

Fall 2018
AMS 310/HIS 315G
Unique #: 31090/38975

DR. CARY CORDOVA
Associate Professor

AMS 310 / HIS 315G INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN STUDIES

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This class introduces students to the field of American Studies. The guiding objective of the class is to use interdisciplinary lenses – such as music, dance, material culture, and technology – to develop a more complex understanding of American culture. The course outline follows a semi-linear pattern in history, but it is hardly comprehensive. We will look broadly at the tensions between individual identity formation and the many social constructions that operate in American culture. The class is loosely tied around the interrelationship of individuals with mass culture (music, in particular, but also fashion, television, government, and corporate cultures).

This class is organized into three sections, starting with the dynamics of swing culture in the 1930s and '40s, shifting to the complexities of popular music and civil rights from the 1950s to the 1970s, and finally, looking at the politics of class, capital, and citizenship in our everyday lives. We will use these three modules to think critically about the relationship between the past and present, to examine the relationship between individual identity formation and the larger cultural zeitgeist, and to develop an understanding of how social inequalities, particularly guised through race, class, gender, sexuality, and geography, infiltrate all areas of American life.

While mass culture often provides a context for making sense of the world, it also simplifies and negates a variety of more complex issues. At a time when people are bombarded with advertisements, information, and propaganda, this course encourages students to develop research skills, raise questions, and thoughtfully evaluate sources. If there is an overriding theme to the class, it is the concept of visibility versus invisibility. Who becomes the representative American? What is un-American? Who feels displaced, or invisible? How do ideologies of race, class, gender, and sexuality penetrate popular culture? And how have individuals responded?

The goals of the course are to develop a more nuanced understanding of American culture and American Studies, to build critical thinking skills, and to generate new paradigms for looking at the world.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

COURSE READER: This class requires a course reader, which will be available for purchase at Jenn's Copy and Binding (512-482-0779). Jenn's is located at 2518 Guadalupe (where Guadalupe intersects with Dean Keeton). **Please note: The first few articles will be posted on Canvas to ensure everyone has access to the initial readings: <https://utexas.instructure.com/>**

If you have trouble accessing the Canvas system, please contact the UT helpdesk (512-475-9400). In addition, one copy of the course reader will be placed on reserve at PCL to ensure everyone's access.

As you will see, this course intentionally brings together a diverse group of readings from a wide array of authors. Part of your objective in this class is to make connections between the readings and to detect parallels,

intersections, and dissension. In fact, becoming a critical reader of texts is an instrumental part of participating in American Studies, since this is a field that encourages you to question your sources and to poke and prod at silences and assumptions.

SUPPLEMENTAL INSTRUCTION:

- **Section 1: Monday, 10:00-11:00 a.m., JES A218A**
- **Section 2: Wednesday, 6:30-7:30 p.m., RLM 5.112**

This course offers an **optional** Supplemental Instruction (SI) discussion sections in conjunction with the Sanger Learning and Career Center. Teaching Assistant Christine Castro will hold this discussion section twice a week for one hour (**Note: the same material will be covered in both sections**). The section will cover course material as well as other skills that are vital for college success such as how to organize information, test prep and test taking skills, and critical thinking and writing skills. There is a consistent and strong correlation between grades and SI attendance in this and/or other classes and you are highly encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity. **Please note:** *Students who are unable to attend these sessions due to scheduling conflicts are more than welcome to make use of TA and professor office hours to discuss class materials.*

CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE UNITED STATES FLAG:

“The Cultural Diversity requirement increases your familiarity with the variety and richness of the American cultural experience. Courses carrying this flag ask you to explore the beliefs, practices, and histories of at least one cultural group that has experienced persistent marginalization. Many of these courses also encourage you to reflect on your own cultural experiences.” <https://ugs.utexas.edu/flags/students/about/cultural-diversity>

GRADING:

- **Midterm Exam (25%):** A combination of keywords and short essays.
- **Final Exam (25%):** Similar to the midterm, focused mostly on material covered after the midterm.
- **Reading Analysis papers (15%)**
 - You must submit two short, but thoughtful papers (3 pages) in relation to a day’s reading assignment. One paper is due prior to the midterm, while the second is due in the latter half of the class (see schedule for due dates).
- **Discography (20%)**
 - For this assignment, you will turn in a music playlist and accompanying cultural analysis that examines how this selection of songs is personally AND culturally significant. Given that we will be spending a significant amount of time discussing the complexities of popular music in this class, this assignment requires you to think critically about the music that has informed your life. While it may be easy to identify songs you love, this assignment asks you to identify the larger cultural context of the songs you choose. Rarely is there a single answer to this process, but you will need to build your argument on **RESEARCH**.
- **Attendance and Participation (15%)**
 - Students are expected to attend class regularly and to participate as best they can in such a sizable class. Just showing up to class is important, but it is not the only factor in determining a student’s performance. Various aspects of the student’s overall performance will be taken into account,

including regular attendance, pop questions, pop quizzes, submission of all assignments, overall performance of assignments, extra credit, participation in class, and/or efforts to communicate with the professor and teaching assistants outside of class.

