

# AMST\_OX 201QW: Introduction to American Studies Spring 2017

Tuesday/Thursday, 10:00-11:40 am

Tuesday/Thursday, 1:40-3:20 pm



*Image from Ellis Island website*

**Instructor:** Dr. Molly McGehee

**Email:** [margaret.mcgehee@emory.edu](mailto:margaret.mcgehee@emory.edu)

**Office location:** Humanities Hall 205A

**Office phone:** 770.784.4532

**Office Hours:** Mondays & Wednesdays, 1-2 pm, and  
other times on Mon and Wed mornings by  
appointment

## Required Books

Abraham Cahan, *Yekl*

Nella Larsen, *Passing*

Gene Luen Yang, *American Born Chinese*

Copies of these books are available through the Oxford College Bookstore. You may choose to purchase these texts elsewhere; if so, please get the same editions that we are using in class. **You should always have the assigned reading with you in class.**

## Articles & Films

You are required to read several essays and articles as well. These are available as PDFs online via our Course Reserves and Canvas sites. **Always bring your assigned text to class—i.e., please print out the assigned articles or essays. Laptops and iPads are not allowed in class.** Our course texts and films are also on the Reserve shelf behind the main reference desk in the library.

## Course Overview

What are the myths put forth about life in the U.S., and what are the realities? Who counts as “American”? Is the “American Dream” just that—a *dream*? In this course, we will examine works that address the multiple meanings and uses of the term “American” as applied to—or kept from—individuals and groups throughout the history of the United States. Focusing on what it has meant to be (or not to be) an American at different points in time, this course will explore how people have experienced life within this country’s borders given their diverse identities and given the political, economic, and social climates surrounding them. Topics will include immigration experiences in the late nineteenth and late twentieth/early twenty-first centuries; the phenomenon of “passing” (and what that can tell us about how social constructions in the U.S.); and the struggles that many Americans face in making ends meet.

## INQ Designation

Courses driven by inquiry are designed to be transformative in that students not only learn elemental concepts, principles, assumptions, and terminology of a particular discipline, but they understand and question the way knowledge is sought by actively learning and practicing the

discipline's approaches to inquiry. These explorations often engage ethical issues and social responsibility, make connections across disciplines, and create contexts for experiential learning. Ways of Inquiry courses, although primarily focused on ways of seeking knowledge rooted within a discipline, also strive to develop students' abilities in areas that in some ways transcend disciplines: reading critically, writing cogently, communicating effectively, and independently pursuing knowledge through inquiry. The Student Learning Outcomes listed below connect to the mission of the Ways of Inquiry (INQ) courses. AMST 201Q will guide you in understanding the central concerns—and practicing the central methodologies—of American Studies as a field of academic study.

### **Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)**

By the end of this course, students will develop their abilities to:

1. Read more critically
2. Produce analytical essays in which they clearly articulate and thoroughly support a central argument
3. Think more critically about the political, economic, and social issues that shape individuals' and groups' experiences living and working in the United States
4. Articulate the ways in which identity categories and social constructions—including (but not limited to) race/ethnicity, class status, gender, religious affiliation, and sexual orientation—intersect to inform how an individual or group has experienced life in the United States at various points in the country's history
5. Produce a ~10-page paper using appropriate academic sources that responds to specific research questions
6. Present research findings orally in a clear, organized, and engaging way

### **Email**

I am always happy to speak with you in person about your coursework. I am also happy to field your questions over email, with the exception of questions about grades (which should be asked in person). When emailing me (or any professor or staff member, for that matter), please keep the following guidelines in mind:

1. Use an appropriate subject line for your message.
2. *Always* start your message with an appropriate greeting, such as "Dear Prof. McGehee" or "Dr. McGehee—" (as opposed to "Hey").
3. Use a professional and respectful tone within your message.
4. Proofread your message before sending. (A good way to do that and to check tone is to read the message aloud before clicking Send.)

***Note: I do not always check email between 5 pm and 8 am. If you email in the evening/night, I will most likely not respond until the next morning.***

### **Oxford College Writing Center**

I strongly encourage you to take your essays to the Writing Center. You may do so at any stage in the writing process, but the Writing Center director and I advise you not to wait until the day before the essay is due. You could go for help to get started, to organize and develop your ideas in a rough draft, or to learn to recognize and correct errors in grammar and punctuation in a revised draft.

