

MALS 73100
American Culture and Values

Fall 2020

Professor Karen Miller

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Thursdays, 4:15 to 6:15 pm Eastern Time

Open office hours will be on Thursdays from 7-9 pm Eastern Time

I am also available by appointment and by email

Course Description

This class will serve as a graduate level introduction to the field of American Studies. We will examine how scholars within a range of subfields have used both creative and conventional scholarly tools to explore questions about life, infrastructure, health, race, ethnicity, indigeneity, gender, sexuality, transnationality, borders, architecture, foreign relations, language, politics, economics, literature, art, music, work, social movements, and more. The class will be organized thematically, arranged around a series of inquiries drawn from recent scholarship. Each week, we will examine a narrow set of questions that scholars have posed within a specific subfield. We will explore parts of two books that are thematically related and consider how authors' approaches have invited different kinds of studies and produced different sorts of questions. We will consider texts that engage directly with other American Studies scholars, as well as studies that we may consider American Studies, but whose self-conscious target audiences are elsewhere in the academy. Students will be asked to write at least one book review, one "keyword" study, and one research paper.

Course Structure:

This course is fully online. Zoom and Blackboard are the two online tools we will be using together.

We will be meeting synchronously during our class period (from 4:15 to 6:15 pm on Thursdays). During those meetings, we will be using Zoom.

Student will also be asked to login to Blackboard for our discussion board discussions and to turn in assignments. Please make sure that your Blackboard is set to receive emails at an email that you check regularly (it does not need to be your gradcenter.cuny.edu account). I will post the syllabus and a link to the readings on the Blackboard site. There are also hyperlinks on this document.

Please complete the readings by noon on Thursday so that you can participate in our Blackboard discussion. Please keep your responses handy for our discussion as you will be asked to consult them while we are talking about the texts synchronously.

We will be using blackboard for

1. The discussion board feature.
2. All assignments will be turned in via Blackboard.

All assigned work is due on a Sunday night at 11:59 pm.

Course Objectives:

1. Develop a familiarity with the field of American Studies.
2. Critically interrogate the concepts of "American," "Culture" and "Values."

3. Develop an understanding of how a range of American Studies scholars approach sources, make claims, and engage in public debate.
4. Gain an understanding of the broad range of theories and methods appropriate to interdisciplinary work in American Studies.
5. Learn the United States is shaped in the contexts of empire, racial capitalism, and power hierarchies.

Course Expectations:

1. *Course Reading:* All of our readings are posted in a Dropbox folder. You do not need to sign in to Dropbox to access the readings. You can download them to your own computer. Please read all material before noon on Thursdays so that you can engage in our discussion board conversations.

A note about printing (if you have a printer): To save paper, you can print out two pages per sheet. Here are [directions](#). Choose 2 by 1 and click “Landscape” at the bottom of the dialogue box.

2. *Discussion Board Prompt & Responses:* Each week, one student will start a discussion board thread on blackboard. Everyone else will respond. Please post the prompt by Tuesday at noon so that your colleagues have a couple of days to respond. Here is a link to form to sign up for a week.

Crafting the prompt:

- a. Write a short paragraph about how the two assigned readings speak to each other – what are common themes or elements that they share? How are they different in their approaches? What did you learn by thinking about them together?
- b. Write three to five bullet points that summarize *key arguments* that the author is making in the assigned text.
- c. For each reading, find 12 paragraphs throughout the assigned text that are particularly illustrative of the author’s main points. List those paragraphs (by first couple of words and page number).

Writing the response (200-300 words):

- Here are some questions to consider: What questions does the author raise that you find interesting? How do they connect back to one or more of the points highlighted in the lesson plan? Does either of them push you to consider other aspects of the readings than you were thinking about? Students will use their discussion board writing during our synchronous conversations, so save this somewhere where they are accessible. This will help us link our insights back to concrete examples in the text.
3. *One Key Word:* Each student will write one keyword entry of a word of their choosing. You do not need to do outside research for this. Instead, choose a word that is emerging from the assigned texts in the first month of the class. These entries should be 3 double spaced pages. Please use the entries in the *Keywords for American Studies* book as your model.
 - a. Bring an idea of a couple of key words you are thinking of exploring to class on Thursday, September 24.
 - b. Keyword assignment due on October 4 at 11:59 pm.

