

**ACS7400/HIST7400**  
**Spring 2012**  
**Genealogy of American Culture**

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### **Course Goals**

This course will expose students to the general evolution of American Studies as a field of inquiry, acquaint students with some of the fruitful intersections between cultural analysis and historical analysis, and illuminate to students some of the intellectual contours of the cultural history of the geographical area that is now the United States up through the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most of all, students will consider how we analyze culture in a historical context and how culture changes over time.

### **Participation**

#### Meetings

Unless you are instructed otherwise in class, we will meet in the ACS conference room in East Hall on Tuesdays from 2:30 to 5:20PM.

Goal: The learning experience involves not only the flow of information from teacher to student but also the exchange of ideas between teachers and students and among the students themselves. Each of us brings a unique background and viewpoint to class, and only by engaging in conversation will you be able to benefit from others in the class the way they may benefit from your presence and participation. Discussion not only requires the articulation of ideas, but also taking into account others' viewpoints. You will be required to discuss both in class and online. You will lead discussion one week. Leading discussions serves several purposes. First, in order to be able to lead discussion effectively, one must digest the material covered. Second, one must consider not only what the authors argued, but also what they did not, as well as how the different works intersect. Third, one provides a service to one's peers by putting the works in a proper context and in considering what issues they bring up, on their own and together. Finally, this is good preparation for future teachers at all levels.

Finally, you will present the results of your historiographic paper (more on that below). The purpose of presenting work is to engage into a conversation with colleagues (and sometimes the general public) so as to provoke discussion and to solicit the suggestions and critiques necessary for sharpening arguments. This assignment will help you do both through your presenting a paper orally for comment and discussion by your peers. Remember that presentations are *not* the same as papers. A good presentation is not merely your paper read out loud. Rather, it is presenting the essential points in an engaging way that can be followed by listeners, as opposed to writing in a detailed way that can be slowly digested by readers. Preparing for a presentation is very different from simply reading a paper.

Requirements: You must come to class prepared to discuss intelligently the relevant sources assigned for the class, and you must take part in class discussion and online discussion on a regular basis in a civil way. Woody Allen once wrote that "eighty percent of success is showing up." Although the percentage is different for success in this class, attendance is mandatory. Each student will lead discussion once, generally in pairs, as there are more students than there are course days. Students will be responsible for leading discussion for at least the first half of the

class session. Discussion leaders will ensure that all readings are discussed individually and in relation to each other, that all students participate, and that the classroom atmosphere is conducive to an open exchange of ideas. Furthermore, discussion leaders will be responsible for discussion that week on Canvas. The subject of the blog will be relating the subject of our reading to the historicization of a current issue in American culture.

Evaluation: Class participation will count for 25% of your grade. You will be evaluated as much on the quality of your participation—the relevance of your comments, your ability to engage other students, your exhibiting a grasp of the material, and the cogency of your remarks—as the quantity of your participation.

## **Writing**

Note: All written work must be submitted electronically, by the assigned date, through the appropriate link in the “Assignments” area of Canvas.

### *Book Reviews*

Goal: In order to be able to discuss a book intelligently, you must first be able to grasp, evaluate, and articulate the book’s scope (that is, what the book is about), its thesis (its essential argument), its methodology (how the author constructed the thesis, including choice and analysis of evidence and application of relevant theoretical constructs), and some placing of the book into a broad intellectual context. In this case, the context will be our reading and discussions concerning the field of American Studies, cultural studies, and their intersections with the study of American history. Furthermore, learning to write book reviews is an essential part of your professional training.

Requirement: Each student will write four 500- to 750- word book reviews, based on professional models, of different course texts. The book reviews are due no later than the beginning of class on the day the book is due to be read, and must be done on separate books from the one on which you will be leading class discussion.

Below are typical guidelines for reviews in scholarly journals:

- Provide a brief summary of the scope, purpose, thesis, and content of the book. Explain its significance and scholarly context. *For this class: your review must refer to some issue or debate (theoretical or methodological) from our readings on cultural history or American studies at the beginning of the semester or some other issue that we have encountered, either in discussion or in our reading. The purpose of this is for you to make connections between your reading and to better contextualize your reading.*
- Include an evaluation of the author’s use of sources, organization and presentation of material, and achievement of overall purpose.
- Do not list typographical or other minor errors unless they significantly impair the value of the book.