Spring 2017 hours are Sunday-Thursday, 3-11 pm. The center is located on the second floor of the library. You may sign up online for an appointment at: <http://oxford.emory.edu/academics/centers-institutes-programs/writing-center/>. When you go to your appointment, make sure that, in addition to your draft, you have a copy of your assignment with you, as well as the book(s) you are using in that assignment. **Ask the tutor for assistance on specific issues—s/he is not there (and is not**

allowed) to proofread your work but to guide you towards a clearer expression of your ideas.

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and class participation	100 possible points
5 weekly responses	50 possible points
Weekly quizzes (~10)	~50* possible points
2 essays	200 possible points
1 research project/presentation	200 possible points
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>600 max. points</b>
<i>OPTIONAL Narrative of Learning</i>	<i>50 possible points</i>
<b>OPTIONAL TOTAL</b>	<b>650 max. points</b>

\*May vary if fewer quizzes are given

### GRADING

The grading system for this course relies on a point system, meaning that **you start with a 0 in this course**. The only way to go is up, in other words! Each component of the course is worth a certain number of points (see Course Requirements below), and all of your points will appear in the Gradebook within Canvas. Your grade will be determined by dividing the number of points *you earned* by the total number of *possible* points (not including extra credit), which totals **600** for this semester. (If you choose to complete the Narrative of Learning, then the total will be **650 possible points for the semester**.) The grading scale is as follows: A 100-93; A- 92-90; B+ 89-87; B 86-83; B- 82-80; C+ 79-77; C 76-73; C- 72-70; D+ 69-67, D 66-60, F 59 and below.

### DISCUSSIONS & ATTENDANCE

- **Class Participation:** The success of this class depends on you (and a little bit on me). You are responsible both for attending each class session and for participating in the lively and informed discussions that will no doubt result from your having thoroughly and thoughtfully completed the assignments for each day.
  - If you tend to be a less vocal participant in classroom discussions, send your thoughts or questions to me via email, talk to me after class, etc.
  - Participation also involves “active” listening, including eye contact, nodding, smiling, raising eyebrows, and taking notes.
  - Bring your book or assigned articles (printed out) to class.
  - Texting and being generally disruptive during class meetings will **NOT** earn you participation points.
  - If you are disruptive in class (talking while I am talking, sleeping, or engaging in any other form of distracting behavior), I will ask you to leave, and you will be marked absent for that day.
- **Attendance: You are allowed 2 absences, for any reason, without penalty.**
  - There are no “excused” absences for medical reasons unless someone from the Office of Academic Services and/or the Access, Disability Services and Resources (ADSR) office contacts me directly about your particular situation. If you realize you will be missing multiple classes for a medical reason, please contact Lauren Braun in Academic Services ASAP so she can notify all of your professors.
  - **For each absence beyond 2, you will lose 1 point from your final grade average.** (For example, you have a 90 average at the end of term, but you were absent 5 times total. Because of the 3 excessive absences, you would lose 3 points on that average, leading to an 87 for the course.)
  - That said, please talk to me in advance about **accommodations for religious holidays/observances**.
  - Be on time. If you come to class more than 10 minutes late, you will be counted as absent.

- If you miss class, you are responsible for obtaining notes from a classmate. Please don't email me with the following question: "Did I miss anything important in class today?" My answer will always be "yes."
- **Technology: ALL CELL PHONES SHOULD BE TURNED OFF DURING CLASS!**
  - Texting or using your cell phones during class automatically negates any participation points earned during class that day. This is by far by #1 pet peeve—arrgghhhh!!!!
- **Grading:** At midterm, you will receive a participation grade out of 50 points along with feedback on how to improve your participation going forward. At the end of the semester, you will receive an additional participation grade out of 50 points. **Possible points: 100 points**

