Fall 2015 AMST 500
Theoretical Foundations in American Studies

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Office: 448 Kaprelian Hall
Office Hours: Tu-10:00 – 11:30; W 11:30 – 1:00, and by appointment

Class Time and Place: Tu 2:00-4:50pm in KAP 150

This course is designed to introduce students to key debates in the fields of American and Ethnic Studies. Rather than give a comprehensive or chronological survey of the field, this course attempts to sample from the field in order to give students access to some important conversations, some relevant historical arcs and some pressing politically urgent questions. The texts have been chosen, therefore, for their contributions to an ongoing understanding of the global understanding of “America” “the Americas: and “American” within dynamic systems and processes of race, migration, subjectivity, property and knowledge

Our readings will provide us with the tools and theories to resist the seductions of developmental narratives of the citizen-subject and we will look for alternative accounts of history, subjectivity, politics and the social. Throughout we will situate “America” as a regulating concept rather than as an idealization and we will consider the meaning of this concept within a global economy. Most weeks, we will select a central theme and then situate readings in a constellation around that theme. We will mostly focus on books or book chapters but you will always have the option of doing other suggested readings on the theme.

The themes/topics we will try to cover include: histories of capitalism; settler colonialism; US Imperialism; knowledge production/circulation; carceral power; migration; memory; architecture.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Glen Sean Coulthard, Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).


Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013).


**ELECTRONIC RESERVES**


Pandora, 1989), 267-319.


14) Lanita Jacobs, Chapters 1 and 6 from *From the Kitchen to the Parlor: Language and Becoming in African American Women's Hair Care* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006).


Assignments

1. Weekly Reports: Each week you will turn in summaries of that week’s reading. In no more than a total of 1.5 single-spaced pages for each week’s reading, identify:

1) What is the main question/problem engaged by each text?

2) What is the main argument of each text (try to keep this to two sentences) and, moreover, what is at stake for the author in this argument?

3) You should end with a question provoked by the reading that is specific to the reading but that opens out into a discussion topic for the seminar.

2. Final Paper:

Please submit a final seminar paper (10-15 pages) that addresses an area or topic or question that you wish to explore further but that deploys the theoretical materials of the course. We can meet and talk about your papers in the second half of the semester.
3. Presentations:

After week two, one or two students per session will be responsible for leading a discussion about one or more of the seminar readings for that week. You can use your weekly report to build your presentation.

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTIONS: TRIAL BY FIRE
Aug. 25

Reading: James Baldwin, “A Talk to Teachers” - http://www.pps.k12.or.us/files/district-leadership/A_Talk_To_Teachers_James_Baldwin.pdf

WEEK 2: WHAT, WHY, WHEN AND HOW?
September 1


WEEK 3: NO CLASS
September 8 LABOR DAY

Reading:

WEEK 4: WAR, WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?
September 15

Reading: Jill Lepore, The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity
WEEK 5:  
**HIDDEN HISTORIES**  
September 22

**Reading:** Linebaugh and Rediker from *Many Headed Hydra*; Cedric Robinson, Section One from *Black Marxism*.

**Themes:** Histories of resistance; dominant archives, counter histories; capitalism and its discontents; coalition; multitudes.

WEEK 6:  
**SUBJECTION, SLAVERY, ESCAPE**  
September 29

**Reading:** Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*; Fred Moten, “Resistance of the Object: Aunt Hester’s Scream” from *In the Break*.

**Themes:** Race, histories of captivity and escape; aesthetics and survival.

WEEK 7:  
**BLACK SKINS, RED SKINS, WHITE MASKS**  
October 6

**Reading:** Fanon, from *Black Skins, White Masks*; Coulthard, from *Red Skins, White Masks*.

**Themes:** Territory, occupation; spaces, movement; biopolitics.

WEEK 8:  
**FROM REPRESSION TO PRODUCTION**  
October 13

**Reading:** Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1*; Foucault, from *Biopolitics* (BB); Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex” (BB).

**Themes:** Power, desire, history, blood, affiliation, productivity.
WEEK 9: READINGS IN QUEER THEORY
October 20

Reading: Jasbir Puar, from *Terrorist Assemblages* (BB); from Chandan Reddy, *Freedom With Violence* (BB); from Dean Spade, *Normal Life* (BB).

Themes: Norms, violence, sexuality and power.

Special Event: Lecture and Seminar with Professor Jasbir Puar, October 29 + 30.

WEEK 10: METHODOLOGIES 1: ETHNOGRAPHY
October 27

Reading: Kale Fajardo, Bantigue. "Transportation: Translating Filipino/Filipino American Tomboy Masculinities Through Seafaring and Migration." *GLQ* 14:2/3 (BB); Kathleen Stewart, from *A Space on the Side of the Road* (BB); Lanita Jacobs, from *From the Kitchen to the Parlor* (BB).

Special Event: CLASS VISIT: Professor Lanita Jacobs

WEEK 11: METHODOLOGIES 2: CLOSE READING, SURFACE READING, SOCIO-CULTURAL ANALYSIS
November 3

Reading: Heather Love, “Surface Reading” (BB); Macarena Gomez-Barris, from *In Memory Dwells* (BB); Jack Halberstam, from *The Queer Art of Failure* (BB).

Special Event: CLASS VISIT: Professor Gomez-Barris.

WEEK 11: METHODOLOGIES 3: ARCHIVES
November 10

Reading: Nayan Shah, from *Stranger Intimacy* (BB); Ann Cvetkovich, from *Archive of Feelings* (BB); Gayatri Gopinath (BB); Ann
Stoler, from *Along the Archival Grain* (BB); Diana Taylor, from *The Archive and the Repertoire* (BB).

**Special Event:** CLASS VISIT: Professor Nayan Shah

**WEEK 12:** METHODOLOGIES 4: PERFORMANCE CULTURES

November 17

**Reading:** José Muñoz, from *Cruising Utopia*; Karen Tongson from “The Empty Orchestra”; Marlon Bailey, from *Butch Queen Up in Pumps*; Joseph Roach, from *Cities of the Dead*.

**Watch:** *Paris is Burning*.

**WEEK 13:** INTIMACY ON FOUR CONTINENTS

November 24

**Reading:** Lisa Lowe, *Intimacy on Four Continents*;

**WEEK 14:** CONCLUSIONS – FINAL PROJECTS

December 1

**Reading:** Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons*.