

Introduction to American Studies

21:050:200:01

Conklin 455

Mondays & Thursdays 1—2:20pm

Prof. Drew Ciccolo | Email: djc296@rutgers.edu

Office Hours: after class or by appointment on Zoom

Required Texts:

Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (Vintage, 2004)

Note on required text: Please get the correct edition. (The 2004 Vintage edition of *Beloved* contains an important Foreword by the author, and we will need to be on the same page — no pun intended — when it comes to page numbers in the novel proper.)

General introductory note: This class is designed in a very straightforward way, with clear deadlines and expectations, and the hope is that you'll be able to learn about American Studies and the U.S. itself without it causing you unnecessary stress. If you're experiencing any troubles, please don't hesitate to be in touch with me via email or after class. We will talk and figure things out together.

COVID-related protocol:

In order to protect the health and wellbeing of all members of the Rutgers-Newark community, masks must be worn by all persons inside campus buildings when in the presence of others, and in buildings in non-private enclosed settings (e.g., common workspaces, workstations, meeting rooms, classrooms, etc.). Masks should conform to CDC guidelines and should securely cover the nose and mouth. Masks must be worn during class meetings. Each day before you arrive on campus or leave your residence hall, you must complete the brief survey on the My Campus Pass symptom checker self-screening app found at: [myRutgers Portal](#).

Masks/Face coverings must be worn (required) in all buildings at RU-N, including in classroom settings. Masks/Face coverings should cover your nose and your mouth securely. Though you may choose to wear your mask outdoors, particularly in crowded settings, masks are not required outdoors.

Canvas: We'll also be using the web-based **Canvas course software** (<http://canvas.rutgers.edu>). I will post the syllabus and syllabus updates there, and I'll also post course documents and assignments. Be sure that you have created a Net ID; you'll need it to access the site.

We may also use the **Zoom feature in Canvas**, particularly for office hours and/or conferences. You can create your **Rutgers Zoom account** here:

<https://it.rutgers.edu/zoom/knowledgebase/how-to-create-your-rutgers-zoom-account/>

All texts except *Beloved* will be available in digital (.PDF) format on Canvas for you to download. For any clips and films, I will supply a link or links (on Canvas) and they will be free to watch.

Course summary:

As an interdisciplinary field, American Studies employs countless lenses to explore competing definitions of “America.” Therefore, it does not have a standard set of practices that defines its approach. Instead, as an interdisciplinary field, American Studies allows us to start with a given problem or question and use the approaches, theories, and sources that best address it.

In this course, we will begin by analyzing discussions about America writ large. Then, we will move (for the most part) chronologically from the pre-Columbian era through the present. Though we will be anchored by historical narratives, we will expand beyond history into other disciplines, including English, African American Studies, Women’s and Gender Studies, Anthropology, Economics, and more in order to critically and carefully read and write about primary and secondary sources. Through our studies, we will focus on the following themes: oppression and resistance, identity and difference, inclusion and exclusion, and legacies and hauntings.

Our goals are not just to gain greater perspective on U.S. history and culture, but also to think about how American Studies, in comparison to other fields, allows for such perspectives. Our work in this course will mirror the diversity (and, at times, the dissonance) of the field and the country itself. That is to say, you will be not just encouraged, but required, to find your own individualized path into a deeper understanding of “America.” To do so, you will first need to be aware of how others have created their paths. Then, following your curiosities, you can begin to map your own.

Course Objectives

- ¥ Identify and examine key moments and events in the history of U.S. society and culture
- ¥ Distinguish between history and historiography
- ¥ Analyze American history, culture, and identities through multiple kinds of sources with awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of these sources
- ¥ Learn to identify an author’s main argument
- ¥ Learn to do interdisciplinary analysis and present it in different forms
- ¥ Draw connections between readings across themes and historical periods
- ¥ Develop writing skills via two writing assignments – one short and one longer-form

Course Requirements:

Class meetings are from 1pm – 2:20pm on Mondays and Thursdays in Conklin 455.

6 Reading Tests – multiple choice and true/false, to be taken on Canvas

2 Writing Assignments – one shorter form (2 pages or so) and one longer-form (3-4 pages) assignment – clear directions for each will be available via Canvas.

If an assignment or test is submitted after the deadline, points will be deducted for every two days (or one class meeting) your response is overdue.

