

USA 300H1S

Alexandra Rahr

Theories and Methods in American Studies

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Thursdays 12-2pm; PB 255

Office Hours: T 12:30-2:30pm; Th 2:30-4:30pm 1 Devonshire Place, Rm 326N

**Course Description:** Beginning with Henry Nash Smith's field-defining question -- 'Can American Studies develop a method?' -- this class explores America as an object of study. Interrogating the modes of American Studies, we will examine how the field makes meaning out of history, geography, literature, demography, sociology and visual culture. Recognizing that methodology requires an object, we will read material culture as well as theory. To this end, pulp fiction cover art will illuminate our discussion of American citizenship, and we will examine Lyndon Johnson's infamous 'Daisy' campaign ad alongside scholarship on Cold War geographies. By analyzing the methods, history and theories of American Studies, we will both trace the invention of the field and consider contemporary debates over the discipline's future.

**All required texts available online through Blackboard class website.**

**Evaluation:**

**Comparative Analysis (20%):** An analysis of an assigned object, using two theoretical texts we've read so far this term. Analyse the object through the lens of these theoretical approaches, demonstrating how the theories produce different interpretations of the object (5-7 pages).

**Essay (30%):** An essay analyzing one of two assigned theoretical readings and using a methodology of your choosing (8-10 pages).

**Exam (30%):** The final exam will cover the texts, concepts and skills developed throughout the course.

**Informed Participation (20%):** In both lecture and tutorial, you will be evaluated based on the quality and quantity of your oral participation.

**Late Policy:** The penalty for late essays is two percentage points a day to a maximum of fourteen points (e.g., from 80% to 66%). Essays will not be accepted more than one week after the due date unless accompanied by medical documentation.

**Plagiarism:** According to the Code of Behaviour established by the Governing Council of the University of Toronto, to plagiarize is "to represent as one's own any idea or expression of an idea or work of another." This includes borrowing ideas as well as words without attribution, from print and from online sources. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please contact me.

**Drop Policy:** Last day to cancel S section code courses without academic penalty: **14 March 2018**. By this date, the Comparative Analysis assignment will be marked and returned to you, totaling 20% of your final grade.

**E-Culture Policy:** Blackboard is the best source for grades and other important course information. While I will respond to emails within two business days, substantive discussions about essays are most successful in person, and I encourage students to take advantage of scheduled office hours. If you're not available during these times, please contact me and we'll schedule an appointment.

**Schedule:**

**January 4: Setting the Terms**

Henry Nash Smith, 'Can 'American Studies' Develop a Method?' (Online)

**January 11: Myth and Symbol**

Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* (Online, excerpts)

Krista Comer, "West," *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* (Online)

**Jan 18: Revising Mythic Landscapes**

Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land* (Online, excerpts)

Walter L. Hixson, *American Settler Colonialism: A History*' (Online, excerpts)

**January 25: Racing the Field**

Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Online, excerpts)

Edward Baptist, *The Half has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (Online, excerpts)

**February 1: Queering the Field**

Mari Ruti, *The Ethics of Opting Out: Queer Theory's Defiant Subjects* (Online, excerpts)

Gay pulp fiction covers art (Online)

**February 8: Rapping Community**

Jooyoung Lee, *Blowin' Up: Rap Dreams in South Central* (Online, excerpts)

Hip hop selections (Online)

### **February 15: Making Americans**

William Frey, *Diversity Explosion* (Online, excerpts)

Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (Online, excerpts)

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS DUE IN TUTORIALS**

### **February 22: READING WEEK**

#### **March 1: The Pluribus and the Unum**

Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital* (Online)

Miranda Joseph, 'Community,' *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* (Online)

#### **March 8: Geographies of Conflict**

Matthew Farish, *The Contours of America's Cold War* (Online, excerpts)

'Daisy' campaign ad, Johnson Presidential Committee (Online)

#### **March 15: Not Just US America – Transnationalism and Exceptionalism**

Donald E. Pease, 'Introduction: Re-Mapping the Transnational Turn.' In *Re-Framing the Transnational Turn in American Studies* (Online)

Pan-American Exhibition Posters (Online)

#### **March 22: Re-Imagining a Discipline**

John Carlos Rowe, 'The Cultural Politics of the New American Studies' (Online, excerpts)

Russ Castronovo and Susan Gilman, *States of Emergency: The Object of American Studies* (Online, excerpts)

**ESSAY DUE IN TUTORIALS**

#### **March 29: Exam Prep and Review**