

## AMST 101: Introduction to American Studies

- Instructor: Dan Greene
- Office: 4118 Susquehanna Hall
- Office Hours: By appointment. Contact the instructor by email and set up a time in the next 48 hours (Monday-Friday) to either meet in person at UMD or electronically via Google Hangout.
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**Class Meetings:** Online

**Pre- or co-requisites:** None

"...the world is just as concrete, ornery, vile, and sublimely wonderful as before, only now I better understand my relation to it and it to me." – Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952)

### **Course Description:**

What do you do in American Studies? Seems like a simple question with a simple answer: "you study America." But 'America' is a set of places, peoples, and ideas that are always contested. They change with the political, economic, and cultural tides of history. Where other fields may have a standard set of practices applied to a variety of problems, American Studies is interdisciplinary in that its scholars are trained to start with a specific problem and to then bring together the methods, theories, and objects that best address it. To address the U.S.A's process of nation-building through inclusion and exclusion, this course will introduce students to the Department of American Studies' three pillars of scholarship: the construction of identity and difference, the cultures of everyday life, and the transnational. Through these three pillars, this course will explore the meanings given to diversity, freedom, and citizenship within different contexts and cultures. This course will introduce students to such key analytical categories as race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, place, and disability. As a lower-level course in the interdisciplinary field of American Studies, this course will also explore the various methodologies (textual analysis, archival research, material culture analysis, and ethnography) and questions of the field through the consideration of both canonical and contemporary work. This syllabus is an active document and specific readings or assignments may be adjusted to the needs of students and the instructor as the semester progresses. The most up to date syllabus is always the version on ELMS.

### **Course Goals:**

After completing this course, students should be able to:

- Understand and appreciate the diversity and dynamic quality of Americans' cultures, including cultural identities, products, and everyday practices.
- Identify and apply appropriate concepts, methods, and technologies pertinent to research in the field of American Studies.
- Demonstrate critical thinking in evaluating the sources for and arguments about American cultures.
- Engage in multiple forms of college-level communication, critique, and learning.
- Identify and assess one's own values and beliefs about American culture, and be able to critically and self-reflexively evaluate those values and beliefs within the terms of class discussions and formal written arguments.
- Analyze how a given text or object of study reveals the context of its construction and practice.

**General structure of the class**

This is an online course, so we will not be meeting in person—although the instructor will be able to meet on campus by appointment. Online courses have certain advantages and disadvantages over in-person courses. We get to write more and incorporate different media into our work, but we don't build the sort of community atmosphere that comes from sitting down together twice a week and the instructor can't call time out on a difficult debate and help everyone work through it together. We're more independent here, for better and for worse. **Our time is also condensed: we have 15 days to do what would normally happen in 15 weeks, so each day will be the equivalent of a week's work in a regular semester.** This runs the risk of moving too quickly without adequately connecting everything.

To help us anchor our discussions around three core themes, each week will be based around a different foundation of the American Dream: Property, or the white picket fence and home ownership as a sign you've made it; Security, or the faith that the state will protect its citizens; and Opportunity, or the immigrant hope of coming to the U.S., working hard, integrating, and making it. Each week we'll watch a film that revolves around this story: *The Queen of Versailles* (2012), *When the Levees Broke* (2006), and *Sleep Dealer* (2008). Blogs will ask you to analyze these films, using our readings as support, or to do your own independent research and compare your experience with that of the films. This is a writing-heavy course that places an emphasis on close reading, clear logic, and finding and comparing evidence from our texts. Rubrics reward students for giving focused analyses supported by examples drawn from class texts and penalize them for putting opinion before evidence, not responding to the prompt, or choosing to focus, on vague generalizations about 'human nature' or 'the American spirit' and the like instead of specific historical processes and institutions..

We will meet as a class every day on Canvas. Canvas is our classroom and every time students log in they should act as though they are entering the classroom. The type of writing you do here is similar to a business memo or written essay. It is not a Facebook post or text message.

Every week will look like the below. All deadlines are 5 PM on the day listed.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blog post due</li> <li>• Comment on Friday's blogs due</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comment on Monday's blogs due</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blog post due</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comment on Wednesday's blogs due</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blog post due</li> </ul>

There will be new readings every day. The instructor will supplement each day's readings with a short video lecture about what to pay special attention to in each reading, and what you can choose to avoid. The purpose of this is to help you focus on the salient points of the readings and to draw connections between readings so as to better illuminate the main themes of the course. These mini-lectures will not substitute for actually doing the reading, and both blog posts and quizzes will be impossible to complete without having done so.

