**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 dwell on these conceptual nodes at some length. The idea here is not to develop a comprehensive picture of American Studies as a body of knowledge, but to get a feel for the way its most predominating concerns have been the object of heated, oppositional debate. This perspective is especially helpful in tracking the points of contact between American and Ethnic studies. This thematic focus also gives us time to develop small individual research projects for each unit.

Our guiding questions include: 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.)

**Schedule:**

Sept. 10: Introductions, ASA Presidential Addresses by Robert Warrior and David Roediger

CAPTIVITY

Sept. 17: Mary Rowlandson, “The Soveraignty and Goodness of God”; Christopher Castiglia, “Her Tortures Were Turned into Frolick: Captivity and Liminal Critique, 1682-1862”

Sept. 24: Henry Highland Garnet, “Address” (1843); Frederick Douglass, selections from *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855); Frances Harper, selected poems

Oct. 1: George Washington Cable, “The Convict Lease System”; Ruth Wilson Gilmore, selections from *The Golden Gulag*; Nicole Fleetwood, “Posing in Prison: Family Photographs, Emotional Labor, and Carceral Intimacy”

Oct. 8: Mohamedou Ould Slahi, selections from *Guantanamo Diary*; Amy Kaplan, “Where is Guantanamo?”

LAND, SPACE, AND PROPERTY

Oct. 15: Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History”; Herbert Bolton, “The Epic of Greater America”; Jack D. Forbes, “Frontiers in American History and the Role of the Frontier Historian” **(Paper 1 Due)**

Oct. 22: Frederick Law Olmsted, “Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns”;David Scobey, “Anatomy of the Promenade: The Politics of Bourgeois Sociability in Nineteenth-Century New York”

Oct. 29: Eric Avila, “Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Film Noir, Disneyland, and the Cold War (Sub)Urban Imaginary”; Derek Hyra, “The Back-to-the-City Movement: Neighbourhood Redevelopment and Processes of Political and Cultural Displacement”

Nov 5: NO CLASS—FALL BREAK

Nov 12: Rob Nixon, “Environmentalism, Postcolonialism, and American Studies”; Julia Sze, “Gender, Asthma Politics, and Urban Environmental Justice Activism”

THE CITY, NIGHTLIFE, AND SEXUALITY:

Nov 19: Tim Guilfoyle, from *City of Eros*; Kathy Peiss, “Dance Madness: New York City Dance Halls and Working Class Sexuality”; George Chauncey, from *Gay New York* **(Paper 2 Due)**

Nov 26: Samuel Delany, from *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*; José Esteban Muñoz, “The Future Is in the Present: Sexual Avant Gardes and the Performance of Utopia”

Dec 3: Jane Gerhard, “Sex and the City: Carrie Bradshaw’s Queer Postfeminism” Richard Lloyd and Terry Nichols Clark, “The City as Entertainment Machine”

Dec 10: TBA **(Paper 3 Due)**