Evaluation: Your book review will be evaluated in terms of the degree to which it captures and evaluates the book’s scope, thesis, and methodology; how successful it is in placing the book in the broader intellectual themes of the class; and its organization and felicity of expression. The book reviews, taken together, will count for 20% of your grade.

*Dual book review* Goal: This is the next step up from writing a single book review: writing a more extended consideration of two monographs that deal with similar subject matter, to think

about what we can learn by reading them together. How do they shed light on each other? What questions does one raise that the other answers? To what extent do they agree and disagree, and why, and what does that say about the books, their interpretations, methodology, or the sources on which they rely? And what does that tell us about the time and place and people the books address?

Requirements: This 2,000-2,500 word paper still requires communicating the basic information and offering the analysis that a book review does, except of course for two books. Furthermore, they must include a discussion of the two books together and in the context of the practice of cultural history, as with the individual book reviews.

Evaluation: Your book review will be evaluated in terms of the degree to which it captures and evaluates the books' scope, thesis, and methodology; how successful it is in considering the two books in light of each other and in placing the books in the broader intellectual themes of the class; and its organization and felicity of expression. It will count for 10% of your grade.

### *Historiography Paper*

Goal: Professional-level academic work always takes place in the context of long scholarly conversations. "Historiography" basically means the history of historians' thought on a given subject, so a "historiographic essay" is an analysis of how, over time, scholars have investigated and thought about a given issue, along with how lines of debate have evolved. For example, the historiography of American slavery in the 20<sup>th</sup> century would begin with a consideration of U.B. Phillips, who in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century basically wrote that slavery was the best thing that ever happened to the enslaved, would continue through people like Kenneth Stampp, who in the 1950s wrote that slavery imposed a concentration-camp mentality among the enslaved, and continue through further debates concerning slave accommodation and resistance, African acculturation to America, the gendered nature of slavery, the ways slavery changed over time, and so forth. The goal of this assignment will be for you to assess this conversation, and to join it for yourself.

Requirement: Your historiography paper will be 2,500-3,000 words long on the topic of your choice (as long as its scope is within the geography of the current United States and chronologically ending by 1900). Whatever its topic, it must relate the discussion of that topic to broader trends in American cultural history and consider that conversation in the context of those broader trends. It will be due at the beginning of class on the day of your presentation on this topic.

Evaluation: Your paper will be evaluated according to how well and how clearly they achieve the above objectives, and will count for 25% of your grade.

### *Final Paper*

Goal: Part of the academic conversation on a given topic necessarily involves considering its broader disciplinary and intellectual concerns. The purpose of this paper is to reflect upon what we have learned and to consider what the major trends are in the study of American cultural history.

Requirement: You will write a 2,000-2,500 word paper to consider the question of what are the major trends in American cultural history. It can and should address the historiographies of the topics that you wrote about, but those may not be the central focus of the paper; rather, they can be used to illustrate your broader points about the state of the field, its guiding questions, and its current direction. It is due no later than 8PM May 5, that is, the end of the final exam period designated for this class.

Evaluation: Your paper will be evaluated according to how well and how clearly it achieves the above objectives. It will count for 20% of your grade.

### Course Schedule

Below is the schedule for class meetings. The articles for the first two weeks of reading are all available online in our Canvas course site in the "Files" area. The books in **boldface** are those available through the BGSU bookstore and local off-campus bookstores; the others are all available at Jerome or through OhioLink. Please note that, because of the number of students in the course, if you plan to get a book from Jerome Library or through Ohiolink, make sure to order it well in advance. You have the schedule now; plan accordingly. In any given week, you are to read the required text. However, you may opt instead to read the alternate text in any week, but please do so no more than two or three times over the course of the semester. On the two weeks listed as a "forum," we'll divide up the books to read so that they are all covered.