#### READING RESPONSES (5)

- See the handout at the end of this syllabus for more info about this assignment as well as the due dates.
- You will submit **5 reading responses** in this course—that is one per week except during weeks when a take-home test or portion of the research project is due. (Note: You have 6 opportunities for reading responses, but you only have to submit 5.)
- **Late responses will not be accepted.**
- These responses are to be 350 words (or more) each, and you should also include 1-2 discussion questions at the end of the response that you would like to address in our class meetings.
- You will post the responses to Canvas (instructions attached).
- I recommend typing a response in Word first, checking your word count and spelling, and then upload your response to Canvas.
- These responses are intended to help prepare you for class discussion, to provide you with practice writing, and to provide an informal space where you can work out ideas for the more formal essays.
- Each response is worth a maximum of 10 points. **Total possible points: 50 points maximum (5 responses x 10 points max each).**

#### WEEKLY QUIZZES (~10)

- I will give a **quiz once a week** based on the reading assignment for the day I choose to give the quiz.
- The quizzes will consist of either 5 factual questions related to the reading or one open-ended question to which you will respond in a paragraph or two.
- **Total possible points: 50 points maximum (5 points per quiz).**

#### ESSAYS (2)

- For each of the essays, you will be asked to respond to a question of your choice. The first essay will be 5-6 pages in length; the second essay will be 6-7 pages in length.
- The questions will relate to the readings and class discussions leading up to each essay assignment.
- **Total possible points: 200 points max. (100 points per essay test)**

#### RESEARCH PROJECT

Topic statement/ research questions	20 points
Annotated Bibliography	30 points
Paper	100 points
Presentation	50 points
<b>Total</b>	<b>200 points</b>

For this project, you are to research a topic of your choice related to the themes and main ideas of this course. You may work in pairs on this project or work individually. You will turn in a topic statement, an annotated bibliography of approximately 6-8 sources, and a paper in which you present your findings (approx. 10 pages; longer if working in a pair). You will also be asked to present your findings to the class in a presentation (time length TBD, but ~10-12 minutes for an individual or ~20 minutes for a pair). If you would like to pursue an alternative format to a research paper (e.g., a website; a short film; etc.), please talk to me about your ideas well in advance, but keep in mind that I can offer limited technical expertise.

In terms of topics, this is an open-ended assignment—you will just want to make sure that your topic relates in some way to the themes or ideas of the course. I will provide you with a possible list of ideas and work with you to develop your ideas...but you are free to choose your own focus. I do encourage you, however, to avoid topics for which there are very few peer-reviewed sources available.

### **OPTIONAL NARRATIVE OF LEARNING**

The narrative of learning, due during the exam period, is optional. You decide at the end of the semester whether you will complete this assignment; if you do, your grade is calculated out of 650 points, rather than out of 600. In this short essay, you will reflect on what you took away as significant, important, or essential from this course. You will be asked to incorporate a certain number of the course texts into the essay. Total possible points: **50 points max.**

### **Note on Student Work**

Student work submitted as part of this course may be reviewed by Oxford College and Emory College faculty and staff for the purposes of improving instruction and enhancing Emory education.

### **EXTRA CREDIT**

Throughout the semester, I will give you opportunities to raise your point total by attending and writing up a summary of outside events—such as lectures, films, performances, or exhibitions—that relate to the topics and themes of this course. If you have suggestions for such events, email your ideas to me for approval, and I will post them to Canvas. Most events will be worth 3 points. The maximum you may earn is **6 points**.

### **HONOR CODE**

<http://oxford.emory.edu/academics/student-services/student-honor-code/> The Honor Code applies to all assignments, in and out of the classroom. **All work in this course must be entirely your own.** The bottom line: don't use someone else's ideas or words without proper citation. (This includes websites like Sparks Notes!) I am always happy to discuss with you when something needs to be acknowledged and properly cited, but it is up to you to see me before your written work is due to ask your questions about documenting sources.

**ACCESS, DISABILITY SERVICES and RESOURCES OFFICE (ADSR):** <http://oxford.emory.edu/life-at-oxford/disability-services/> ADSR will offer qualifying students academic accommodations such as alternative testing, notetaking, interpretation, etc. **Students must register and request those services.** To do so, contact ADSR at [adsroxford@emory.edu](mailto:adsroxford@emory.edu) or 770.784.4690.

