:00 p.m.

Unit 2: What about the 99%?

Tu 2/24
1. Photographs of Occupy Wall Street (2011)
5. Oxfam 2015 study on world wealth gap

Th 2/26
1. Herman Melville, “*Bartleby, the Scrivener*” (1853)

Tu 3/3
1. Andrew Carnegie, “*Wealth*” (1889)

In-class: Walking tour of Smith College environs

Th 3/5

In class: visit Sophia Smith Collection
Employment Collection, “*Women at Work: Views and Visions from the Pioneer Valley, 1870-1945*”
Tu 3/10

Th 3/12
2-page essay due
In-class poster-session #2

Spring Break

Unit 3: Are we really a nation of immigrants?

Tu 3/24
3. Dara Lind, “35 Maps that Explain how America is a Nation of Immigrants” Vox (January 12, 2015)

Th 3/26
1. The Invasion of America
2. Phillip Earenfight, “From the Plains to the Coast” from A Kiowa’s Odyssey (2007): 12-29
3. Fort Marion Artists’ drawings (Smithsonian Institution)

Tu 3/31

Th 4/2

Tu 4/7
2-page essay due
In-class poster-session #3
Unit 4: Why are we obsessed with celebrity and consumption?

Th 4/9
1. *New York Times debate* on “Renee Zellweger and the Question of Aging”
2. Blue Telusma, “*Kim Kardashian doesn’t realize . . .*” *Grio* (12 Nov. 2014)
3. Anne Helen Peterson, “*Jennifer Lawrence And The History Of Cool Girls*” *Buzzfeed* (2014)

Tu 4/14
1. Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (1900)

Th 4/16
1. Dreiser
3. Library of Congress exhibition: “*The Gibson Girl’s America*” (c. 1890)

Tu 4/21
1. Dreiser

In-class: Museum visit to see photographs by Lauren Greenfield, *Girl Culture*

Th 4/23
Dreiser reading day (Cheung at conference)

Tu 4/28
1. Dreiser

Th 4/30
2-page essay due
In-class poster-session #4

Th 5/7
Final project due