Date	Theme	Main reading	Alternate Reading
10-Jan	Intro		
17-Jan	American studies and cultural history: how we got here	<b>Readings in Canvas</b>	
24-Jan	Cultural contact	Shoemaker, <b>A Strange Likeness: Becoming Red and White in Eighteenth-Century North America.</b>	Richter, Facing East from Indian Country
31-Feb	Culture under crisis	Smallwood, <b>Saltwater Slavery</b>	Sensbach, Rebecca's World
7-Feb	Sexuality over time	Block, <b>Rape and Sexual Power in Early America</b>	Foster, Sex and the Eighteenth-Century Man
14-Feb	Forum: Whither early American culture?	Your choice: Butler, <i>Becoming America</i> ; Gomez, <i>Exchanging Our Country Marks</i> ; Greene, <i>Pursuits of Happiness</i> ; Fischer, <i>Albion's Seed</i> (read judiciously); Meinig, <i>Atlantic America</i> ; Bushman, <i>Refinement of America</i>	
21-Feb	A cultural revolution?	Auslander, <b>Cultural Revolutions</b>	Young, <i>The Shoemaker and the Tea Party</i>
28-Mar	Culture, region, and the market	Johnson, <b>Soul by Soul</b>	Roberts, <i>American Alchemy</i>
6-Mar	Spring break		
13-Mar	Forum: Making race, making ethnicity	Your choice: Roediger, <b>Wages of Whiteness</b> ; Bay, <b>White Image in the Black Mind</b> ; Ignatiev, <b>How the Irish Became White</b>	

20-Mar	Civil War, culture war	Faust, <b>This Republic of Suffering</b>	Manning, What This Cruel War Was Over
27-Mar	Capital and culture	Trachtenberg, <b>Incorporation of America</b>	Enstad, Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure
3-Apr	Cultural heritages	Nelson, <b>Steel Drivin' Man</b>	Blight, Race and Reunion
10-Apr	Presentations		
17-Apr	Presentations		
24-Apr	American Studies and cultural history: where to?	<b>Readings in Canvas</b>	
3-May	Final paper due, 8PM		

Important: on 13 March, that's Mia Bay's **The White Image in the Black Mind: African-American Ideas About White People, 1830-1925** not the book with a similar title by Jane Davis.

### Grades

#### Evaluations weighting

Participation	25%
Book reviews (combined)	20%
Dual book review	10%
Historiography paper	25%
Final paper	20%
TOTAL	100%

#### Grading scale

A	90-100
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69
F	<60

### Passing

You must earn a passing grade in every portion of this course—participation, oral presentation and discussion leading, and all written assignments—to earn a passing grade for the course. Fail any of those categories, and you will not receive a passing grade for the course.

### Miscellany

Late papers policy: You will be penalized one letter grade for each day an assignment is due. The clock starts at the beginning of class on the day the paper is due, meaning that if the paper is not handed in at the beginning of that class, it will be considered late.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is bad on many levels. First of all, you're stealing from someone else by taking her or his hard work and passing it off as your own. You're cheapening your degree, and worse yet, those of your peers by getting something (a passing grade) for nothing. You're cheating yourself the opportunity to learn and to develop your thinking and writing skills, presumably the reason you came to BGSU. You are also stealing from your classmates—and, indeed, yourself—by taking up a good deal of your instructor's time on detecting and dealing

with plagiarism rather than evaluating other assignments and preparing for class. Last of all, you're insulting your instructors by assuming that we can't tell. You may get away with it this time, but sooner or later, you'll get caught (and you won't be the first or even the second graduate student who has been so insolent in one of my classes). Cheating or plagiarism of any form is a serious offense, will not be tolerated, may result in a failing grade for the entire course and/or disciplinary action, and indeed, only my lawyer's vehement objections prevent me from inflicting 18<sup>th</sup>-century-style corporal punishment (think pressing or keelhauling) on academic honesty offenders. See the BGSU graduate catalog for further information.

Emergencies: John Milton praised the ability "to temper Justice with Mercy." Should there be some dire and urgent reason that you are unable to attend class or turn in an assignment on time (family or medical emergency, for example, not "But there's a *Land of the Lost* marathon on cable this week!"), contact me as soon as possible so that we may make alternate arrangements for the satisfactory and timely completion of the requirements of the assignment(s). Note that you will still be held responsible for any material read, due, or discussed in class.

Special Needs: If you need special course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability or have emergency medical information to share with me, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible. I will make strong efforts to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to learn, to participate, and to be evaluated fairly.

Office Hours: Should you have any questions, comments, difficulties, or desire to discuss matters historical or otherwise, please do not hesitate to come to my office hours, make an appointment to see me, or email me.