- **Sign-in Sheet:** A sign-in sheet will be passed out at each class.
- **It is the student's responsibility to sign in each day.** A pop question or quiz also may be used as a substitute for the sign-in sheet.
- **You may miss up to 3 classes without penalty. Missing more than 3 classes is likely to negatively impact your grade.** Students who experience conflicts as a result of a medical or family emergency, social trauma or disaster, or official documented university business, are encouraged to discuss accommodations with the professor and / or teaching assistants.
- **Missing more than 3 weeks of class (7 absences) is a guaranteed zero for attendance and participation and may result in failing the class.**
- **Pop Questions:** These short questions may draw on the reading or on lecture. Whether or not the student knows the answer, students should turn in a paper with their name, since I may use pop questions to calculate roll for that day.
- **Quizzes:** I do pop reading quizzes. Quizzes reward students that stay on top of the reading. This is your opportunity to show your hard work. But be warned: I especially like to give quizzes when I sense students are unprepared for lecture. *My quizzes are not hard if you have done the reading.* Come to class prepared. I do not give make-up quizzes. For quizzes, I grade as follows: + (excellent); ✓+ (good); ✓ (acceptable); ✓- (poor); — (failed). These grades are taken into consideration at the end of the semester as part of the student's overall participation grade.
- **Office hours:** Your professor and your teaching assistants are happy to help you steer your way through this class. You are encouraged to visit with us during our office hours, or by appointment. Please take a few minutes to introduce yourself and express any questions you might have, or just say "hi."

■ **Extra Credit:**

- As the semester rolls along, there may be a few opportunities for extra credit. Extra credit opportunities often entail attending an event or talk related to our class and submitting a short paper (1-2 pages) on how the content of the event relates to the content of our class. If you have an idea for an extra credit assignment, you are welcome to discuss it with the professor.
- **So what is extra credit worth?** Extra credit is given weight in the assessment of your participation grade. It is meant to help students that would like a little more recognition in this aspect of the grading process. It is in no way required, but it can help push students up a couple of points in their overall participation grade.
- **Extra Credit Exam Questions:** Before the midterm and before the final, you will have the option of composing at least one short essay question that you would like to see on the upcoming exam. This is an exercise to make you think about how you can connect the materials and develop your critical thinking skills about what you are learning.

GRADING SCALE:

100-93 = A	92-90 = A-	87-89 = B+	84-86 = B
80-83 = B-	77-79 = C+	74-76 = C	70-73 = C-
67-69 = D+	64-66 = D	60-63 = D-	0-59 = F

POLICIES:**■ CLASSROOM CONDUCT:**

- In order to build the best possible learning environment, please be respectful of the professor, the teaching assistants, and other students. **Reading on your phone, texting, falling asleep, talking to friends, and various other examples of disregarding the learning environment, are not acceptable conduct.** Should you feel compelled to engage in these activities, you may be asked to leave the classroom.
- **Please turn off and put away all the electronics** – cell phones, tablets, and laptops.

LAPTOP POLICY: WHY LAPTOPS ARE DISCOURAGED

- 1. Students perform better without them!** Studies show that the act of physically writing notes helps students better retain information. While laptop writers can type more quickly, they risk becoming “transcription zombies,” while those who put pen to paper must actively edit and physically document information in a way that enhances memory. See here: <http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/the-case-for-banning-laptops-in-the-classroom>
- 2. While perhaps convenient for one student, laptops often serve as objects of distraction for every other nearby student.**
- 3. Because we are all human and easily distracted by email, social media, and homework for other classes. If you must use a laptop to take notes, you must abide the following: You must sit in the first three/four rows of class. If you appear to be doing anything other than taking notes, you will lose the privilege of using your laptop for the rest of the semester. The loss of electronic privileges is FINAL.**

ASSIGNMENTS / LATE POLICIES:

- Students are expected to do the required readings for each class *in advance* of attending class. Students also are encouraged to **bring the course reader with them to class**, in order to refer to the material when needed (or perhaps prepare for a pop quiz!).
- Extensions on graded assignments will be granted only in the case of a medical or family emergency, social trauma or disaster, or if you have official documented university business off campus. In most cases, you must notify me before the due date. Failure to do so will result in the automatic subtraction of a letter grade. **Assignments turned in late without an allowable excuse will lose one letter grade for each day past the due date.**
- You are responsible for the material missed in any class. I cannot respond to email requests to summarize material, but I can respond to such requests during office hours or by appointment. Alternatively, consult

with the teaching assistants, or a fellow student.

