

**Ways of Seeing:  
Images and Ideas in American Culture**

**AMST/HIST 6600: Theory and Methods  
Mondays 2:30pm-5pm, FL 307  
Fall 2007**

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**AUDIENCE:**

This course is designed to introduce graduate students to the field of American Studies.

**GOALS:**

The class will:

- explore the origins, purposes, and approaches of American Studies
- examine current texts and trends in the field
- examine changes in American Studies methods over half a century
- focus on the theme of visual culture

**DESIGN:**

The course is a reading seminar. Students will:

1. Meet once per week for a 2.5-hour class discussion
2. Read a book or article(s) every week
3. Attend every class meeting. Since the course revolves around class discussion, I require attendance at all seminar meetings. If you must miss class, talk to me before class. You will be required to submit a written review of the book for that day, **and** your final grade will suffer.
4. Come to class prepared to discuss the works in a critical, careful, and professional manner. I expect you to participate actively and thoughtfully in seminar discussion. *Students* lead and actively shape a reading seminar; the professor stays in the background.
5. Submit three substantive questions designed to stimulate discussion each week; the quality of your discussion questions will be reflected in your grade for the course.
6. Submit a final paper (12-15 pgs) discussing the historiography and varying approaches to your field of study using at least 5 substantial articles or books, one of which we may have read in class.

**REQUIRED BOOKS:**

- *Locating American Studies: The Evolution of a Discipline*, Lucy Maddox.
- *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West*, Martha Sandweiss.
- *Enter the New Negroes: Images of Race in American Culture*, Martha Jane Nadell.
- *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way*, Lary May.

- *A Staggering Revolution: A Cultural History of Thirties Photography*, John Raeburn.
- *Imaging Japanese America: The Visual Construction of Citizenship, Nation, and the Body*, Elena Tajima Creef.
- *Public Native America: Tribal Self-Representation in Museums, Powwows, and Casinos*, Mary Lawlor.
- *The Visual Culture of American Religions*, David Morgan and Sally M. Promey, editors.

## **Class Schedule:**

Aug. 27– Introduction to the class and one another

Sept. 3 - APPROACHES TO AMERICAN STUDIES, 1950-1980  
Maddox, pp. vii-214

Sept 10: APPROACHES TO AMERICAN STUDIES, 1980-2000  
Maddox, pp. 215-443

Sept. 17 – PRINT THE LEGEND

Sept. 24 – In class video, “Irving Norman: To Whom it May Concern.” Read *Dark Metropolis* exhibition catalog (on reserve in library) and view Norman’s website:  
[www.irvingnorman.com](http://www.irvingnorman.com)

FRIDAY SEPT. 28 – 10:30-11:30am at the Nora Eccles Harrison Museum. Panel discussion with Hela Norman and Scott Shields, curator of *Dark Metropolis*.

Oct. 1 – ENTER THE NEW NEGRO

Nora Eccles Harrison Exhibit Review due. See the *Journal of American History* for examples of exhibit reviews and come to class prepared to thoughtfully discuss the exhibition and panel.

Oct. 8 – A STAGGERING REVOLUTION, pp. ix-142

Oct. 15 – A STAGGERING REVOLUTION, pp. 143 - end

Oct. 22 – THE BIG TOMORROW

Oct. 29 – PUBLIC NATIVE AMERICA

Nov. 5 – IMAGING JAPANESE AMERICA

Nov. 12 – THE VISUAL CULTURE OF AMERICAN RELIGIONS

Nov. 19 - AMERICAN STUDIES WORKS IN YOUR FIELD – Presentation and critical review due. Consult with me to select a work pertaining to your area of scholarly interest.

Nov. 26 - AMERICAN STUDIES WORKS IN YOUR FIELD – Presentation and critical review due. Consult with me to select a work pertaining to your area of scholarly interest.

Dec. 3 - RECENT LITERATURE IN THE FIELD

Read the articles in the most recent issue of *American Quarterly*.

## GUIDELINES FOR BOOK REVIEWS AND CLASS DISCUSSION

### **Critical Textual Analysis**

Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *Perspectives*, February 1988

The purpose of analytical or deep reading (and reviewing) is to see through the surface text of a book or article to its inner workings. A simple recapitulation or summary of the work's contents as the author organizes it does not usually provide you as a reader or anyone with whom you discuss the piece an adequate understanding of the contents as a set of arguments or a narrative embodying a duster of presuppositions. You should examine authors' main points, how they went about explicating them, and the sets of assumptions that made for their works being exactly the way they are. In books, for example, authors have several hundred pages to make their points, but in preparing a review you have only a few double-spaced pages to make your points. Thus you must reorganize the author's scheme of exposition and framework of argument and assumptions for your own purposes according to your own needs for understanding and/or presentation. The following topics and questions aim to help you do this, to examine the book or article as a whole according to the larger framework of assumptions that generates its contents.