**COUNSELING AND CAREER SERVICES (CCS):** <http://oxford.emory.edu/counseling/>

CCS provides many services at no cost to help address students' personal and career development needs, including personal counseling, career counseling, and psychiatric services. To schedule an appointment, call 770.784.8394.

### (Tentative\*) Reading and Assignment Schedule

*\*Disclaimer: Should we get behind or need more time on a topic, I reserve the right to alter the reading schedule. I will not, however, alter the assignment due dates except in a case where it may help the class.*

**Tu Jan 10** Introduction and Overview of syllabus  
"The Great American Melting Pot" from *Schoolhouse Rock*

#### Coming to America, Becoming American

**Central Questions:** *Does the idea of the "melting pot" capture the reality of immigrant experiences? How do immigrants in the U.S. reconcile the old and the new? Traditions? Language? Beliefs? Behaviors? Etc. What is retained? What is left behind? Why? What forces—external and internal—have shaped immigrants' lives at different points in U.S. history?*

**Th Jan 12** *Canvas/Reserves:* Lawrence Levine, "From the Melting Pot to the Pluralist Vision" (from Levine's *The Opening of the American Mind*)

**Tu Jan 17** *Canvas/Reserves:* Karen Brodtkin, "Not Quite White: Gender and Jewish Identity" (Ch. 4 from Brodtkin's *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America*)

**Th Jan 19** Abraham Cahan, *Yekl*, 1-45

Reading Response #1 due  
this week

**Tu Jan 24** Finish *Yekl*

**Th Jan 26** *Canvas/Reserves:* Ruben Martinez, "The Crossing"  
Start *The New Americans* in class

Reading Response #2 due  
this week

**Tu Jan 31** Gene Luen Yang, *American Born Chinese*, 7-84  
**Th Feb 2** *American Born Chinese*, read to p. 160

Reading Response #3 due this week

**T Feb 7** Finish *American Born Chinese*

**Th Feb 9** Faculty/Staff Panel on Immigration Experiences

Reading Response #4 due  
for all on T 2/7

#### Free to Be Me?: "Passing" and Prescriptions of Identity in American Society

**Central questions:** *What can the phenomenon of passing reveal to us about how identity categories and social constructions have structured and continue to structure U.S. society? Are individuals in the U.S. free to be who they know themselves to be?*

**T Feb 14** **ESSAY #1 due in class**

**Th Feb 16** Nella Larsen, *Passing*, part I

**T Feb 21** Finish *Passing*

**Th Feb 23** *Canvas/Reserves:* Henry Louis Gates, Jr.,  
"White Like Me," *The New Yorker* (June 17,  
1996): 66+

Reading Response #5 due this week

**T Feb 28** Marta Cunningham (dir.), *Valentine Road* (2013) (in class)

**Th Mar 2** **Topics and Research Questions due to Canvas by classtime**

~March 6-10: SPRING BREAK~

- T Mar 14** Canvas/Reserves: 1) Aaron H. Devor, "Becoming Members of Society," from *Rereading America*, and 2) Jesse Green, "S/He," *New York Magazine* (May 27, 2012) <http://nymag.com/news/features/transgender-children-2012-6/>
- Th Mar 16** Catch Up Day
- F Mar 17** **ESSAY #2 due to Canvas by 11:59 pm**

**Living the Dream?: Working in the U.S.**

**Central Questions:** *In general, what accounts for or comprises one's class identity in the contemporary US? How do economics define one's class status? What other forms of "capital" define class? How do Americans mark/ perform their class identities? For those defined as "working class" and/or those who live just above, at, or below the poverty level in this country, what goes into the day-to-day experience of making ends meet? What role does capitalism play in maintaining and strengthening class identities and divisions between rich and poor? How does the promise of "The American Dream" relate to class issues and identities?*

- T Mar 21** Canvas/Reserves: Gregory Mantsios, "Class in America—2009," from *Rereading America*
- Th Mar 23** Frontline's "Two American Families" (in class)

<b>Reading Response #6 due on T 3/21 for all</b>
--

- T Mar 28** **Annotated Bibliographies Due to Canvas by 11:59 pm**
- Th Mar 30** Presentation on Presentations (in class)  
*New York Times* wedding announcements (in class)

**Mon Apr 3-Fri Apr 7** No class meetings, but required individual conferences about presentation/research paper (sign up via Google Docs)