4. One Book Review: Each student will sign up to write one book review. This book review should be at least 5 double-spaced pages and is due on November 1 at 11:59 pm.

Directions:

- a. Choose one book that is on this syllabus and send me an email telling me what it is.
- b. Please read the chosen book in its entirety and write a critical review. The UNC writing center has an excellent on-line [handout about how to write a book review](#).
- c. For models of reviews, please look at the [reviews on H-Amstdy](#). You may also want to look at reviews in academic American studies journals like the *American Quarterly* and *The Journal of American Studies*. [The Graduate Center library](#) subscribes to these journals.

Elements of a strong book review:

1. In the first paragraph, the reviewer introduces the book and makes a statement about what they see as the book's contribution to its field of study.
 2. Reviewer offers a concise explanation of the book's *central claims*.
 3. Reviewer explains who the book's author is engaging (what bodies of literature).
 4. Reviewer provides a critical summary of some of the book's main themes. This critical summary should be the bulk of the essay and should include topic sentences for each paragraph that link the analysis of the evidence to the larger claim about the book, itself.
 5. Reviewer considers what kind of evidence the book's author is using, assesses and discusses the research that the author has conducted.
 6. Reviewer includes a conclusion that considers what questions the book may raise for other scholars to address.
5. Final Project – Proposal, Presentation, and Paper (This is a link to the more extensive assignment):
- a. Paper Proposal: A proposal for your final paper is due on Sunday, October 18. Please try to meet with me well before then to discuss your paper ideas. Please upload the paper to our blackboard site.
 - b. Presentation Based on Your Final Project: You will all be asked to make a presentation based on your research on Thursday, Dec. 10th. These presentations will be five minutes long. Every student should make a single PowerPoint slide and email it to me by noon on that day. The idea here is for you to summarize your main points and your evidence. A strong presentation will begin with an explanation of the thesis you have devised and demonstrate how your thesis works through one or two examples.
 - c. Final Paper: Your final paper is due on Tuesday, December 17th. Please upload a .pdf copy of your paper to our blackboard site before midnight.

Your grade:

Students can only get a grade in the class if they complete and turn in all of the assignments:

Keyword Assignment (due Oct. 4): 15%
Book review (due Nov. 1): 15%

Term paper: 50%

Proposal (due Oct. 18)

Presentation (on Dec. 10)

Final paper (due Dec. 17)

Class participation: 20%

This includes Discussion Board Prompts and Responses

Assigned Reading

Meeting 1 (Aug. 27): Keywords for American Studies

- Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler, eds., *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, Second edition (New York: New York University Press, 2014), Introduction, Chapters "American," "Culture," and "Politics," and at least four chapters of your choosing.

Meeting 2 (Sep. 3): Studies of Masculinities

- Rebecca M. Jordan-Young and Katrina Alicia Karkazis, *Testosterone: An Unauthorized Biography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019). Introduction and Chapter 7.
- Rashad Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness: Architectures of Confinement and Black Masculinity in Chicago* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015). Preface, Introduction, Chapters 3 & 5.

Meeting 3 (Sep. 10): Cultural Studies of Unfree Labor

- Gregory Rosenthal, *Beyond Hawai'i: Native Labor in the Pacific World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), Introduction, Chapters 1 & 3, and Epilogue.
- Sophie White, *Voices of the Enslaved: Love, Labor, and Longing in French Louisiana* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019). Introduction, Chapter 1, and Epilogue.

Meeting 4 (Sep. 17): Trans Studies

- Marquis Bey, *Them Goon Rules: Fugitive Essays on Radical Black Feminism* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2019). Pages 5 – 55, 141 – 157
- Aren Z. Aizura, *Mobile Subjects: Transnational Imaginaries of Gender Reassignment*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018). Introduction, Chapter 4, and Epilogue.