Quizzes test basic content recall and basic skills (key definitions, quick research tasks). Blogs apply those skills and connect individual readings to the bigger picture. The midterm and final will be integrated into the blog post schedule (see below) and will mesh both quiz-like and blog-like tasks with some primary research materials (the midterm) and a reflection on the course and the field (the final).

Rubric-based grading will also be visible through Canvas and this is also where you'll find PDF versions of copyrighted works and the course gradebook.

### Grading and assignments

Major assignments will have their own grading rubrics, but students will be able to get a sense of

what they offer from the below. All assignments have a point value, with everything adding up to 1000, so students should be able to estimate their grade at any point in the semester—though grades will be regularly updated on ELMS' gradebook. ELMS is only an unofficial record of grades, the instructor's copy is final. Extra credit is built into the blogging assignments. All written assignments should be polished products with few, preferably no, spelling or grammar errors. This is an intro level class, so part of what we're learning is how to express ourselves in different kinds of writing and with different kinds of evidence. As such, students will receive detailed responses from the instructor on the style, composition, structure, and argumentation of their writing as part of the blogging process. Many students have not received this sort of criticism before. It's the best way to improve your writing, but it can also be a bit of a shock the first time. That's OK: Both essays and blogs have specific conventions you have to learn and getting suggestions about what works and what doesn't work in your writing isn't a comment on you, it's a comment on some words you put on the page. We'll work together to make the words on the page better represent the complex understanding you all already have, and will continue to hone, about American cultures.

#### *Daily Blogging—500 points*

Students must post a 350-word (2-3 paragraph) blog post to the Discussions section of Canvas by 5 PM Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and a comment to another person's post by 3 PM Tuesday, Thursday, and Monday. The instructor will start the discussion with a prompt, as well as the guides to the day's reading provided in the podcast.

**Every reading or film used up to that particular day is fair game for a blog prompt. Students should have read these texts by the day they're listed on the syllabus. Every post should have a thesis statement, supporting evidence, and links to course texts.**

The instructor will comment on some posts, providing feedback on composition and comprehension (i.e., if multiple students are struggling with a thorny aspect of the reading, the instructor will walk one or two through it and refer others back to the response), and ask questions of others so they can expand their argument. Think of this as the instructor at the front of the classroom, leading discussion. Students address each other somewhat differently: as equal participants in a debate, presenting evidence for and against different arguments and interpretations, providing new perspectives that peers may not have thought of before. Think of this as sitting in a circle in a seminar and talking to each other. Students will have to comment on each other's blogs the day after they're posted.

**All debate will always be focused on the texts we've read, both films and articles: If we haven't brought it up in class, try not to bring it up in discussion. This is to keep us focused and to help develop close reading skills. Rubrics will be posted for both blog posts and comments.**

Extra credit is built into the blogging system (see the rubric for more info). Do more blogs, get more points. At any time, students can choose to do a 250-word media post where they use a contemporary film, TV series, article, book, album, commercial, etc. to help explain some of the ideas for the week. They will get up to 5 extra points for this. Students can accrue up to 100 points worth of extra credit.

#### *Quizzes—200 points*

There will be up to ten quizzes throughout the course. They will be announced 24 hours in advance of their due date. They will be quick and easy, meant only to check that you did the previous day's reading and keep you on track for it.

#### *Midterm and Final—150 points each*

The midterm will assess recall and explanation of core AMST 101 vocabulary (students will work with the instructor to identify key ideas to test each other on) via short answer responses, and core concepts via a blog-length essay. It will be a formative assessment meant to track not only comprehension of

complex concepts but the the ability to logically define and explain them, and give students feedback on their progress so that they can improve their reading comprehension and conceptual argumentation skills in the back-end of the course.

The final will be a summative assessment, asking students to reflect on what they've learned in AMST 101 and using that to write a pair of blog-length essays that take positions on the field's internal debate over what it should be called, what its goals should be, and how it defines American culture.

Semester grades will be based on the following University scale:

Letter Grade	Description
A+ (970-1000 points), A (930-969 points), A- (900-929 points)	"Denotes excellent mastery of the subject and outstanding scholarship."
B+ (870-899 points), B (830-869 points), B- (800-829 points)	"Denotes good mastery of the subject and good scholarship."
C+ (770-799 points), C (730-769 points), C- (700-729 points)	"Denotes acceptable mastery of the subject and the usual achievement expected."
D+ (670-699 points), D (630-669 points), D- (600-629 points)	"Denotes borderline understanding of the subject. These grades denote marginal performance, and they do not represent satisfactory progress toward a degree."
F (0-599points)	"Denotes failure to understand the subject and unsatisfactory performance."