On any given day, I may choose to give a reading quiz consisting of simple questions about that day's reading(s).

Grading:

Reading Tests (6) and Writing Assignments (2): 90%

- 6 Reading tests @ 10% each
- 1 (mid-semester) Writing Assignment @ 12%
- 1 (end-of-semester) Writing Assignment @ 18%

Communication, engagement with material, general comportment as student: 10%

Classroom Guidelines:

Inevitably, as we discuss the texts that we will read in this class, I expect there to be a variety of perspectives, disagreements, and debates. Dialogue across our disagreements can help us understanding the readings (and life) more deeply. But please also remain respectful.

Attendance and Absences:

More than three (excused or unexcused) may result in a lowering of your final grade. More than five may result in failure of the course. Showing up is important – that's where most of the learning happens. And participating is important – please be engage with the course materials and the classroom discussions.

Academic Integrity Policy

As an academic community dedicated to the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge, Rutgers University is committed to fostering an intellectual and ethical environment based on the principles of academic integrity. Academic integrity is essential to the success of the University's educational and research missions, and violations of academic integrity constitute serious offenses against the entire academic community.

The Rutgers University Academic Integrity Policy defines plagiarism as “the use of another person's words, ideas, or results without giving that person appropriate credit.” In Writing Program courses instruction is given and emphasis is placed on attribution and citation skills. Intentionally committing plagiarism is a serious offense that results in severe consequences. Writing Program instructors are required to report students who intentionally violate this policy to the Director of the Writing Program and to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs.

The most common academic integrity violations by writing students are:

- “Copying word for word (i.e. quoting directly) from an oral, printed, or electronic source without proper attribution.”
- “Paraphrasing without proper attribution, i.e., presenting in one’s own words another person’s written words or ideas as if they were one’s own.”
- “Submitting a purchased or downloaded term paper or other materials to satisfy a course requirement.”

If you are in doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism or are concerned that you are misappropriating someone’s words or ideas, speak immediately with your instructor. For more information, you can also consult the Rutgers University Academic Integrity Policy, which can be found at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>

Accommodation and Support Statement:

Rutgers University Newark (RU-N) is committed to the creation of an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students. RU-N has identified the following resources to further the mission of access and support:

Students with Disabilities: Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Disability Services (ODS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter barriers due to disability. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact ODS, register, have an initial appointment, and provide documentation. Once a student has completed the ODS process (registration, initial appointment, and documentation submitted) and reasonable accommodations are determined to be necessary and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be provided to the student. The student must give the LOA to each course instructor, followed by a discussion with the instructor. This should be completed as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at ods.rutgers.edu. Contact ODS: (973) 353-5375 or ods@newark.rutgers.edu.

Religious Holiday Policy and Accommodations: Students are advised to provide timely notification to instructors about necessary absences for religious observances and are responsible for making up the work or exams according to an agreed-upon schedule. The Division of Student Affairs is available to verify absences for religious observance, as needed: (973) 353-5063 or DeanofStudents@newark.rutgers.edu.

Counseling Services: Counseling Center Room 101, Blumenthal Hall, (973) 353-5805 or <http://counseling.newark.rutgers.edu/>.

Students with Temporary Conditions/Injuries: Students experiencing a temporary condition or injury that is adversely affecting their ability to fully participate in their courses should submit a request for assistance at: <https://temporaryconditions.rutgers.edu>.

Students Who are Pregnant: The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance is available to assist students with any concerns or potential accommodations related to pregnancy: (973) 353-1906 or TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu.

Gender or Sex-Based Discrimination or Harassment: Students experiencing any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, or stalking, should know that help and support are available. To report an incident, contact the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance: (973) 353-1906 or TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu. To submit an incident report: tinyurl.com/RUNReportingForm. To speak with a staff member who is confidential and does **NOT** have a reporting responsibility, contact the Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance: (973) 353-1918 or run.vpva@rutgers.edu.

Learning Resources:

Rutgers Learning Center (tutoring services)

Room 140, Bradley Hall

(973) 353-5608

<https://sas.n.rutgers.edu/student-support/tutoring-academic-support/learning-center>

Writing Center (tutoring and writing workshops)

Room 126, Conklin Hall

(973) 353-5847

nwc@rutgers.edu

<https://sas.n.rutgers.edu/student-support/tutoring-academic-support/writing-center>

Cell Phones: Must be turned off or switched to silent mode at all times. Many of us have become phone addicts... it's good to unplug for an hour. Respect yourself, me, and the learning environment.

