

SEMINAR IN AMERICAN STUDIES AMST 1201

Professor: Chris Vials
Office Hours: Wednesdays 1-3 pm (and by appointment)
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Course Description

This course will serve as an introduction to American Studies, a method that studies U.S. culture by bringing together material from across a wide range of disciplines such as literature, history, anthropology, art history, media studies, economics, and more. Our major theme for this particular section is how the U.S. has been consistently shaped by the world outside its borders. Early American Studies scholarship was based on the “exceptionalist” idea that U.S. history was guided entirely by internal mechanisms: this country was molded, in other words, in a vacuum. More recent studies have stressed how the U.S. border is more permeable than is often believed, and we will explore this permeability as we look at capital flows across borders, the influence of “foreign” ideas on US culture, the diasporic imagination among ethnic American writers, and more. Toward the end of the course, we will study how exceptionalist ideas about the outside world can lead to devastating wars.

Situating the U.S. in a global context, we will use literature, popular fiction, photography, music, political rhetoric, and secondary historical works to examine diverse historical phenomena such as immigration, transatlantic slavery, American Victorianism, industrial capitalism, the New Deal, the Cold War, and consumer culture.

Required Texts

Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa*
Jack London, *Call of the Wild*
Carlos Bulosan, *America is in the Heart*
Graham Greene, *The Quiet American*
Sandra Cisneros, *Woman Hollering Creek*
Smaller readings are available on HUSKY CT

Course Requirements and Policies

For this class, you'll be asked to write 3 papers and 1 final exam. Your first paper will be what I call a “cultural artifact assignment,” which will require you to address a number of interpretive questions about an “artifact” of your choosing. The second and third papers will require you to write in an interdisciplinary fashion (details on all of these assignments will follow). Your final exam will be a “take home” that will ask you to draw upon material we've covered over the course of the semester.

Finally, you will be evaluated on your participation. It goes without saying here that for a good participation grade, you will need to read the material for each and every class and arrive ALERT, ready to discuss it in detail. This also means that you need to regularly attend. Every absence over 3 will negatively impact your participation grade. **Seven absences or more will result in an automatic “F” for participation.**

Grading

Paper One (Cultural Artifact)	20%
Mid-Term Exam	15%
Paper Two	20%
Final Paper	25%
Participation	20%

Paper Submission Guidelines. All papers need to be submitted in Times New Roman 12 point font (or its equivalent), double-spaced, and with 1 inch margins. Papers and exams also need to be submitted *in class* (not electronically) on the day they are due. If your paper is one class period late, I will deduct your grade by ½ letter, but will still accept it. If it is more than one class meeting late, I will not accept it.

Plagiarism Policy. According to the University of Connecticut, Student Code, Section VI:

“A fundamental tenet of all educational institutions is academic honesty; academic work depends upon respect for and acknowledgment of the research and ideas of others. Misrepresenting someone else’s work as one’s own is a serious offense in any academic setting and it will not be condoned”

You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with the University’s academic honesty policies. If you are caught plagiarizing an assignment, I will give you an automatic “F” for that assignment and also file a report with the University documenting the incident. For a second offense, I will automatically fail you for the course.

Daily Syllabus

(all readings not purchased at the Coop are available on HUSKY CT)

Foundations

- 1/19 Tu Introductions
1/21 Th Dorothy Ross, "American Exceptionalism," + Daniel Rodgers, "Exceptionalism" + John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity;" + Ronald Reagan, "A Shining City Upon a Hill"
- 1/26 Tu Linbaugh & Rediker, "Wreck of the Sea Venture"
1/28 Th Equiano, *Interesting Narrative*
- 2/2 Tu Equiano, *Interesting Narrative*
2/4 Th Equiano, *Interesting Narrative*
- 2/9 Tu Declaration of Independence + Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen

The Frontier and Early American Studies

- 2/11 Th Smith, *Virgin Land* (excerpt)
In-class: painting and still photography on the American West
- 2/16 Tu Slotkin, "Exposition: the Frontier as Myth and Ideology" + "Buffalo Bill's Wild West and the Mythologization of the American Empire"

Industrialization and Late 19th Century Culture

- 2/18 Th Sinclair, *The Jungle* (excerpts)
- 2/23 Tu Arnold, "Sweetness and Light" + Stevenson, "Around the Parlor Table"
2/25 Th Peiss, *Cheap Amusements* (excerpts)
In-class activity: the late 19th century weekend

Empire at the Turn of the Century

- 3/2 Tu London, *Call of Wild*
3/4 Th London, *Call of Wild*
Due: Cultural Artifact Assignment
- 3/9 & 3/11 No Class: Spring Break
- 3/16 Tu **Due: Take-Home Mid-Term Exam**
Poetry of the New Negro Renaissance: Jean Toomer, Margaret Walker, Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Bennett, Sterling Brown, Claude McCay

The Popular Front of the 1930s and 1940s

- 3/18 Th Denning, "Waiting for Lefty"
In-class presentation: Dr. Seuss
- 3/23 Tu Steinbeck, *Grapes of Wrath* (excerpt)
In-class: photography of the Farm Security Administration
3/25 Th Bulosan, *America is in the Heart*
- 3/30 Tu Bulosan, *America is in the Heart*
4/1 Th Bulosan, *America is in the Heart*

Postwar Consumer Culture and the Cold War

- 4/6 Tu **Due: Paper Two**
In class: *Ephemeral Films*
- 4/8 Th Cleaver, "The Rise and Fall of the Keynesian State" + film discussion
[shorten discussion of Quiet American to two days; Cisneros to one? Or, make the "Conclusions" day a Cisneros day to clear room for conferences
- 4/13 Tu Greene, *The Quiet American*
In-class: presentation on the Vietnam War
- 4/15 Th Greene, *The Quiet American*
- 4/20 Tu Greene, *The Quiet American*
- 4/22 Th Cisneros, *Woman Hollering Creek*
- 4/27 Tu Cisneros, *Woman Hollering Creek*
- 4/29 Th Conclusions

Your **Final Paper** is due on **Friday, April 30th** in my mailbox (CLAS 208).