

**American Studies 506
Fall 2011
Wilson-Short 4**

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office hours:
Tuesday 1:00 – 2:30
Thursday 1:00 – 2:30
and by appointment

Catalogue description of core sequence

- AMST 505: Provides an introduction to critical theoretical engagement within an interdisciplinary field. Emphasizes the professionalization of students into the academy.
- AMST 506: Provides a framework for the varied intellectual, theoretical, and political genealogies within American cultural studies.
- AMST 507: Provides overview of contemporary practices in American cultural studies. Identifies important concepts and major insights within the field.

Required texts

Doane, Mary Anne. *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive*. Harvard UP, 2002.

Guillaumin, Colette. *Racism, Sexism, Power and Ideology*. Routledge, 1995.

Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Blackwell, 1991.

San Juan, E., Jr. *Racism and Cultural Studies: Critiques of Multiculturalist Ideology and the Politics of Difference*. Duke UP, 2002.

Soja, Edward. *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. Second edition. Verso, 2011.

Various films and handouts may supplement these books.

Course objective, rationale, and “learning outcomes”

As this is a core course, we will examine genealogies within our field—or fields—of work. Our base texts, Guillaumin and Harvey and San Juan, will provide breadth, giving us at least a sense of some of the “canonical” voices in our presumably anti-canonical work. (We will discuss this contradiction.) Other texts will variously provide a history and geography of injustice, guides to examining culture’s engagement of injustice, and—we hope—ideas for formulating our own visions of justice. Guillaumin, Harvey, and San Juan have been labeled Marxist critics, but they reject the determinisms of economic reductions, and their insistence on history and geography provide a base from which we might frame our own ideas and activism, unless we are, on one extreme, New Critics who reject history and memory or, on the other extreme, poststructuralists who dismiss all means of studying justice and injustice as equally competing signifiers.

Consider this: Stephen Steinberg argues that in the last third of the nineteenth century—in the generation following the end of the Civil War—the United States lost its last best chance to end racism. During that time, two curious technologies emerged that may offer clues into the nation’s racial politics. In 1874 barbed wire was patented. Invented as a tool for keeping out unwanted animals, it soon became a tool for keeping in unwanted humans. A mere quarter-century after the patenting of barbed wire, concentration camps were invented in Africa. As for the second technology: in the 1880s institutional leaders from imperial-industrial nations established the Greenwich meridian as the standard for timekeeping. The staunchest advocate for standardization was the railroad industry.

What can these very different technologies tell us about racism's survival and persistence? The Industrial Revolution introduced technologies that, like these, escalated owners' capacity to monitor and regulate workers' bodies and movements—their time and space. Though Einstein would, early in the twentieth century, introduce theories that would liberate time and space from the fixity and absoluteness into which science and religion had locked them, still, ironically, new technologies were shackling workers by newly regulating them.

As for “outcomes,” you should gain from this course a capacity to compare the depth and breadth of our field's theory to the depth and breadth of its practice, and to envision and maybe even propose corrections to unjustifiable imbalances. You should be better able to define the “American” in American Studies. This should sharpen your vision of your own work and role in the field. Are you—is academia—a reformer or a revolutionary? Can you—should you—teach and research the toppling of an unjust system while occupying a comfortable position in an institution that anchors that system? We may not answer such questions this semester, but we should emerge better able to find answers.

Course description

Since we meet only once a week, it will be doubly important to keep up with readings. Our reading load will be heavy at times, though considerably lighter than in most graduate courses in our fields! Some of our texts will be fairly accessible. Others—Harvey, Guillaumin, some of San Juan and Soja—will be slower going. You would be wise, therefore, to peek ahead, to get a sense of the texts' difficulties, so that you might allow sufficient time for readings.