**Comparing the author's goals and achievements.** What are the chief goals of the work as announced by the author in the preface or introduction to the book or the first few paragraphs of the article? What are the actual major themes or ideas of the work in your own opinion? Does your analysis of the goals and themes agree with the aims as expressed by the author? Do the author's explicit goals (if any) and his/her major themes or arguments match both in their logic and in their exposition as represented in the book's or article's organization? Are the goals, themes, and arguments shown clearly in the organization of the book or article?

Does, for example, the structure of the book---its parts, chapters, or other subsections---follow closely or loosely from the author's stated goals, or does the structure derive more from implicit judgments about morality, politics, or other concerns? Does the author, in short, prove her/his argument(s) and how well and by what means? Does the author's style enhance or detract from the main arguments or the overall contents of the work? What rhetorical ploys does the author use to further the argument or story? From whose viewpoint and with what literary devices does the author present the story or frame the argument? Why do you think the author chose that particular viewpoint or voice? Do conspicuous silences occur in the work about topics you think should have been covered? Why do you think the author omitted what you think so important to the work's argument or narrative?

**Morals, uses, politics.** What are the author's moral and political judgments and how do they influence the text? For what political, moral, intellectual, or other purpose does the author argue and shape the material? (Philosophical, religious, and professional concerns can shape material as much as economic, political, or other interests.) Are the author's uses made explicit or are they implicit in how he/she told the story or made the argument(s)? Even an explicit denial of political or moral ends may have moral and political consequences.

**Models of society, economy, politics.** What does the author presume about the nature of social, economic, or political arrangements in the society being examined? How are social groupings and their relationships determined? Does the society have classes as well as groups? What does the author argue explicitly or implicitly about the structures of power and the means of social control or domination? Does the author presume consensual agreement or conflict is natural among social groups and the overall workings of a society? Is the author a pluralist who believes in the wide distribution of power throughout the society or a power elitist who sees a small integrated group

dominating the society? Does the author present supporting evidence or only theory in her/ his exposition of social arrangements?

**Plots, stories, metastories.** From whose viewpoint does the author tell the story or make the argument? How does the author employ (or organize) the underlying narrative (conceived broadly)? To what extent does the author presume progress, decline, cyclic, or other basic modes of comprehending time through history? What story or logic does the author employ to move his/her argument or narrative forward? Of what larger story or history does the text or interpretation presume its story to be a part? Why does the author begin and end the history when she/he does? Do the beginning and end points build in certain biases in the making of the argument? At bottom, how does the author view the nature of history as a way of comprehending the past? To what extent do the author's arguments and story depend upon her/his evidence and what upon larger assumptions about human nature and society, ethics, and political uses? How does the author divide time in her/his story? What periodization does the author presume or explicate and how does the author know it or prove it?

**Model(s) of human nature and causation.** Does the author presume that human beings change their ways and outlooks easily or are they fundamentally hostile to change? To what extent do changes stem from willed human agency, that is, from goal-oriented human action individually or collectively? Or does change come from unanticipated consequences of aimed-for actions or from larger forces and/or structures working upon human beings? Can humans change their circumstances easily or only with difficulty? Does society in a sense create human beings and their actions or vice versa in the author's opinion? How does the author see the particular society, culture, or time as coming into being, and how does that society, culture, or time reproduce itself according to the author's arguments; To what extent are humans constrained by their culture or society or times and to what extent are they free to create what they will? Are all human beings alike over time in their interests, outlooks, and capacities, or do they vary by time and culture? Does the author, in other words, presume human nature is universal or a cultural and temporal creation? Are certain drives and interests considered common to all human beings, or do these vary by individual human beings, by cultures, by times?

**Uses of evidence and proof.** Does the author have all the kinds of evidence needed for all parts of her/his case as explored in the preceding topics? Are the basic facts presented by the author determined more by the evidence used or by the author's premises and presuppositions about human nature, models of society, or political and moral uses? Does the author, in other words, employ the types of evidence she/he needs to prove her/his case in the larger sense of the argument? Or is much of the evidence presented in the book or article beside the point(s) actually argued or implied? Does the author employ sophisticated methods of analysis in the manipulation of data? If the methods are quantitative, are they the proper or best methods? Does the author assert and then prove a strongly framed version of her/his case or argument but assert the stronger one is proven?