

California State University, Long Beach
American Studies 300 (Schedule Number 1096)
Introduction to American Studies
Dr. Brett Mizelle

Fall Semester 2005
Tuesdays & Thursdays, 2:00 – 3:15 p.m.
Room ED2-160B

Office: Room FO2-109
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:30-1:30pm & 3:30-4:30pm; Wednesdays 4:00-6:00pm; and by appt.
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Course Description:

This course provides an introduction to the interdisciplinary study of American history, life, and culture. While it serves as a required introduction for those students interested in a major in American Studies, it also stands alone to encourage students to make connections between various aspects of society and culture at different moments in American history and to situate the interactions between peoples in a culturally diverse society within national and global contexts.

American Studies has been around for more than half a century, and is a vital, malleable, and growing academic enterprise. Scholars working within the American Studies tradition have posed new questions about American history and life, brought new perspectives to the study of the cultures of the United States, and have introduced new information into scholarly and public conversations about national identity and experience. In the process, American Studies has developed into an intensely self-reflective mode of inquiry, one constantly concerned with its methods, fields of study, intellectual coherence, and relation to both other disciplines and the world.

This course is part of the recently revived and reconceptualized Program in American Studies at CSULB. For the past several years, faculty from a number of different departments and programs on campus have been working to reimagine what "American Studies" should mean in the 21st century. Many of those conversations have found their way into both the American Studies major and this syllabus. As an overview, we will attempt to locate American Studies in history and the present, in culture and ideas, in scholarly work and popular culture, and from the United States and abroad. After exploring the utility of "American Studies" as a mode of inquiry, we will then turn our attention to Los Angeles, investigating the intersections of race, gender, class, work and identity. Throughout the semester we will work to ask pertinent, insightful questions about course topics and readings and the larger world with which we interact.

Course Design:

While parts of this course will use a lecture format, most of our class sessions will revolve around in-class discussions and analyses of American culture, usually approached through our course readings. Several of our regular sessions will be replaced with guest lectures and field trips. This will enable you to meet and work with some of the faculty affiliated with American Studies at CSULB as they introduce us to their approaches to the many voices and many lives shaping American experiences.

Because of the flexibility of American Studies, students will actively assist in the growth and design of the Program and this introductory course. While I have expertise about some aspects of American history and culture, I operate under the assumption that each of you are likewise experts on topics and issues about which I

know little. Accordingly, despite the fact that I ultimately possess the power of the grade book, I hope to run this class in an open, democratic, and interactive manner.

Required Course Texts:

Richard P. Horwitz, ed., The American Studies Anthology (2001).

Raul Villa and George Sanchez, eds., Los Angeles and the Future of Urban Cultures (2005).

Walter Mosley, Little Scarlet: An Easy Rawlins Novel (2005).

These books are available at the University Bookstore. Additional readings may be passed out in class or distributed electronically.

Students in American Studies obviously require a basic understanding of American history. Those of you who feel you lack sufficient background should consult one of the many U.S. history textbooks that are available. I particularly like Peter N. Carroll & David W. Noble, The Free & the Unfree: A Progressive History of the United States (Penguin, 2001). You may also wish to consult the outlines of American history provided by the U.S. Information Agency from 1954 to 1994 that are available on-line: <http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/H/index.htm>. All students should possess a quality dictionary and a style manual.

Course Assignments & Grading:

1. Reading journal (20% of course grade).
You will track your insights about the readings in The American Studies Anthology and Los Angeles and the Future of Urban Cultures, responding to your own muse and/or to guiding questions.
2. Reflective essay (10%)
What does American Studies mean? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this interdisciplinary approach to understanding American history and culture?
3. Reaction paper on Mosley's Little Scarlet (10%)
4. Final paper, due December 15th, 50% (includes preliminary work and presentation, 10% each)
Final Paper Topic: Read something, or view something, or listen to something, and tell me what it reveals about American culture, using the materials of the course that help you make the most sense of what you've read, seen, or heard. Take about ten pages to do it. No more than fifteen.
5. Attendance and participation 10%

Additional information about these assignments will be distributed and discussed in class.

Course Policies:

Attendance: Because we cover a great deal of material in this interactive course, prompt and regular attendance is a necessity. Students who miss classes run the risk of receiving a failing grade or receiving a lower grade than the student might have secured with regular attendance. Excused absences must be documented by a doctor's note, a note from the Dean, or advance notice from the Athletic Director. Absences for religious observances are excused; please let me know of dates in advance. I allow two unexcused absences during the semester; thereafter each subsequent unexcused absence will result in the subtraction of points from your participation grade.

Classroom Environment: You are strongly urged to ask questions and express opinions in this course, approaching readings and ideas actively and critically. As you do so, however, please strive to be courteous to your fellow students. To create a respectful and productive environment please avoid unnecessary distractions (such as ringing cell phones, beeping pagers, and conspicuous food consumption) during class meetings.

Course Readings: You are expected to have completed the day's readings prior to coming to class and to be prepared to participate in discussions. Always bring the texts we will be discussing to class.

Reading Journals: All students will keep a weekly journal of their reactions to our course readings and their relationship to contemporary cultural debates and events. Guidelines for this assignment will be distributed and discussed in class.

Papers: All work written outside the classroom must be typed or word-processed in a standard 10 or 12 point font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. Your papers should, at a minimum, both present and critically analyze the main theoretical and historical arguments in your reading. All quotations must be cited by using parenthetical references, footnotes, or endnotes. If you are unsure about how or what to cite, please ask me. All papers should have your name, the course title and number, the due date, and an appropriate title or label for the assignment at the top. I strongly recommend that you keep copies of all your work, either on paper or on disk, for your protection.

