

AMERICAN STUDIES 3310G
Advanced American Studies: Being American

Winter 2020-21
Tuesdays 3:30 – 5:30 p.m. (on Zoom)

Instructor: Professor Aldona Sendzikas

Office Hours: Tuesdays 12 – 2 p.m. by e-mail (or on Zoom, by appointment)

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Images courtesy of amplifier.org

PLEASE NOTE: The weekly meetings of this course will be conducted in a virtual, synchronous format, using Zoom. The link for our weekly meetings can be found on the OWL course website. (Use the Zoom tab on the left side of the screen.) Please contact the instructor via e-mail should you have any questions about Zoom, difficulty accessing course materials, or any other concerns.

Course Description:

What defines being “American”? How is the American identity constructed, and how and why is it frequently contested? This course employs an interdisciplinary approach to explore the meaning(s) and definition(s) of American identity from multiple viewpoints, and within the context of US history, politics, regions, values, and culture.

Prerequisite(s):

1.0 History course at the 2200 level or above or enrolment in an American Studies module.

Unless you have either the prerequisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. The decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Antirequisite(s):

History 3310F/G.

Course Syllabus:**Course Content and Objectives:**

In this course, we will engage in the “doing” of American Studies by bringing together sources from a variety of disciplines—including History, English, Political Science, Popular Culture, *etc.*—as well as current events, in order to explore and examine a variety of topics, in an attempt to answer the question: What defines being “American”? Who determines this definition? What unites Americans, and what divides them? How is the American identity constructed, how has it evolved, and how and why is it frequently contested? How and why has the definition of “being American” changed? Who has been excluded from “being American,” and why?

Learning Outcomes:

In this course, students will:

- Practice applying an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the United States.
- Use both primary and secondary sources, drawn from a range of disciplines, to interpret and analyze issues in American history and society.
- Learn to situate contemporary issues in the context of historical events, as well as in the broader context of American Studies.
- Develop a research question and answer it in a written assignment, integrating both primary and secondary sources, and employing an interdisciplinary approach, in formulating the argument.
- Develop improved essay writing and research skills.
- Develop improved presentation and communication skills through class discussion.

Expectations:

- Attendance at all class sessions (virtually, via Zoom).
- Completion of all assigned readings and active, informed participation in class discussion, based on those readings, as well as on current events in the U.S. Follow the news!
- Courtesy and respect towards other members of the class.
- Be present: avoid distractions during the seminar, and try to engage with the class!

Course Materials:

- *A New Literary History of America*, edited by Greil Marcus and Werner Sollors (Cambridge, MA and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009). **This book is available for purchase through the Western Bookstore.**
- Additional weekly online readings, which will be posted on the OWL course website or will be otherwise accessible online.

Methods of Evaluation:**Grading:**

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| • Class participation | 20% |
| • Two short written assignments* (3-5 pp. each) | 10% x 2 = 20% |
| • Leading class discussion on one of the readings | 10% |
| • Midterm exam (during class, March 2 nd , 2021) | 20% |
| • Essay proposal (due Feb. 23 rd , 2021) | 5% |
| • Research essay (10-12 pages) (due April 6 th -13 th , 2021) | 25% |

*The first short written assignment will be due on February 2nd, 2021. The second short written assignment will be due on the date that you choose to lead a class discussion on an assigned reading from the textbook (or by 7 days from that date). This written assignment will be on the topic of that particular reading.

Written assignments

Written assignments must be submitted at the specified time on the due date, in electronic form via the submission link on the OWL course website. (By using the submission link on the course website, your paper will automatically be submitted to Turnitin.com.)

Further instructions regarding the above assignments will be provided during class.

Late assignments: A late penalty of 5% for the first day, and 2% for each day after the first day (including Saturdays and Sundays) will be incurred for all written work submitted after the due date and time. Papers submitted on the due date but after the due time will be considered late and will be penalized 2%. Keep a copy of each of your written assignments until you receive the grade for it.

Please note that AS3310G is an essay course. According to Western's Academic Handbook, an essay course "...must be so structured that the student is required to demonstrate competence in essay writing to pass the course." In this class, that means that all of the written assignments (including the midterm exam) must be completed and submitted in order for a student to pass the course.

Mid-term Exam

The mid-term exam will consist of essay questions that will be provided at the start of our class session on March 2nd, and you will have 2 hours to write the exam. The exam will be based on the course readings and class discussions. Your exams will be submitted to Turnitin.com.

You may not work together with other students in writing the exam, nor receive any assistance from other individuals.

Exams that are submitted after the due date and time will **not** be accepted.

Further instructions regarding the exam and assignments will be provided in class and posted on OWL.

Policy on Absences and Extensions:

If you require an extension or other type of academic accommodation, for either medical or non-medical reasons, contact Academic Counselling. Students are reminded that academic accommodation on medical grounds can in most instances only be granted if supported by a University of Western Ontario Student Medical Certificate. This form can be accessed at the Social Science Academic Counselling website: <http://counselling.ssc.uwo.ca/>, or can be picked up at the Academic Counselling Office in the student's home faculty. (For Social Science students: SSC 2105.) Further detail on this policy can be found at this same website.