- **EXAMS:** Exams will be administered during the scheduled class time or final time. If you miss class, you will not receive credit for the exam. **Only in cases of serious emergency or conflict, will I consider allowing a student to take the exam at a time other than on the schedule.**

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:

- Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and ALL incidents of dishonesty will be reported to the Office of the Dean of Students and Student Judicial Services. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism (the unauthorized appropriation of another's work – including from Websites – in one's own written work offered for credit) and collusion (the unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing college work offered for credit). These acts will be subject to serious academic penalty.
- **PLAGIARISM: STUDENTS WHO COMMIT PLAGIARISM ARE SUBJECT TO IMMEDIATE FAILURE OF THE CLASS, IN ADDITION TO FACING THE POLICIES OF THE UNIVERSITY.** Students should be aware that all required writing assignments may be submitted to a plagiarism-detection tool such as Turnitin.com as part of a larger effort to address plagiarism and improper citation. If you are unclear about what plagiarism is, I would encourage you to visit the following website: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/services/instruction/learningmodules/plagiarism>

ACCOMMODATION:

- **Students with Disabilities:** Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodations should contact Services for Students with Disabilities at ssd@austin.utexas.edu, or 512-471-6259 (voice), or 512-410-6644 (Video Phone), as soon as possible to request an official letter outlining authorized accommodations. The professor and student will use this letter as a guide for implementing any accommodations. *Students who need assistance, but do not yet have an official letter of support, are welcome to bring any of their concerns to the attention of the professor.* Immediate concerns will be handled on a case by case basis, and official documentation will be required to ensure proper accommodations are made. See here for more info: <http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/using-accommodations/>
- **Religious observances:** Texas Education Code 51.911 states that a student shall be excused from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. University policy requires students to notify each of their instructors as far in advance of the absence as possible so that arrangements can be made.

CAMPUS CARRY:

- According to Texas SB11, persons with a current legally valid Concealed Carry License may carry a legal handgun on public college campuses, as long as it remains concealed and on their person (private colleges can opt out of SB11). *If anyone, including the professor, sees a handgun, however briefly, leave the vicinity and call 911 immediately.*

- According to SB11, faculty members cannot ban the concealed carry of handguns in their classrooms, no matter how unsafe they or students may feel discussing complex issues with firearms present.
- Some exceptions to campus carry exist: For instance, faculty and staff can ban guns from their sole-occupant offices, *but only* if they give oral notice of this policy. Thus, in order to comply with this new policy, I will read the following aloud on the first day of class: **“I prohibit the concealed carry of handguns in my office.”**

STRATEGIES TO DO WELL IN THIS CLASS:

- **FOCUSED READING:**
 - This class asks students to read several essays of varying levels of difficulty. You are encouraged to read these texts thoughtfully and strategically. Rather than feeling you must remember every detail, consider these questions as guides to reading these texts more efficiently:
 - What is the author’s central argument?
 - What are the major themes and concerns shaping this argument?
 - What evidence does the author use? What facts prove most or least convincing? Develop specific examples.
 - What questions does the text raise for you?
- **EFFECTIVE NOTE TAKING:**
 - **Students who opt for lecture to wash over them without taking notes forget lots!** Studies show that we tend to forget about 40% of new information within the first 24 hours and about 60% after 48 hours (famously known as the **“Forgetting Curve”**), unless we take steps to document and review the information.
 - **BE SELECTIVE:** You do not need verbatim transcripts of class discussions. Students benefit more from shorter, more targeted notes.
 - **KEYWORDS** are used to help students focus on particular narratives and events. Remember that the act of writing will help you recall and retain information. Reviewing notes, especially within the first few days, significantly enhances recollection. Note taking is also a valuable professional skill. The following article offers good tips on note taking: <https://theconversation.com/whats-the-best-most-effective-way-to-take-notes-41961>
- **TREAT IN-CLASS AUDIO-VISUAL MATERIALS AS TEXTS:**
 - American Studies is interdisciplinary and includes studying visual culture, sound, and music as texts. Treat in-class documentaries, films, images, and music as part of the curriculum and deserving of analysis, critique, and note taking.
- **BE CURIOUS:**
 - American Studies encourages asking questions, making connections across diverse materials, and looking at complexities and contradictions. Be open to analyzing mixed messages in our study of history and culture. Develop study groups, share ideas, and cultivate conversations that enhance your understanding of the materials, but also remember to be original and use your voice.