Meeting 5 (Sep. 24): Fashion Studies

- Thuy Linh N Tu, *The Beautiful Generation Asian Americans and the Cultural Economy of Fashion* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011). Introduction and Chapter 2.
- Anne Anlin Cheng, *Ornamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), Preface, Intro, Ch. 3, Coda.

Please bring a couple of ideas for keywords you might want to write about with you to class.

Meeting 6 (Oct. 1): Rightlessness

- A. Naomi Paik, *Rightlessness: Testimony and Redress in U.S. Prison Camps Since World War II*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016). Introduction, Chapter 3, and Conclusion.
- Rebecca Mina Schreiber, *The Undocumented Everyday: Migrant Lives and the Politics of Visibility* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018). Preface, Introduction, Chapter 6, and Conclusion.

Keyword assignment due on Oct. 4

Meeting 7 (Oct. 8): Music Studies

- Nitasha Tamar Sharma, *Hip Hop Desis: South Asian Americans, Blackness, and a Global Race Consciousness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013). Preface, Introduction, Chapter 2, and Conclusion.
- Kristina M. Jacobsen, *The Sound of Navajo Country: Music, Language, and Diné Belonging* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017). Introduction, Chapters 1 & 5, and Epilogue.

Meeting 8 (Oct. 15): Disability Studies

- Bess Williamson, *Accessible America: A History of Disability and Design* (New York: New York University Press, 2019). Introduction, Chapter 7, and Epilogue.
- Anne E. Parsons, *From Asylum to Prison: Deinstitutionalization and the Rise of Mass Incarceration after 1945, Justice, Power, and Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

Proposal for final project due on Oct. 18

Meeting 9 (Oct. 22): Queer Studies

- Karen Tongson, *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries, Sexual Cultures* (New York: New York University Press, 2011). Chapters 1, 4, & Coda.
- E. Patrick Johnson, *Black. Queer. Southern. Women: An Oral History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018). Introduction, Chapter 7, and Epilogue.

Meeting 10 (Oct. 29): TV and Film Studies

- Elana Levine, *Her Stories: Daytime Soap Opera & US Television History, Console-Ing Passions* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020). Introduction, Chapters 6 & 8.
- Hilary Neroni, *The Subject of Torture: Psychoanalysis and Biopolitics in Television and Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015). Introduction, Chapters 1 & 5.

Book review due on Nov. 1

Meeting 11 (Nov. 5): Studies of the Cultures of the US in the World

- Colleen Woods, *Freedom Incorporated: Anticommunism and Philippine Independence in the Age of Decolonization*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020). Introduction, Chapter 3, and Conclusion.
- Mark L. Gillem, *America Town: Building the Outposts of Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). Introduction, Chapters 3, Conclusion.

Meeting 12 (Nov. 12): Science and Medicine Studies

- Neil Maher, *Apollo in the Age of Aquarius* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019). Introduction, Chapter 2, and Conclusion.

- Sari Altschuler, *The Medical Imagination: Literature and Health in the Early United States*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018). Introduction, Chapter 3, and Conclusion.

Meeting 13 (Nov. 19): Studies of Black & Brown Citizenship

- John D. Márquez, *Black-Brown Solidarity: Racial Politics in the New Gulf South*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013). Introduction, Chapters 3 & 4, and Conclusion.
- Aimee Meredith Cox, *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015). Preface, Introduction, Chapter 4, and Epilogue.

Meeting 14 (Dec. 3): Bodies and Empire Studies

- Neve Gordon and Nicola Perugini, *Human Shields: A History of People in the Line of Fire* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), TBA.
- Andrew Jon Rotter, *Empires of the Senses: Bodily Encounters in Imperial India and the Philippines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019). Introduction, Chapter 6, and Conclusion.

Meeting 15 (Dec. 10): Presentations

Final Paper due December 17.