- T Apr 11** ***Rough Draft of Presentation due in class—full PPT and notes/outline***
- Th Apr 13** ***Presentations (7)***

- T Apr 18** ***Presentations (7)***
- Th Apr 20** ***Presentations (6)***

**M Apr 24** ***Research Paper due to Canvas by 11:59 pm***

**W May 3** **OPTIONAL NARRATIVE OF LEARNING DUE BY 2pm to Canvas**

## READING RESPONSES

Reading responses are due to me via Canvas under Assignments, by class time on Tuesdays or Thursdays, depending on your assigned day. You will write a total of 5 responses throughout the semester. (You have 6 opportunities to write responses, but you only need to submit 5.)

Below, you will find the list of due dates for these responses.

- Students whose last names begin with A to J will submit responses on Tuesdays.
- Students with last names K to Z will submit responses on Thursdays, with the exception of responses 4 and 6.
- **If you prefer to switch due dates one week, you must let me know by Sunday, 10pm, of the week that the response is due.**

Due Dates	Group 1 (last name A-K)	Group 2 (last name L-Z)
Response 1	T 1/17	Th 1/19
Response 2	T 1/24	Th 1/26
Response 3	T 1/31	Th 2/2
Response 4	T 2/7	*T 2/7
Response 5	T 2/21	Th 2/23
Response 6	T 3/21	*T 3/21

**You will not have a response due the same week that an essay test OR a major part of your research project is due!**

### Objectives

The responses are meant to accomplish the following:

- 1) get you writing on a regular basis,\* and
- 2) ensure that you are not only completing the readings assignments but thinking about them critically before coming to class.\*\*

\*Just like with exercise, it's important to write on a regular basis. If you don't, then your writing weakens. If you do, then you not only become a stronger writer, but writing becomes easier and less daunting. Furthermore, the more writing assignments you have, the more chances you have to get an A!

\*\*Because this is a discussion-heavy course, I want to make sure you are doing the reading in a way that will allow us to have lots to talk about when we meet each day. I also want to make sure that each of you is able to participate even if you are one of the less vocal members of the class.

### How do I get 10 out of 10 on each response?

- These responses are to be **at least 350 words** in length. Type your response in Word and save it as a .doc, .docx, or PDF file; check the word count using "Word Count" under Tools.
- The response **should reflect upon the reading due in class that day**. On the days that you have more than one essay or article to read, you may write about only one of the readings without penalty.
- The response should be **grammatically correct**.
- You should incorporate **textual evidence** to support your point or conclusion.



- **At the end of your response, you should include 2 questions for in-class discussion.**
- Submit your response by classtime on the day it is due. Late responses will not be accepted.

These responses should be very thoughtful and reflective. They should show that you understand the main points or premises of the reading. But they are also meant to provide you with a more relaxed space in which to play with your ideas and to make connections to your personal experiences. You can use humor and colloquial language, but your response should be intelligent and articulate...and of course, grammatically correct.

What you choose to write about is essentially up to you, but I have provided some prompts for you below. You can respond to one of these, or you can choose to write about a single idea, metaphor, phrase, or fact that piqued your intellectual curiosity.

***The response should relate in some way to the reading that is due in class the following day, not about something you just pulled out of the air.***

**Sample prompts** (but feel free to come up with your own!):

- The most interesting (or powerful or perplexing or surprising) moment in the reading was: (include reasons)
- This reading connected to [name previous text or an idea from our discussions]... (discuss the parallels or differences that you noted)
- This reading raised a central question for me: (include the question and your thoughts about it)
- One of the central ideas raised by this text is: (discuss idea and offer your response to it)

**To post your response to Canvas:**

1. Write your reading response in Microsoft Word and save as a PDF, .doc or .docx file.
2. Log into Canvas at [classes.emory.edu](https://classes.emory.edu).
3. Select our course AMST 201QW.
4. Go to Assignments (listed in the Menu on the left).
5. Click on the reading response you wish to complete.
6. Follow the instructions on screen for uploading your response. (I will run your document through SafeAssign, the anti-plagiarism program, before grading it.)
7. Submit the response.
8. Check back within a week to see my comments.