Pressures of work or computer/printer difficulties do not constitute acceptable reasons for an extension.

Students should familiarize themselves with the university's Policy on Accommodation for Illness (http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_illness.pdf).

Accommodation for missed midterms with a Self-Reported Absence (SRA):

Students with an approved absence from an in-class test will be required to write a makeup test. Students must contact their professor to arrange a makeup test. Students who fail to write a makeup test in the designated time slot will receive a grade of zero.

Students should be aware that course professors may not be available to respond to questions during the makeup test slots.

Accommodation for missed assignment deadlines with a Self-Reported Absence (SRA):

If a student reports a SRA for an assignment (*e.g.*, an essay) the new due date will be 48 hours after the SRA was submitted. For example, if you complete a SRA on March 19 at 3pm, your new due date will be March 21 at 3pm.

If a student reports a SRA for an oral presentation, the presentation will be rescheduled by the instructor to an alternate date. The written assignment associated with the oral presentation will be due 48 hours after the original due date, as outlined above.

Course Schedule and Readings:

WEEKLY CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1 (January 12th): Introduction.

Review of syllabus. Introduction to course topic, themes, and methodology. Discussion: what defines being an American? Where should we look to find this definition? Is the meaning of “being American” different today than it has been in the past?

Week 2 (January 19th): “What, then, is the American, this new man...?”

How has American identity been defined historically? Is this a static definition, or does it change? What unites Americans? What divides them? How do America’s origins, the American Revolution, and America’s founding documents contribute to American identity?

Readings for today’s class:

- “...Crèvecoeur is naturalized as a citizen of the colony of New York” (in *A New Literary History of America*, pp. 88-93)
 - Crèvecoeur, Letter III from *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) (you can find this under “Resources” on the OWL course website)
- “James Madison keeps a secret transcript of the Constitutional Convention” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 108-112)
 - U.S. Constitution (available on OWL)
 - Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself” (Stanzas 1, 15 and 16) (available on OWL)
- “Washington’s Farewell Address” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 122-126)
- “Jefferson’s First Inaugural Address” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 136-140)
- “‘Yankee Doodle’ goes to town; Francis Scott Key writes ‘The Star-Spangled Banner’” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 84-88)

Week 3 (January 26th): “A Model of Christianity.”

Religion, religious differences, and religious tolerance in America. Is religion part of “being American,” or is “separation of church and state” an essential element of the American identity?

Readings for today’s class:

- “The City Upon a Hill” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 26-30)

- Excerpt from John Winthrop’s “A Model of Christian Charity” speech (1630) (available on OWL)
- “The Book of Mormon” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 192-196)
- “The Scopes Trial” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 584-588)
- Kurt Anderson, “America Versus the Godless Civilized World: Why Are We So Exceptional?” (available on OWL)
- Alan Wolfe, “Religious Diversity: The American Experiment that Works” (available on OWL)

Week 4 (February 2nd): “Warrior Nation.”

America is a nation that was born through warfare, that was split apart by warfare, and that traditionally has respected military service. How has war shaped the meaning of America? To what extent is war and military service part of “being American”?

Readings for today’s class:

- “Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 333-338)
 - Text of Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address (available on OWL)
- “Conditions of Repose” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 338-344)
 - *Gardner’s Photographic Sketch Book of the War* (Vol. 1, 1863) (available on OWL)
- “Ulysses S. Grant Finishes his *Memoirs*” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 397-401)
- “The Robert Gould Shaw and 54th Regiment Monument” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 434-440)
- “The Atom Bomb” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 780-786)
- “The Eye of Vietnam” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 963-968)
 - Seymour Hersh, “Lieutenant accused of murdering 109 civilians” (19 Nov. 1969) (available on OWL)
- “Maya Lin’s Wall” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 1006-1011)
 - Excerpt from John McCain, “Faith of My Fathers” (available on OWL)

*Short paper #1 due.

Week 5 (February 9th): “The complexities of race in this country that we’ve never really worked through...”

What is it like to be black in America? To what extent have slavery and racism shaped the meaning of America? We will discuss the idea of “double consciousness”: the reconciling of black identity and American identity in a race conscious society.

Readings for today’s class:

- “White Supremacy and Black Solidarity” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 196-201)
 - Article 1 of Walker’s *Appeal* (available on OWL)
 - Query 14 in Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* (read pp. 147-154) (available on OWL)

- “A Red Record” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 421-425)
 - Chapter 1 of Ida B. Wells, *A Red Record* (1895) (available on OWL)
 - Helene Johnson, “A Southern Road” (poem) (1926) (available on OWL)
 - Claude McKay, “The Lynching” (poem) (1922) (available on OWL)
- “Integrating the Military” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 786-790)
- “Roll Over Beethoven” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 871-875)
- “The Autobiography of Malcolm X” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 932-938)

SPRING READING WEEK: February 15th – 19th. No class this week.

