AMST 601 Fall 2012

Introductory Seminar In American Studies: Perspectives on the Past & Theoretical Directions

Nancy L. Struna
1106 Holzapfel Hall
email, nlstruna@umd.edu  phone, 301-405-1357
office hours, Mondays before class & by appointment

Course Description:

AMST 601 is the initial course of a two-course sequence introducing graduate students to some of the literature -- from the field, the discipline, and beyond -- that has shaped and reshaped Americans' Studies over time. In this course, we focus on the theories and paradigms, or conceptual frameworks, evident in scholarly work through the mid-1990s. By concentrating on the historiography of Americans' Studies and on the theoretical directions and assumptions of scholars, this course should help you to understand the making of theories in American Studies and, of course, the making of American Studies before the turn of the century. Reading and thinking about this "early" scholarship should also prepare you for the contemporary theories and literature that are the focus of AMST 603 (Current Approaches to American Studies).

This is a reading-intensive course, and I am well aware of the tension between "too much" (reading) and "too little" (depth of treatment) that will undoubtedly emerge as we proceed with considerable speed through many texts. One means of limiting this tension is for everyone to read and contribute both comments and questions in class discussions. At all times please feel free to think aloud, to challenge, to critique, and to offer alternative ways of looking and thinking. One point of any seminar is to think more broadly and differently about the material as the discussion proceeds. If any of us is not challenged to think differently, we shall all have fallen short of the possibilities.

Course Schedule:

Sept. 10 – Introductions, Theoretical Trajectories, Building to Critique
And Americans on America Before American Studies

Francis Higginson, "A Short and True Description of New England" (1629)

Ben Franklin, Autobiography (1791), pp. 5-23 (top), 77 (begin at Passy) – 92
Phillis Wheatley, “Poems,” which follow a memoir by Margaretta Odell

Judith Sargent Murray, "On the Equality of the Sexes (1790);

J. Hector St. Jean de Crevecoeur, Letter III: "What is an American?," from Letters From An American Farmer (1782)

William Craft, "Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom" (1860)


Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893)

"The Lives of The Freedmen of Indian Territory: The Slave Narratives of Indian Territory" – Freedmen = Estelusti

Liliuokalani, "Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen" (1898)


Eugene V. Debs, "The Martyred Apostles of Labor" (1898) & "Speech at Conference for Progressive Political Action" (1925)

Carl Sandburg, "Chicago," and others of the Chicago Poems (1916)

Emma Goldman, "A New Declaration of Independence" (1909) & "Was My Life Worth Living?" (1934)

Alain Locke, "The New Negro" (1925)
"Dear Miss Breed: Letters from Camp..." (1942-44), esp. "Life in Camp"
http://www.janm.org/breed/title.htm

All read:

Sept. 17 --
Part 1: It Was (N)Ever Thus: Locating Early American Studies

All read:

The Faradays:

Other:


The Mollys:
Sept. 24 --

Part 1: Broadening the Discipline: External Academic Influences

The Faradays:
Bruce Kuklick, "Myth and Symbol in American Studies" (1972) -- in Maddox, ed.

The Mollys:

The Faradays:


Part 2: Theoretical Turns, Multiple Methods, & "Others"

The Faradays:

The Mollys:


George Lipsitz, "Listening to Learn and Learning to Listen: Popular Culture, Cultural Theory, and American Studies" (1990) – in Maddox, ed.


**Oct. 1-8 – Marxisms From the Sources**

**Karl Marx -- All read for Oct. 1:**

*The German Ideology* (1845) – just chapter 1
http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/abstract.htm

*Wage Labour and Capital* (1847)
http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/wage-labour/index.htm

*Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859)
http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm

*Value, Price and Profit* (1869) http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1865/value-price-profit/index.htm

Recommended at some point:

*Capital, vol. 1*
http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/index.htm

*Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1847)
http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/index.htm


Ron Strickland, Youtube video on Base and Superstructure (2007),
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mHcv45NORAM&feature=related
and historical materialism
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjXAgBDSp2g&feature=related

**Antonio Gramsci -- All read for Oct. 8**


**The Faradays:**


"The Intellectuals" and "On Education," pp. 2-43 in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks, 1929-35*

Not required but helpful discussions and additional theorists:
Marxists Internet Archive  http://www.marxists.org/
International Gramsci Society  http://www.internationalgramscisociety.org/
Louis Althusser internet archive:
http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/index.htm