With hard work and careful attention to the texts, discussion, and the course themes and objectives, every student is capable of above-average work. Work that just 'gets by' on the requirements will be rewarded with a 'C' or less. It takes truly exemplary work to earn an 'A' grade. All assignments are issued well in advance of their well-advertised due date and extra credit is easy to get. **Because of this, computer problems are not an excuse for late work and late work will not be accepted.** If students feel they will not be able to meet a deadline due to extreme circumstances, they should contact the instructor a week in advance to discuss possible alternatives.

### Statement on Diversity, Respect, and Classroom Language

This class will touch many 'hot-button' subjects such as race, gender, and sexuality, and will encourage personal reflection to link those issues to contemporary political debates and personal experiences. In the discussion of politically complex and charged issues, it is often necessary to explore terminology and concepts that, on occasion, may make us uncomfortable. Please understand that it is necessary to engage in these discussions in order to come to a critical and comprehensive understanding of our topic so that, subsequently, we can learn how to deconstruct and engage the themes contained therein. This means that in-class spaces are professional ones but also safe ones, where the expression of personal identity is encouraged and respected. Students should afford each other the same respect they desire in turn. Insults and disrespectful language will not be tolerated. Uncomfortable topics may be broached, but always in relation to course themes and objectives and never for shock value. If you become particularly distressed about any discussion, please contact the instructor immediately. The instructor will give the class a heads up when any particularly graphic topics are going to be brought into discussion.

### Disability Accommodation and Learning Support

Students requiring accommodations for classroom activities or assessments must provide the instructor with the appropriate documentation from Disability Support Services (DSS) in the first two weeks of the semester. Individual solutions will be negotiated from there. DSS can be reached at <http://www.counseling.umd.edu/DSS/> or 301-314-7682. Students experiencing serious difficulties

adapting to the demands of the college workload are encouraged to make use of the Counseling Center's other resources in the [Learning Assistance Service](#) (LAS; for developing effective college learning skills) or [Counseling Services](#) (for professional support around personal, interpersonal, and vocational issues). They can be reached at 301-314-7693 and 301-314-7651 respectively.

### Digital and Written Communication

Students will recognize that the norms of communication are different in a scholarly community, compared to a social one. You are not going to write and act the same way in class spaces and in communication with the professor as you would on Facebook or through text messages or instant messages to friends. Major course announcements will be emailed. Email is also the best way to contact your instructor with any questions or concerns. All emails should have a subject line with the course title, a greeting, and a signature. To learn more about email norms, and other college how-to's, Wellesley College's "[How to Email a Professor](#)" posts (and the whole Netiquette series) are priceless. I check my email regularly, but I get a lot of it. I will endeavor to respond to emails within 24 hours. When composing a blog post, be sure to write at a college level, draw evidence from the texts, and communicate your ideas clearly to your intended audience with the understanding that reading a response is different from hearing it explained in person. Students are expected to improve their writing skills throughout the semester, but will be graded at a college level—so style, structure, readability, and spelling and grammar will factor into grading. For guides on effective writing strategies, check out this MLA-based online guide (<http://www.ccc.commnet.edu/mla/index.shtml>) or the classic Strunk & White *Elements of Style*. Students desiring more personalized support are encouraged to make an appointment with the University Writing Center (<http://english.umd.edu/academics/writingcenter>).

### Academic Honesty

The University has approved a *Code of Academic Integrity* (<http://www.jpo.umd.edu/Info/Faculty/AcadHonorPledge.aspx>) which prohibits students from cheating on exams, plagiarizing papers, submitting the same paper for credit in two courses without authorization, buying papers, facilitating academic dishonesty, submitting fraudulent documents, and forging signatures. All quotations taken from other authors, including Web-based sources, must be indicated by quotation marks and referenced. Paraphrasing must be referenced as well. Using any source without a reference constitutes plagiarism in this course. Citation styles are up to the student, as long as they consistently make use of MLA, APA, or Chicago. If students are even slightly confused about what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it, review the guidelines at <http://www.lib.usm.edu/legacy/plag/whatisplag.php> or contact the instructor. Correctly citing other people's ideas is, of course, a skill with a learning curve. To reflect that, this course distinguishes between the following types of plagiarism:

**Category A:** Sloppiness. Automatic "0" on paper, with option to rewrite for no better than a "C"

**Category B:** Ignorance. Automatic "0" on paper, with option to rewrite for no better than a "C"

**Category C:** Obvious Conscious Cheating. Automatic "0" on paper, with no option for rewriting

Students caught plagiarizing a second time will receive an automatic "0" in the course. For those of you who are not aware of what constitutes plagiarism, here is a breakdown of the various types: **1)** Buying papers, borrowing papers, or recycling former papers unrevised and claiming these types of papers as your own for your assignment in this course. (This constitutes a Category C offense) **2)** Cutting and pasting parts of a webpage or borrowing passages from a book for your paper without properly citing these parts and claiming the material as your own for the expressed intent of cheating. (This constitutes a Category C offense) **3)** Failing to use proper citation style for material you borrow, accidentally. (This constitutes either a Category A or B offense).

Canvas automatically processes all written work through TurnItIn, a plagiarism-detection software that shows the instructor what percentage of a given work matches internet sources.

### Course Texts, Copyrights, and Costs:

There is no required textbook for the class. Students must acquire the first film in the course (*The Queen of Versailles* [2012]) independently. It is available to stream through Netflix or Amazon, as well as other internet sources, and is available as a DVD at many public libraries.

The second (*When the Levees Broke* [2006]) and third (*Sleep Dealer* [2008]) films will be available to stream on Canvas, linked to in their own 'Modules', but are all also available on Netflix and Amazon Prime.

All course materials *not* produced by the instructor (e.g., readings, films, etc.) are copyrighted under the licenses included within those materials. All course materials produced *by the instructor* (e.g., this syllabus, rubrics, slides, etc.) are licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 Unported](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/) license. You can feel free to re-use or re-purpose these materials as long as you give due credit and don't get paid for it.

### Schedule of readings and major assignments:

Students are expected to have read and taken notes on the readings and activities assigned for that day. This syllabus a working document. The most up to date version is always posted on ELMS. Assignments will not change but readings may—depending on the needs of the class.

### Week 1: “The American Dream: Property”

#### January 4: Is there an 'American' culture'?

- Start watching *The Queen of Versailles* (2012)
- Raymond Williams “The Analysis of Culture” (1961) p. 48-56
- Read one of:
  - Alexander H. Stephens' 'Corner Stone' Speech (1861)  
<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/cornerstone-speech/>
  - Jose Marti's “Our America” (1852)  
<http://www.historyofcuba.com/history/marti/America.htm>
  - The Trail of Broken Treaties Caravan's 20-Point Position Paper (1972)  
<http://www.aimovement.org/archives/>
- Kirsten Silva Gruesz "America" from "Keywords for American Cultural Studies" (2007)
- **Students have until midnight to complete today's blog post because it's the first day of class.**

#### January 5: Is there 'class' in America?

- Finish watching *The Queen of Versailles* (2012)
- Begin reading Ta-nehisi Coates "The Case for Reparations" (2014)  
<http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/05/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>
- Laura Rivera "Hiring as cultural matching: The case of elite professional service firms", *American Sociological Review* 77.6 (2012): 999-1022.
- Harold Myerson "The 40-Year Slump" (2014) <http://prospect.org/article/40-year-slump>
- Eric Lott "Class" from "Keywords for American Cultural Studies" (2007)

#### January 6: What is 'race' and how does it work?

- Finish Reading Ta-nehisi Coates “The Case for Reparations” (2014)  
<http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/05/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>
- Michael Omi and Howard Winant, “Racial Formation” in *Racial Formation in the United States*

*From the 1960s to the 1990s*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1994. 53-76.

- James Barret and David Roediger "How White People Became White" (2005) 35-39

#### January 7: What is 'gender' and how does it work?

- Anne Fausto-Sterling, Introduction to *Sexing the Body*. New York: Basic Books, 2000. 1-29
- Catherine Connell. "Doing, undoing, or redoing gender? Learning from the workplace experiences of transpeople." *Gender & Society* 24.1 (2010): 31-55.

#### January 8: How do identities and structures intersect?

- John D'Emilio "Capitalism and Gay Identity" in *The Gay and Lesbian Studies Reader* (1993) 467-476
- Sunny Taylor "The Right to Not Work: Disability and Power" <http://monthlyreview.org/2004/03/01/the-right-not-to-work-power-and-disability/>
- Ange-Marie Hancock "When multiplication doesn't equal quick addition: Examining intersectionality as a research paradigm." *Perspectives on Politics* 5.1 (2007): 63-79.