Week 6 (February 23rd): “You are on Indian land.”

The original Americans: how do they fit into, and how have they shaped, the definition of “being American”?

Readings for today’s class:

- “The *Cherokee Nation Decision*” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 205-210)
 - “Two Accounts of the Trail of Tears” (available on OWL)
 - “The Science of the Indian” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 317-321)
 - Lewis Henry Morgan, “Preface” (pp. ix-xi) in *League of the Ho-dé-no-sau-nee, or Iroquois* (1851) (available online through the Western Libraries catalogue)
 - Query 11 in Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* (pp. 99-113) (available on OWL)
 - “The Southwest Imagined” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 387-392)
 - Charles Fletcher Lummis, *The Land of Poco Tiempo* (1906) (read Chapter 1) (available online through the Western Libraries catalogue)
 - George Wharton James, *What the White Race May Learn from the Indian* (1908) (read Foreword and Chapter 1)
 - Anton Treuer, “Everything You Wanted to Know About Indians” (available on OWL)
- *Essay proposal due.

Week 7 (March 2nd): MIDTERM EXAM

(to be assigned and written during class time, and due at the end of class).

Week 8 (March 9th): “The Other America.”

Regional and class differences amongst Americans: how much do they matter?
Being poor (and ignored) in “the land of opportunity.”

Readings for today’s class:

- “The Great Gatsby” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 574-579)

- “The Second Bill of Rights” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 766-770)
- “The Southwest Imagined” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 387-392)
- “You’re Swell!” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 689-694)
- “Two Days in Harlem” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 710-714)
- Additional articles in Week 8 folder on OWL course website.

Week 9 (March 16th): “Give me your tired, your poor....” vs. “I will build a great wall...”

New Americans: the place of immigrants in America and in American identity. How are Mexican-Americans and other recent immigrants reframing and reshaping the meaning of “being American”? Why has this been such a cause for concern among some other Americans?

Readings for today’s class:

- “The Real American Has Not Yet Arrived” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 473-477)
 - “Unguarded Gates” (poem by Thomas Bailey Aldrich, 1892) (available on OWL)
 - “Trump official says Statue of Liberty verse welcoming immigrants is about ‘people coming from Europe’” (14 Aug. 2019) (Associated Press/CBC.ca) (available on OWL)
- “Americans All” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 569-574)
 - Angel Island Immigration Station Poetry (1910-1940) (available on OWL)
- “The First Asian Americans” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 958-962)

Week 10 (March 23rd): “Un-American.”

When and why have certain Americans been deemed “un-American”? How does this help define—and complicate—the meaning of “being American”?

Readings for today’s class:

- “‘Civil Disobedience’ and *Walden*” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 263-268)
 - Henry David Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience” (1849) (available on OWL)
- U.S. Flag Code (available on OWL)
- “When the Supreme Court Ruled to Allow American Flag Burning” (21 June 2019) (available on OWL)
- “A Vietnam War deserter crosses the line into Canada” (16 September 2017) (available on OWL)
- “Ehren Watada: Free at Last” (*The Nation*, 26 October 2009) (available on OWL)

Week 11 (March 30th): “Why is it that, as a culture, we are more comfortable seeing two men holding guns than holding hands?”

Being gay in America: creating a gay identity in America in the face of exclusion and discrimination. Why have differences in sexual orientation and gender identity been so difficult for many Americans to accept?

Readings for today’s class:

- “Billy Wilder’s *Some Like It Hot*” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 880-885)

- “*A Boy’s Own Story*” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 997-1002)
 - “The early days of America’s AIDS crisis” (NBCNews.com, 15 October 2018) (available on OWL)
- “What we really mean when we talk about the acceptance of gay people” (Los Angeles *Times*, 10 June 2018) (available on OWL)

Week 12 (April 6th): “The only good thing this hurricane brought us is that now everybody knows that we are American citizens...”

Americans on the periphery. In this final week, we will discuss groups of Americans who feel neglected by, or apart from, the rest of American society. We will consider native Hawaiians and the Hawaiian independence movement; Puerto Ricans in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria; and New Orleanians in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Readings for today’s class:

- “Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 429-434)
 - Liliuokalani, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen* (1898) (read Chapter LVII, “Hawaiian Autonomy”) (available on OWL)
- “New Orleans is Lost in the Flood” (in *A New Literary History*, pp. 1039-1044)
- “How Hurricane Maria Fueled Puerto Rico’s Resistance” (Frontline, PBS.org, 2 August 2019) (available on OWL)

*Research essay due.

Additional Statements:

Please review the Department of History Course Must-Knows document, <https://www.history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/Docs/Department%20of%20History%20Course%20Must-Knows.pdf>, for additional information regarding:

- Academic Offences
- Accessibility Options
- Medical Issues
- Plagiarism
- Scholastic Offences
- Copyright
- Health and Wellness