I regard this as an experimental course, not only because this particular renumbered core sequence is being offered for the first time, and certainly not because the American Studies program has been merged with the departments of Comparative Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies. This course is nicely positioned between a course that is obligated to offer a grounding in theory and a course that is obligated to offer practice. In other words, we provide a transition—we work in both realms. But, because the core sequence is being reinvented, you should feel not only free but obligated to share your ideas, observations, intuitions, suspicions, speculations, and inspirations with me, the program director, the department. No one can claim to be an expert in the work we will undertake this term. I will share my own ideas and observations, but I hope that these will provoke discussion and study. I envision this course as being staunchly anti-authoritarian.

You will write three papers for the course, two short pieces and one short-article-length. Details of the assignments appear below. We will watch several films, and I am trying to arrange for a few guest speakers to share their knowledge and observations.

Requirements (*Note:* We will have no quizzes or examinations.)

Attendance and participation: Since we meet only once a week, these are expected.

Text presentation: At the beginning of the term you will sign up to lead a discussion of one of our texts during the semester. This presentation involves your briefly summarizing what you regard as the text's most interesting or most important points and asking two or three questions based on the text. In effect, you will lead discussion of that text.

Paper presentations: You will discuss both the second short paper and the final paper. For the short paper, you need only to identify and briefly summarize the text you have reviewed, and then briefly discuss your critique. For the final paper, prepare to speak for roughly fifteen to twenty minutes, identifying your subject and your argument, then providing a few key details of your argument. If you have any multimedia aids or handouts, please use them.

Short (workshop) paper: For this assignment—which I am tentatively labeling our “dead white straight male paper”—you will read an essay by a canonical or near-canonical U.S. writer (dead and white and at least nominally heterosexual), then write a two- or three-page critique. (For a list of writers, see the end of the syllabus.) The purpose of this assignment is revisionist, in the best recuperative sense. In our fields, we all think we know what is wrong with the positions of dead white straight men; and usually we are right. Usually. But not always. What can you observe in an essay by, say, Emerson or Dwight Macdonald that might surprise us, might even delight us, here in the twenty-first century? You will note in the calendar below that September 21 is reserved for our workshop. This means that your paper must be completed by Monday, September 19, when you will share it with me and your classmates. We will write a one-paragraph critique of each paper by class time on September 21, when you will briefly discuss the essay you read, and we will share with you our critiques. All of this can be done by e-mail so that we might all read the essays and critiques. Note: This means that our critiques will probably be “blind”—if, for example, you read and write your two-page paper on Emerson’s essay “Self-Reliance,” our critiques of your paper need not assume familiarity with Emerson’s essay but will focus squarely on your paper. I will grade both the paper and the critiques.

Second short paper: Your second paper will review a text, a book or article related to research that you hope or plan to undertake in the work of your thesis or dissertation. (If you have not yet determined a thesis or dissertation topic, we can discuss possible books or articles to read and review.) As with most reviews, you should provide a brief overview and analysis of the text. What does it tell us? What can it tell us? Limit your review to *no more than* five pages.

Final paper: Your final paper should be a short-article-length (ie, roughly fifteen pages) analysis of an aspect of the topics we discuss this semester. I encourage you to write from a perspective new or unfamiliar to you. For example, if you would like to write about the politics of technologies controlling time or space, and if your previous work is in the fields of women’s studies, ethnic studies, literature, or history, you may want to read Michio Kaku’s critical biography of Einstein and write about the political implications, especially for policies affecting communities of color, of his theories of relativity. Or Soja may direct you to the work of Henri Lefebvre, Gaston Bachelard, Neil Smith, or Doreen Massey, so that propose your own theory of the production of space. This paper is due by 4:00 PM on December 14.

Alternative to final paper: You may propose an alternative to the final paper that uses a technology—probably, but not necessarily, a media technology—or an art form that will advance an argument or observation on the materials we will cover. Let me know as soon as possible that you are considering this alternative project. If you want to collaborate with a classmate, let me know and we can arrange this.