### **Week 2: "The American Dream: Security"**

#### January 11: "When The Levees Broke" and midterm review

- Watch "When the Levees Broke" (2006)

#### January 12: "There's No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster"

- Neil Smith "There's No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster" <http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Smith/>
  - Most (short) readings for this week are drawn from the 2006 Social Science Research Council project "Understanding Katrina: Perspectives from the Social Sciences, a series of research briefs collecting different scholarly perspectives on the same theme for the public good.
- Dolores Hayden, "Urban Landscape History: The Sense of Place and the Politics of Space" in *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995. 15-43
- **Midterm released, no responses due today (feel free to blog for extra credit).**

#### January 13: Media Disasters

- Virginia Dominguez, "Seeing and Not Seeing: Complicity in Surprise" <http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Dominguez/>
- Havidan Rodriguez and Russell Dynes, "Finding and Framing Katrina: The Social Construction of Disaster" [http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Dynes\\_Rodriguez/](http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Dynes_Rodriguez/)
- Monica Krause, "New Orleans: The Public Sphere of Disaster" <http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Krause/>
- Maria Sturken, "Weather Media and Homeland Security: Selling Preparedness in a Volatile World" <http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Sturken/>

#### January 14: Geographies of Power

- Susan Cutter, "The Geography of Social Vulnerability: Race, Class, and Catastrophe." <http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Cutter/>
- Anthony Oliver-Smith, "Disasters and Forced Migration in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" <http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Oliver-Smith/>
- Julie Sze, "Julie Sze "Toxic Soup Redux: Why Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice Matter after Katrina" <http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Sze>

- **Midterm due**

#### January 15: Performing Recovery

- Eric Porter "Jazz and Revival" *American Quarterly* 61.3 (2009): 593-613

### **Week 3: "The American Dream: Opportunity"**

#### January 18: Producing Border-Crossers

- Watch Sleep Dealer (2008)
- "The Strange Career of the Illegal Alien: Immigration Restriction and Deportation Policy in the United States, 1921-1965" *Law and History Review* 21.1 (2004): 69-107
- Mae Ngai, "How Grandma Got Legal" *Los Angeles Times* (2006)  
<http://borderbattles.ssrc.org/Ngai/>
- Lauren Berlant "Citizenship" from "Keywords for American Cultural Studies" (2007)

#### January 19: Policing Border-Crossers

- Most of today's (short) readings are drawn from the 2006 SSRC Project "Border Battles: The US Immigration Debates" a series of research briefs collecting different scholarly perspectives on the same theme for the public good.
  - Richard Alba "Looking Beyond the Moment: American Immigration Seen from Historically and Internationally Comparative Perspectives" (2006) <http://borderbattles.ssrc.org/Alba/>
  - Nicholas De Genova "Migrant "Illegality" and the Metaphysics of Antiterrorism: "Immigrants' Rights" in the Aftermath of the Homeland Security State" (2006)  
[http://borderbattles.ssrc.org/De\\_Genova](http://borderbattles.ssrc.org/De_Genova)
  - Jorge Santibáñez Romellón "Migration and Borders: The Space for Contradictions" (2006)  
<http://borderbattles.ssrc.org/Santibanez/>
  - Wayne A. Cornelius "Impacts of Border Enforcement on Unauthorized Mexican Migration to the United States" (2006) <http://borderbattles.ssrc.org/Cornelius/printable.html>
- Eithne Luibhéid "Immigration" from "Keywords for American Cultural Studies" (2007)

#### January 20: Reproducing the Border

- Sassen, Saskia. "Strategic Instantiations of Gendering: Global Cities and Global Survival Circuits" in *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2002. pp. 254-275
- Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands/La Frontera*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2007 (1987). 18-35, 99-113
- Alys Weinbaum "Nation" from "Keywords for American Cultural Studies" (2007)
- **Final exam released**

#### January 21: Transnational Ties, National Competition

- Lisa Lowe "Globalization" from "Keywords for American Cultural Studies" (2007)
- Tamara K. Nopper "Revisiting 'Black-Korean Conflict' and the 'Myth of Special Assistance': Korean Banks, US Government Agencies, and the Capitalization of Korean Immigrant Small Business in the United States" *Kalfou* 1.2 (2014) 59-86

#### January 22: What is American Studies Beyond America?

- Radway, Janice. "What's in a Name?" *American Quarterly* 51 (March 1999): 1-32.  
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~DRBR2/radway.html>

- **Final exam due** (no blog today, though you're welcome to submit extra credit!)