Course Schedule:

Please Note:

1. **This schedule is subject to change as needed.**

2. Students should complete the readings for the day they are listed, so they are prepared for that day's lecture.

WEEK 1

Thursday, August 30

- Introduction: What is American Studies?

WEEK 2

Tuesday, September 4

- **LEARNING TO LISTEN**
 - **READ: THE SYLLABUS!**
 - **READ:** Josh Kun, "Strangers Among Sounds," *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 1-18.

Thursday, September 6

PART I: SWINGING THE DREAM: NATION AND SEGREGATION, 1930s-1950s

- **THE RISE OF SWING: AMERICA DANCES TO THE DEPRESSION**
 - **READ:** Lewis A. Erenberg, "Just One More Chance: The Fall of the Jazz Age and the Rise of Swing, 1929-1935," *Swingin' the Dream: Big Band Jazz and the Rebirth of American Culture* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 3-31.

WEEK 3

Tuesday, September 11

- **BECOMING MODERN: LEARNING THE LINDY HOP**
 - **READ:** Malcolm X and Alex Haley, excerpts, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Grove Press, 1965).

Thursday, September 13

- **MALCOLM IN THE MIDDLE**
 - **READ:** Malcolm X, "Selection from 'The Ballot or the Bullet,'" in *The American Intellectual Tradition*, Volume II, 1865 to the Present, eds., David Hollinger and Charles Capper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 368.
 - **READ:** Robin D. G. Kelley, "The Riddle of the Zoot: Malcolm Little and Black Cultural Politics during World War II," *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 161-181).

WEEK 4

Tuesday, September 18

- **ANOTHER SIDE TO 'ROSIE THE RIVETER': ALL-GIRL BANDS OF THE 1940s**
 - **READ:** Sherrie Tucker, "It Don't Mean a Thing If It Ain't in the History Books," *Swing Shift: All-Girl Bands of the 1940s* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 1-29.
 - **DUE: Reading Analysis #1**

Thursday, September 20

- **ZOOT SUIT RIOTS**
 - **READ:** Eduardo Obregón Pagán, "Dangerous Fashion," *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 98-125.

WEEK 5

Tuesday, September 25

- **WHY BRACEROS**
 - **GUEST LECTURE:** Christine Castro
 - **VIEW:** *Why Braceros?* (1962) online at: <https://www.c-span.org/video/?407381-1/why-braceros>
 - **CONSIDER:** Who produced the film and what is their goal? Who is the audience?; And, what are some images that stand out for you?
 - **EXTRA CREDIT DUE:** propose at least one essay question for the mid-term. To receive credit, your question should be typed. Your objective is to help me build a thoughtful exam question, using the themes that you have seen developed in the class. Consider what you would like to respond to on the exam and attempt to generate a question that allows for rich analysis of this issue. Your question must reflect some thoughtfulness, showing an attempt to make connections across this half of the class. Your question should ask students to draw evidence from at least two, or more, of the readings. **Please note: Questions that do not reflect this effort will not receive extra credit. Simplistic one line / shallow questions will not warrant extra credit. Questions that rely on only one reading will not warrant extra credit. Questions not submitted on time will not be accepted.**

Thursday, September 27

- **THE FORTUNE COOKIE CHRONICLES**
 - **READ:** Jennifer 8 Lee, excerpts, *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles: Adventures in the World of Chinese Food* (New York: 12 Press, 2008).

WEEK 6

Tuesday, October 2

- **THE LAVENDER SCARE**
 - READ:** David K. Johnson, Excerpt, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in The Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

Thursday, October 4

****MIDTERM****

WEEK 7

Tuesday, October 9

***PART II: THE SOUND OF CIVIL RIGHTS?
YOUTH, MUSIC, AND RACE***

■ **THE RISE OF YOUTH CULTURE & THE SHIRELLES**

- **READ:** Susan Douglas, “Introduction,” and “Why the Shirelles Mattered,” *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995).