Office Hours: My office hours are for you. Make an appointment at a mutually agreeable time and stop by with any questions you have about assignments, readings, classroom discussions, other pertinent topics, or just drop by to say hello. The only thing I discourage is visiting to cover material from a missed class period; all else is warmly welcomed.

READING SCHEDULE (subject to changes, which will be announced in class and via Canvas/email):

All readings except *Beloved* are available on Canvas and are to be completed by the date next to which they are listed.

Unit 1: Colonization and “America” (pre and post-Columbian America)

Sept. 8th: Syllabus. Using Canvas. Discussion about American Studies and the U.S. Questions?

Sept. 12th: Keyword: America; Howard Zinn, “Columbus, the Indians, and Human Progress.”

Sept. 15th: Keyword: Culture; Watch in class: Roanoke video, Jamestown video. **Reading test (#1) on Zinn chapter must be taken by next class.**

Unit 2: Slavery and its Legacies (Antebellum, Civil War era, and Postbellum U.S.)

Sept. 19th: Howard Zinn, “Drawing the Color Line.” Begin watching in class: Race: The Power of an Illusion, episode 1.

Sept. 22nd: Finish watching Race: The Power of an Illusion, episode 1. Watch videos on slave rebellions. Discuss.

Sept. 26th: Howard Zinn, “Slavery Without Submission, Emancipation Without Freedom.”

Sept. 29th: Watch in class: Race: The Power of an Illusion, episode 2. **Reading test (#2) on Zinn chapter and the construction of race must be taken by next class.**

Oct. 3rd: Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, Foreword (xv-xix) and pp. 1—86.

Oct. 6th: Watch Race: The Power of an Illusion, episode 3. Begin working on mid-semester writing assignments (time in class to discuss and brainstorm).

Oct. 10th: Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, pp. 87—158.

Oct. 13th: Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, pp. 159—195.

Oct. 17th: No class today – if you need to catch up in *Beloved*, do it! (Or you can move ahead so you’ll have less reading next week.)

Oct. 20th: Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, Ch. 196—277.

Oct. 24th: Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, pp. 278—324. **Reading test (#3) on Beloved due by next class.**

Oct. 27th: FOR TODAY’S CLASS, WE WILL ATTEND the IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES AND GLOBAL POLITICS IN EXPRESS NEWARK, 54 HALSEY ST., 2ND FLOOR (1—2:30pm). Reading test (#3) on Beloved due by next class.

Unit 3 (Halloween Interlude): Puritanism and the Salem Witch Trials

Oct. 31st: Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Young Goodman Brown.” Watch in class: Salem witch trials documentary. Discussion on the concept of “scapegoating.” **Discussion of “Immigrant Communities and Global Politics.” Reading test (#4) on the Salem Witch Trials and scapegoating must be taken by next class. First Writing Assignment due by Next Class.**

Unit 4: Class and Neoliberalism

Nov. 3rd: **First Writing Assignment due.** Workshop sample project proposals.

Nov. 7th: Watch “How Poor People Survive in the USA.” **Reading test (#5) on this film must be taken by next class.**

Nov. 10th: Reading TBA. Begin watching *The Shock Doctrine*.

Nov. 14th: Finish watching *The Shock Doctrine*. Discuss.

Unit 5: Gender and Sexuality

Nov. 17th: Sally Ann Drucker, “The Three Waves of Feminism”; Sedgwick, “Queer and Now.”

Nov. 21st: Keyword: Queer; Moore, Satter, Stewart-Winter, Strub, “A Community’s Response to the Problem of Invisibility: The Queer Newark Oral History Project”; *Queer Newark*. **Reading test (#6) on gender and sexuality (3 waves of feminism and *Queer Newark*) must be taken by next class.**

--- Thanksgiving Break ---

Unit 6: Immigration

Nov. 28th: Reading(s) TBA.

Dec. 1st: No class today. Work on final writing assignments!

Dec. 5th: Watch U.S. immigration documentary.

Dec. 8th: Explore *Newest Americans* website.

Dec. 12th: Discussion of big takeaways. **Last writing assignment due.**