

**Introduction to American Studies**  
**AMST 4000**  
**Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race**  
**Prof. Matt Sandler**  
**Office Hours: Monday, 2-4, and by appt.**  
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**Description:**

This course explores the set of possibilities presented by American Studies as a comparative field of study. We begin with a brief overview of the history of the discipline, and we'll focus especially on its transformation by the emergence of ethnic studies and identity based forms of knowledge in the 1960's and 1970's. Rather than attempting a synoptic approach, we will focus on three subjects, "Land and Property," "Captivity," and "Nightlife."

We will have a few guiding concerns: How does one organize knowledge around conceptual categories? How does one do research in a multimedia, "cultural" environment? How does one situate oneself as an "intellectual" or "critic" in relation to one's object of study? How does one write about different media/genres? How does one incorporate different methodologies into one research project?

**Grading:**

--Participation: 15%

(You will be expected to contribute verbally to every class session. You are permitted to miss 2 sessions without penalty.)

--Research projects: 3x25%

(After each unit, you'll be responsible for a research project, targeted at 7-9 pages in length. These will have specific prompts, and you should check with me via email or in person about your direction before proceeding.)

--Event reports: 10%

(These are very short responses to events in the department relevant to American Studies.)

**Required Texts:**

Most of the material for the course is available via Courseworks in pdf form. The books are available at Book Culture. If you buy them somewhere else, please be sure to order them in time, and get the same editions listed here...

Chauncey, George. *Gay New York: : Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*. New York: Beacon, 1995.

Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. New York: Norton, 2000.

## **Schedule:**

**Week1 (Sept. 12<sup>th</sup>):** Henry Nash Smith, "Can 'American Studies' Develop a Method?"; Gene Wise, "Paradigm Dramas in American Studies"

### **Land and Property:**

**Week2 (Sept. 19<sup>st</sup>):** Henry Nash Smith, selections from *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*; Leo Marx, selections from *The Machine in the Garden*; Annette Kolodny, selections from *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience in American Life and Letters* (Courseworks)

**Week 3 (Sept. 26<sup>th</sup>):** Kenneth Jackson, "The Drive-in Culture of Contemporary America"; Catherine Jurca, "The Sanctimonious Suburbanite: Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*"; Eric Avila, "Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Film Noir, Disneyland and the Cold War (Sub)Urban Imaginary" (Courseworks)

**Week4 (Oct. 3<sup>rd</sup>):** Christina Hanhardt, "Canaries of the Creative Age: Queer Critiques of Risk and Real Estate in the Twenty-First Century"; N.D.B. Connolly, "Bulldozing Jim Crow"; Beryl Satter, "Property is Bad: Recent Trends in American Studies" (Courseworks)

**Week5 (Oct. 10<sup>th</sup>):** Rob Nixon, "Environmentalism, Postcolonialism, and American Studies"; Julia Sze, "Gender, Asthma Politics, and Urban Environmental Justice Activism"; David Naguib Pellow, "High-Tech Environmental Racism: Silicon Valley's Toxic Workplaces" (Courseworks)

### **Captivity:**

**Week6 (Oct. 17<sup>th</sup>):** *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012, dir. Kathryn Bigelow); Amy Kaplan, "Where is Guantanamo?" (Courseworks)

**Week7 (Oct. 24<sup>th</sup>):** Mary Rowlandson, "The Sovereignty and Goodness of God" (Courseworks); Christopher Castiglia, "Her Tortures Were Turned into Frolick: Captivity and Liminal Critique, 1682-1862" (Courseworks)

**\*\*\* Attend Johanna Fernandez talk, Oct. 26, 6:30pm, Sulzberger South Tower Conference Room \*\*\***

**Week8 (Oct. 31<sup>st</sup>):** Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*; Valerie Smith, "Form and Ideology in Three Slave Narratives"; Frances Smith Foster, "Resisting Incidents" (Norton) **\*\*classroom visit by Prof. Courtney Thorsson (Oregon)\*\***

**Week9 (Nov. 7<sup>th</sup>):** Winter Break

**Week10 (Nov. 14<sup>th</sup>):** Jacobs, cont'd.; James Olney, "I Was Born"; and Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe"

**Nightlife:**

**Week11 (Nov. 21<sup>th</sup>):** George Chauncey, *Gay New York*

**Week12 (Nov. 28<sup>th</sup>):** Shane Vogel "Closing Time: Langston Hughes and the Queer Poetics of Harlem Nightlife"; Ralph Ellison, "Golden Age, Time Past"; Robin Kelley, from *TheLonious Monk* (Courseworks)

**Week13 (Dec. 5<sup>th</sup>):** Kathy Peiss, "Dance Madness: New York City Dance Halls and Working Class Sexuality"; selections from Carla Kaplan, *Miss Anne in Harlem*, Jane Gerhard, "Sex and the City: Carrie Bradshaw's Queer Postfeminism"

**Week14 (Dec. 12<sup>th</sup>):** Chris Washburne, from *Sounding Salsa*; Alexandra Vazquez, from *Listening in Detail*; Frances Negrón Muntaner, "Ricky Martin's Hips" (Courseworks)