Your papers will be evaluated for earnest effort and thoughtful, coherent content. Remember to clearly state your thesis and support your arguments with examples. Usage and grammar are not major concerns of grading, but a minimum mechanical competence to insure the "readability" of these papers is expected. I expect that you will proofread your papers and exams before handing them in. All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day assigned unless otherwise noted. Electronic submission of papers is not allowed. If you know you are going to miss class on dates assignments are due you must be proactive and request an extension in advance. Late assignments will lose 5 points for each calendar day late and will not be accepted more than one week past their due date without a previously agreed to extension.

Plagiarism & Academic Integrity: Students in this class will be held to a high standard of academic integrity, which is defined as "the pursuit of scholarly activity free from fraud and deception." Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating of information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. If I suspect all or part of an assignment may not be your own intellectual work I will ask to see your notes or drafts. I also may require electronic submission of the paper to facilitate running the paper through plagiarism-detecting databases. If you have any questions about academic integrity, please talk with me. I can and will fail a student for major infractions.

Disability Accommodation: Any student who feels that he or she may need an accommodation for any sort of disability should make an appointment to see me during my office hours so we can make arrangements for you to complete the requirements of the class.

Student Services: If you need help with written assignments or require guidance on note-taking and critical reading, please take advantage of the Writer's Resource Lab (LAB-312; 985-4329) or the Learning Assistance Center (Library East 12; 985-5350).

Technology: The CSULB Technology Help Desk is now available for students. Help is available on a wide range of computer issues including: BeachBoard, Windows and Mac OS, CSULB Internet Accounts, Remote Connectivity, Microsoft Desktop Applications, Anti-Virus, Internet and Web related topics. Visit them on the web at <http://helpdesk.csulb.edu> or contact the THD by phone at 562-985-4959 or send Email to helpdesk@csulb.edu. All students should make sure that their CSULB e-mail accounts forward to their preferred e-mail accounts so that you will receive course assignments and announcements.

Course Schedule:

Despite its organized appearance, there is substantial flexibility in this syllabus, which should be considered as a work in progress that will be changed during the semester as necessary and appropriate. Any changes, such as a reorganization of readings to accommodate guest lectures and/or field trips, will be discussed in class and distributed via e-mail. Supplemental in-class texts, such as film and musical selections, are not listed below. Remember, you should have these readings and papers completed prior to our meeting on the date listed.

Unit 1: Roots and Soil: Configuring American Studies

Sep 01	What is American Studies?	Reading: Horwitz, Introduction
Sep 06	America as a New World	Reading: Horwitz, 1-5
Sep 08	"	Reading: Horwitz, 6-9
Sep 13	America as an Independent Nation	Reading: Horwitz, 10-13 & images
Sep 15	"	Reading: Horwitz, 14-16
Sep 20	America as a Place to Belong	Reading: Horwitz, 17-20 & images
Sep 22	"	Reading: Horwitz, 21-26
Sep 27	America as a Land of the Free	Reading: Horwitz, 27-31 & images
Sep 29	"	Reading: Horwitz, 32-36 & images
Oct 04	America as an Empire	Reading: Horwitz, 37-40
Oct 06	[Library Orientation]	

Class meets with librarian Greg Armento in the Spidell Room, First Floor Library (by reference office)
Please take a look at Michael Willard's "Nuestra Los Angeles" in LAFUC prior to this session

Oct 11	"	Reading: Horwitz, 41-44 & images
Oct 13	America as a Culture	Reading: Horwitz, 45-49 & images

Unit 2: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles

Oct 18	Learning from L.A.	Reading: LAFUC, Introduction, Norte & Lipsitz
Oct 20	Migrations & Borders	Reading: LAFUC, Yu & Hise
Oct 25	Neighbors & Neighborhoods	Reading: LAFUC, Cuff & Sanchez
Oct 27	Black Politics & Life	Reading: LAFUC, Sides & Freer
Nov 01	Public Art Controversies	Reading: LAFUC, Schrank
	Guest Lecture: Sarah Schrank	
	<i>Reflective Essay due by the start of November</i>	
Nov 03	No Class Meeting	
Nov 08	The Politics of Music	Reading: LAFUC, Macias, Viesca & Kun
Nov 10	Transnational L.A.	Reading: LAFUC, Zilberg & Maher
Nov 15	L.A. Riots & Rebellions	Reading: Davis & Schrank

Mike Davis, "L.A. Was Just the Beginning: Urban Revolt in the United States"; Sarah Schrank, "Picturing the Watts Towers: The Art and Politics of an Urban Landmark"

Nov 17	Field Trip: Watts Towers	Reading: Mosley, chapters 1-16
Nov 22	Easy Rawlins' L.A.	Reading: Mosley, chapters 17-33
Nov 24	No Class Meeting	Reading: finish Mosley over the break
Nov 29	The Mysteries of Race & Power	
	<i>Reaction Paper Due</i>	

Unit 4: Whadya Know?

Dec 01	Student Presentations	
	<i>Collected Reading Journals due</i>	
Dec 06	Student Presentations	
Dec 08	Student Presentations & Course-Wrap Up	

Th Dec 15 *Final Papers due* in F02-109 by 2:30pm, the end of our scheduled exam time. An end-of-semester social event will follow.