

Society and Culture of the United States

AMS 335-9439 | HST 335-9438
Spring 2009, CSI/CUNY
W 6:30- 9:50PM 2N/110

Professor Catherine Lavender, PhD
Office hours (2N-203): W 4:00-6:00, and by appointment;
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ABOUT THE COURSE:

This course in part grows out of the American poet Wallace Stevens's poem, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," in which the Stevens gives us multiple views of the same thing, transforming what we see with each sighting. There are certainly many more than thirteen ways to look at America, especially if you think about "America" as more than just a place; it is also an idea, a chimera, something slippery and solid, simultaneously just out of our reach and located inside of us. We will take thirteen ways of looking at America not as the thirteen best ways, or even the thirteen most important ways, but instead as thirteen ways which will each give us a different way of understanding, as Stevens does the blackbird, that elusive idea of "America" and its society and culture.

In the interdisciplinary field of American Studies, scholars use texts from many genres to build a broader understanding of social and cultural phenomena. These many kinds of texts, from the literary (poems, stories, novels) to the performing arts (films, television, plays), from the historical (memories, documents, oral traditions) to the visual (photographs, paintings, sculptures), become the sources for study in the field of American Studies. American Studies methodology asks us to draw from the methodologies of a multitude of disciplines – such as the close-reading used by literary critics, the visual analysis used by art historians, the statistical analysis used by social scientists, and the textual analysis used by historians – in order to gain new insights into the topic of American culture and society. In this course, we will be stretching to understand the many ways in which the American Studies scholar works, with the goal of coming to a deeper understanding of the contours of American culture and ways of seeing it.

Finally, one of the chief goals of the course will be to enable students to undertake a serious piece of historically-situated interdisciplinary research, and to write a substantial research paper. Your research paper will be written on a topic of your own choosing (with the approval of the professor), but it will also be based on the interdisciplinary analysis of a single American document or cultural artifact. This final research paper will be twelve- to fifteen pages in length, and will be based on research in the library, consultation of relevant secondary literature, and in-depth analysis of the document or artifact you choose to address. This paper will represent a substantial portion of the course grade.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- Class Participation (throughout the semester): 10% of course grade
- Cultural Event Report (due W 2/25): 15% of course grade
- Midterm Examination (W 3/18): 15% of course grade total
- Final Paper (due W 5/13): 45% of course grade
 - Outline of Paper (due W 4/22): 5% of course grade
 - Final Draft of Paper (W 5/13): 40% of course grade
- Final Examination (W 5/20): 15% of course grade total

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Integrity is fundamental to the academic enterprise. It is violated by acts such as borrowing or purchasing term papers, essays, reports, and other written assignments; using concealed notes or crib sheets during examinations; copying others' work and submitting it as one's own; and misappropriating the knowledge of others. The sources from which one derives one's ideas, statements, terms, and data must be fully and specifically acknowledged in the appropriate form; failure to do so, intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes plagiarism. Violations of academic integrity may result in failure in the course and in disciplinary actions with penalties such as suspension or dismissal from the College.

TEXTS:

The texts for this course are stored on the Blackboard site and the Course Website (www.library.csi.cuny.edu/dept/history/lavender/335.html). There are no specific texts to be purchased, but you will need a copy of Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (University of Chicago Press, 6th Revised edition, 1996 -- ISBN: 0226816273), which you should have purchased when you took HST 200, to assist you with preparation of your final paper.

CLASS MEETING SCHEDULE:

W 1/28	Introduction to the Course
W 2/4	Thirteen Ways of Looking at American Culture – Discuss <i>Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird</i>
W 2/11	Painting and Sculpture
W 2/18	Folk Music
W 2/25	Outsider Art (View <i>In the Realms of the Unreal</i> in class) – CULTURAL EVENT REPORT DUE
W 3/4	Poetry (Longfellow, Poe, Dickinson and Whitman)
W 3/11	Class will start at 7:00 pm this evening; Poetry (Masters, Frost, Marquis, Hughes, Williams, The Beats)
W 3/18	MIDTERM EXAM
W 3/25	Short Stories
W 4/1	Photography
W 4/8	SPRING BREAK (No Class Meeting)
W 4/15	SPRING BREAK (No Class Meeting)
W 4/22	Drama – PAPER OUTLINE DUE
W 4/29	American Gothic – Discuss <i>Wisconsin Death Trip</i>
W 5/6	American Foodways
W 5/13	American Comedy – FINAL PAPER DUE
W 5/20	FINAL EXAM

Possible Area Cultural Events:

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

- "Alexander Calder: The Paris Years, 1926-33" (through 2/15)
- "Artists Making Photographs: Chamberlain, Rauschenberg, Ruscha, Samaras, Warhol (ongoing)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART

- The Black List Project (To 3/09)
- Building a Feminist Art Collection (To 4/09)
- Small Wonders from the American Collections (to 6/09)
- The Modernist Jewelry of Art Smith (To 7/09)
- American Identities: A New Look (Ongoing)

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM

- The Seduction of Light: Ammi Phillips|Mark Rothko (To 3/09)
- Martin Ramirez: The Last Works (To 4/09)
- Up Close: Henry Darger (To 9/09)
- Recycling & Resourcefulness: Quilts of the 1930s (To 3/09 in Lincoln Square Branch).

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

- Fritz Scholder: Indian/Not Indian (To 5/09)
- Identity by Design: Tradition, Change, and Celebration in Native Women's Dresses (To 9/2009)
- Beauty Surrounds Us (To 3/2010)

THE NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

- Taking the Oath: The First Presidential Inauguration (To 10/09)
- A New President Takes Command: FDR's First Hundred Days (To 5/09)
- Grant and Lee in War and Peace (To 3/09)
- New York Painting Begins: Eighteenth-Century Portraits (To 1/10)

MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN

- Elegant Armor: The Art of Jewelry (To 7/09)
- Second Lives: Remixing the Ordinary (To 4/09)

SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

- The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860–1989 (To 4/2009)

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

- Calder Jewelry (To 3/09)
- Reality Check: Truth and Illusion in Contemporary Photography (To 3/09)
- American Landscapes (Ongoing)

THE NEWARK MUSEUM

- Completing the Circle: The Fiber and Beaded Art of Ina Golub (To 5/09)
- Small but Sublime: Intimate Views by Durand, Bierstadt and Inness (To 11/09)
- The Lenox Legacy: America's Greatest Porcelain, 1889-2005 (To 2010)

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MoMA)

- The Museum and the War Effort: Artistic Freedom and Reporting for "The Cause" (to 2/11/09)
- Batiste Madalena: Hand-Painted Film Posters for the Eastman Theatre, 1924–1928 (To 4/09)
- Dreamland: Architectural Experiments since the 1970s (To 3/09)

COOPER-HEWITT, NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM

- Wall Stories: Children's Wallpapers and Books (To 4/09)

ANY LIVE PRODUCTION OF A PLAY BY AN AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHT OR LIVE CONCERT OF MUSIC BY AN AMERICAN COMPOSER OR LIVE DANCE RECITAL OR BALLET BY AN AMERICAN CHOREOGRAPHER

FOR ADDITIONAL OPTIONS, CONSULT WITH PROFESSOR

Updated: Saturday 21 February 2009