Thursday, October 11

■ **THE RISE OF YOUTH CULTURE CONTINUED**

- **DISCOGRAPHY ASSIGNED**

WEEK 8

Tuesday, October 16

■ **REVOLUTION IN THE AIR AND THE THIRD WORLD STRIKE**

- **READ:** Rickey Vincent, “Introduction: Revolution in the Air,” *Party Music: The Inside Story of the Black Panthers’ Band and How Black Power Transformed Soul Music* (Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill Books, 2013), 1-18.

Thursday, October 18

■ **BROADCASTING RACE**

- **READ:** Maurice Berger, “Guess Who’s Coming To Dinner: Broadcasting Race,” *For all the World To See: Visual Culture and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

WEEK 9

Tuesday, October 23

■ **WHY DISCO MATTERS**

- **READ:** Richard Dyer, “In Defense of Disco,” in *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian and Queer Essays on Popular Culture*, eds., Corey K Creekmur and Alexander Doty (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 407-415.
- **READ:** Joshua Gamson, excerpt, *The Fabulous Sylvester: The Legend, The Music, The Seventies in San Francisco* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005), 134-154.

Thursday, October 25

PART III: CLASS, CITIZENSHIP, AND SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

■ **BORN IN THE USA: BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN AND THE WHITE WORKING CLASS**

- **READ:** Jefferson Cowie and Lauren Boehm, “Dead Man’s Town: ‘Born in the U.S.A.,’ Social History, and Working-Class Identity,” *American Quarterly* 58.2 (June 2007): 353-378.

WEEK 10

Tuesday, October 30

- **BORN IN THE USA Continued**
 - **DUE: DISCOGRAPHY**

Thursday, November 1

- **THE NEW GILDED AGE**
 - **READ:** Douglas S. Massey, “The Rise and Fall of Egalitarian Capitalism,” *Categorically Unequal: The American Stratification System* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2007).
 - **IN-CLASS FILM:** *Inequality for All*

WEEK 11

Tuesday, November 6

- **HOW WHITENESS WORKS**
 - **READ:** George Lipsitz, “How Whiteness Works: Inheritance, Wealth, and Health,” *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

Thursday, November 8

- **THE NEW JIM CROW**
 - **READ:** Michelle Alexander, “The New Jim Crow,” *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (NY: New Press, 2010), 178-220.

WEEK 12

Tuesday, November 13

- **READING THE LANDSCAPE: IN THE SHADOW OF ROBERT E. LEE**
 - **READ:** Mitch Landrieu, excerpts, *In the Shadow of Statues: A White Southerner Confronts History* (New York: Viking, 2018).

Thursday, November 15

- **CENTRAL AMERICAN-AMERICAN VISIBILITIES / INVISIBILITIES**
 - Cary Cordova, “Marking Space: Interpreting Central American-American Spaces in the U.S. Landscape,” *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* (Spring 2017), Vol. 5, No. 1.

WEEK 13

Tuesday, November 20

- **DOCUMENTED / UNDOCUMENTED**
 - Manuel Ramirez, “Still DREAMing,” *Presente!: Latin@ Immigrant Voices in the Struggle for Racial Justice*, eds. Cristina Tzintzún, Carlos Pérez de Alejo, and Arnulfo Manríquez (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2014), 137-146.
 - William Perez, “Introduction,” *We ARE Americans: Undocumented Students Pursuing the American Dream* (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2009).
 - **DUE: Reading Report #2**

Thursday, November 22

- Happy Thanksgiving Holiday!

WEEK 14

Tuesday, November 27

New Technologies, New Worlds

- **THE GOOGLIZATION OF EVERYTHING**
 - **READ:** Siva Vaidhyanathan, “The Googlization of Us: Universal Surveillance and Infrastructural Imperialism,” *The Googlization of Everything (And Why We Should Worry)* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 82-114.
 - **EXTRA CREDIT DUE:** Submit an essay question for the final exam. See instructions for proposing midterm essay questions earlier in this syllabus.

Thursday, November 29

- **THE PROBLEM WITH FACEBOOK IS FACEBOOK**
 - Siva Vaidhyanathan, “The Problem with Facebook is Facebook,” *Antisocial Media: How Facebook Disconnects Us and Undermines Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

WEEK 15

Tuesday, December 4

- **THE POLITICS OF FACEBOOK**
 - Siva Vaidhyanathan, “The Politics Machine,” *Antisocial Media: How Facebook Disconnects Us and Undermines Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Thursday, December 6

- Last Class / Review

Thursday, December 13

- **FINAL EXAM** per schedule from UT Registrar:
Thursday, December 13, 9:00-12:00 noon
Location TBA