Grading formula

Attendance and participation, 10 percent; text presentation and short-paper presentation, 10 percent (5 percent each); final project presentation, 10 percent; workshop paper, 10 percent; second short paper, 20 percent; and final paper, 40 percent.

Policies

I will refrain from rehashing the standard (and obligatory) proscriptions against plagiarizing, aside from saying that you should not plagiarize. While obviously we should avoid abusive and hateful speech, I also want to encourage you to exercise your academic freedoms in thoughtful discourse. A racist idea is a racist idea, and we should be honest enough to say so.

Official university-mandated syllabus statements

Reasonable Accommodation: Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and may need accommodations to fully participate in this class, please visit the Access Center (Washington Building 217) to schedule an appointment with an Access Advisor. All accommodations **MUST** be approved through the Access Center.

Campus Safety Plan/Emergency information: In the interest of campus safety and emergency procedures, please become familiar with the information available on the following websites: <http://safetyplan.wsu.edu> (Campus Safety Plan), <http://oem.wsu.edu/emergencies> (Emergency management web site), <http://alert.wsu.edu> (WSU Alert site).

Schedule of assignments

Note: Because of several possible and unforeseeable contingencies, our schedule of assignments is extremely flexible and subject to change. I will post changes by e-mail, so please keep up.

8/24: Course and personal introductions.

8/31: Guillaumin, introduction (by Danielle Juteau-Lee), chapters 1 and 2.

9/7: Guillaumin, chapters 3, 6, and 7.

9/14: Guillaumin, chapters 9, 10, and 11.

9/21: Film and readings TBA. Workshop.

9/28: San Juan, Introduction, chapters 1 and 2.

10/5: San Juan, chapters 4 and 5.

10/12: San Juan, chapters 6 and 7. Second short paper due.

10/19: Harvey, all of Part III.

10/26: Harvey, all of Part IV.

11/2: Harvey, all of Part I; Soja, Preface and Postscript.

11/9: Soja, chapters 1 – 5.

11/16: Soja, chapters 6 - 9.

11/23: No class. Thanksgiving break.

11/30: Doane, chapters 1, 4, and 5.

12/7: Doane, chapter 6.

Some writers to consider for your workshop paper

Ralph Waldo Emerson	Edward Abbey	Lionel Trilling
Henry David Thoreau	Tom Wolfe	Irving Howe
Scott Russell Sanders	Edward Hoagland	William Gass
John Brinckerhoff Jackson	Edmund Wilson	Kenneth Burke
Lewis Mumford	Dwight Macdonald	George P. Elliott
Leslie Fiedler	Buckminster Fuller	

A useful definition of racism: Racism, specifically, is the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. Berkeley: University of California, 2005. 28.

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on time (written in the late 1990s)

The new millennium is upon us, though the matter shouldn't be taken too seriously. After all, the year 2001 for Christians is 1379 for Moslems, 5114 for Mayans, and 5762 for Jews. The new millennium starts on January 1 only because one fine day the senate of imperial Rome decided to end the tradition of celebrating the new year at the beginning of spring. The number of years in the Christian era is a matter of whim as well: another fine day the pope in Rome decided to assign a date to the birth of Jesus, even though nobody knows when he was born.

Time pays no attention to the borders we erect to fool ourselves into believing we control it.

--Eduardo Galeano, *Upside Down: A Primer for the Looking-Glass World*, p. 333

on space

The equator did not cross the middle of the world map that we studied in school. More than half a century ago, German researcher Arno Peters understood what everyone had looked at but no one had seen: the emperor of geography had no clothes.

The map they taught us gives two-thirds of the world to the North and one-third to the South. Europe is shown as larger than Latin America, even though Latin America is actually twice the size of Europe. India appears smaller than Scandinavia, even though it's three times as big. The United States and Canada fill more space on the map than Africa, when in reality they cover barely two-thirds as much territory.

The map lies. Traditional geography steals space just as the imperial economy steals wealth, official history steals memory, and formal culture steals the world.

--Galeano, p. 315