Antonio Gramsci internet archive:  http://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/index.htm
C. L. R. James internet archive:
http://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/index.htm
esp. “Dialectical Materialism and the Fate of Humanity”
http://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/diamat/diamat47.htm
Black Power (1967)

Part II, Oct. 8 -- The Frankfurt School and Emergent Critical Theory

All read:
  Theodor W. Adorno & Max Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” (1944)
  http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/adorno.htm

The Mollys:
  http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm

Not required but helpful:
  Theodor W. Adorno, "The Culture Industry Reconsidered" (1991)
  http://www.icce.rug.nl/~soundscapes/DATABASES/SWA/Culture_industry_reconsidered.shtml
  Douglas Kellner, "Critical Theory Today: Revisiting the Classics"
  http://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/essays/criticaltheorytoday.pdf
Idem., "The Frankfurt School"
http://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/essays/frankfurtschool.pdf
Ron Strickland on the Frankfurt School on youtube:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ULLZm_x_YE

See, also:
http://filer.case.edu/~ngb2/Pages/Intro.html
and
http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/habermas/

Oct. 15 -- Historical/Cultural Materialism & Hegemony

The Faradays:
Special Note: all read section II.

The Mollys:

Oct. 22-29 -- Poststructuralism & Postmodernism

Oct. 22 -- All read:
http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/saussure.htm
http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/leistra.htm

Oct. 29
The Mollys:

The Faradays:

See, also:
Jacques Derrida, “Fear of Writing” (youtube) and excerpt from “Différence”
John Lye, “Elements of Structuralism,” “Some Post-Structural Assumptions,” “Some Factors Affecting/Effecting the Reading of Texts,” “Différence”
Roger Jones, “Post Structuralism” http://www.philosopher.org.uk/poststr.htm
Daniel Chandler, “Intertextuality,” in Semiotics for Beginners
Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, excerpts from Postmodern Theory. Critical Interrogations.

Nov. 5 – Emergent Cultural Studies

All read:
Douglas Kellner, "Cultural Marxism and Cultural Studies"  pdf

The Faradays:

Transitioners (from BCS):

The Mollys:

Nov. 12 - Feminisms

The Faradays:

The Mollys
SPECIAL NOTE -- For the final weeks, please think about, in addition to content, the following questions:

- How did the authors theorize/frame a given concept?
- What were the likely theoretical influences on their work; what were their intellectual connections to prior theories?
- "How far" from prior framings in Americans' Studies had they moved, and "how far" from our contemporary framings do they appear to be?

Nov. 19 -- (Re)Theorizing Race & Ethnicity

The Mollies:


The Faradays:


All read:


Nov. 26 -- (Re)Theorizing Gender & Sexuality

The Faradays:

Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990; London: Routledge,
1999).  **Special note:** all read 10-year anniversary preface, ch. 3 & conclusion.

**The Mollys:**
Suzanna Danuta Walters, "From Here to Queer: Radical Feminism, Postmodernism, and the Lesbian Menace . . .," *Signs* (Summer 1996):830-69.

**Dec. 3 -- (Re)Theorizing Class & Culture**

**The Mollys:**

**The Faradays:**
Robin D. G. Kelley, "We Are Not What We Seem’: Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South,” *Journal of American History* 80 (June 1993):75-112.
Dec. 10 -- Recap, Remaining Questions, Sharing

Additional notes on readings:


In addition to the citations on this syllabus, a helpful website, with many links, is TV Reed's "Theory and Method in American/Cultural Studies: A Bibliographic Essay," which he has transformed into “Interdisciplinary Cultural Theory.”

Course Requirements:

1. Lead one week's discussion (exploration of main points, critique, raising significant questions) of the readings. (20%)

2. Substantive critiques (to include brief summary of main points) of the readings, using the template uploaded to our course page. Each person will be responsible for completing the template for 3 books, as well as 6 articles across other sessions. For this assignment, do not count the work you do for the week in which you are leading the discussion. Readings templates need to uploaded to the course website by noon the day before each class. Your choices of books & articles need to be synchronized with those of other students so that the readings are covered. (30%)

3. Weekly, insightful participation in and contribution to the discussions, based on your weekly readings, whether or not it's your week to read or you have done a book or article critique. (20%)

4. A final synthetic essay that focuses on ways in which/how/why the theoretical perspectives, approaches, assumptions, questions, etc. that we discuss might bear on your research interests. Consequently, from day 1, consider what might be useful, helpful, etc. from a given week's readings, as well as how and why some readings will not as meaningful. (30%, c. 15-18 pages, minimum; due 12/14/12).