Fall Semester 2004
Tuesdays & Thursdays, 2:00 – 3:15 p.m.
Room CBA-216

Office: Room FO2-109
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:30-10:30am & 12:30-1:30pm, Wednesdays 4:00-6:00pm and by appointment
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Course Description:

This course provides an introduction to the interdisciplinary study of American history, life, and culture. While it serves as a required introduction for those students interested in a major in American Studies, it also stands alone to encourage students to make connections between various aspects of society and culture at different moments in American history and to situate the interactions between peoples in a culturally diverse society within national and global contexts.

American Studies has been around for more than half a century, and is a vital, malleable, and growing academic enterprise. Scholars working within the American Studies tradition have posed new questions about American history and life, brought new perspectives to the study of the cultures of the United States, and have introduced new information into scholarly and public conversations about national identity and experience. In the process, American Studies has developed into an intensely self-reflective mode of inquiry, one constantly concerned with its methods, fields of study, intellectual coherence, and relation to both other disciplines and the world.

This course is part of the recently revived and reconceptualized Program in American Studies at CSULB. For the past several years, faculty from a number of different departments and programs on campus have been working to reimagine what "American Studies" should mean in the 21st century. Many of those conversations have found their way into both the American Studies major and this syllabus. As an overview, we will investigate American Studies as an enterprise, concentrating on the relationships between popular culture and history in postwar America. After exploring the utility of "American Studies" as a mode of inquiry and activism, we will then draw upon a variety of evidence in examining race, gender, class, labor and identity in a range of urban settings, culminating with a focus on the imagination and representation of both Los Angeles and greater California. Throughout the semester, we will work to ask pertinent, insightful questions about both course topics and the larger world with which we interact.

Course Design:

While parts of this course will use a lecture format, most of our class sessions will revolve around in-class discussions and analyses of American culture, usually approached through our course readings. Several of our regular sessions will be replaced with guest lectures and field trips. This will enable you to meet and work with some of the faculty affiliated with American Studies at CSULB as they introduce us to their approaches to the many voices and many lives shaping American experiences.

Because of the flexibility of American Studies, students will actively assist in the growth and design of the Program and this introductory course. While I have expertise about some aspects of American history and culture, I operate under the assumption that each of you are likewise experts on topics and issues about which I
know little. Accordingly, despite the fact that I ultimately possess the power of the grade book, I hope to run this class in an open, democratic, and interactive manner.

**Required Course Texts:**


These books are available at the University Bookstore. Additional readings may be passed out in class or distributed electronically.

Students in American Studies obviously require a basic understanding of American history. Those of you who feel you lack sufficient background should consult one of the many U.S. history textbooks that are available. I particularly like Peter N. Carroll & David W. Noble, *The Free & the Unfree: A Progressive History of the United States* (Penguin, 2001). You may also wish to consult the outlines of American history provided by the U.S. Information Agency from 1954 to 1994 that are available on-line: http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/H/index.htm. All students should possess a quality dictionary and a style manual.

**Course Assignments & Grading:**

1. Three reaction papers, due dates below, 30% of final grade  
2. Final paper, due December 19th, 50% of final grade (including preliminary work and in-class presentation)  
   
   **Final Paper Topic:** Read something, or view something, or listen to something, and tell me what it reveals about American culture, using the materials of the course that help you make the most sense of what you've read, seen, or heard. Take about ten pages to do it. No more than fifteen.

3. Attendance, participation, and in-class assignments, 20% of final grade

Additional information about these assignments will be distributed and discussed in class.

**Course Policies:**

*Attendance:* Because we cover a great deal of material in this interactive course, prompt and regular attendance is a necessity. Students who miss classes run the risk of receiving a failing grade or receiving a lower grade than the student might have secured with regular attendance. Excused absences must be documented by a doctor's note, a note from the Dean, or advance notice from the Athletic Director. Absences for religious observances are excused; please let me know of dates in advance. I allow two unexcused absences during the semester; thereafter each subsequent unexcused absence will result in the subtraction of points from your participation grade.

*Classroom Environment:* You are strongly urged to ask questions and express opinions in this course, approaching readings and ideas actively and critically. As you do so, however, please strive to be courteous to your fellow students. To create a respectful and productive environment please avoid unnecessary distractions (such as ringing cell phones, beeping pagers, and conspicuous food consumption) during class meetings.

*Course Readings:* You are expected to have completed the day's readings prior to coming to class and to be prepared to participate in discussions. Always bring the texts we will be discussing to class.

*Disability Accommodation:* Any student who feels that he or she may need an accommodation for any sort of disability should make an appointment to see me during my office hours so we can make arrangements for you to complete the requirements of the class.
Papers: All work written outside the classroom must be typed or word-processed in a standard 10 or 12 point font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. Your papers should, at a minimum, both present and critically analyze the main theoretical and historical arguments in your reading. All quotations must be cited by using parenthetical references, footnotes, or endnotes. If you are unsure about how or what to cite, please ask me. All papers should have your name, the course title and number, the due date, and an appropriate title or label for the assignment at the top. I strongly recommend that you keep copies of all your work, either on paper or on disk, for your protection.

Your papers will be evaluated for earnest effort and thoughtful, coherent content. Remember to clearly state your thesis and support your arguments with examples. Usage and grammar are not major concerns of grading, but a minimum mechanical competence to insure the "readability" of these papers is expected. I expect that you will proofread your papers and exams before handing them in. All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day assigned unless otherwise noted. Electronic submission of papers is not allowed. If you know you are going to miss class on dates assignments are due you must be proactive and request an extension in advance. Late assignments will lose 5 points for each calendar day late and will not be accepted more than one week past their due date without a previously agreed to extension.

Plagiarism & Academic Integrity: Students in this class will be held to a high standard of academic integrity, which is defined as "the pursuit of scholarly activity free from fraud and deception." Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating of information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. If I suspect all or part of an assignment may not be your own intellectual work I will ask to see your notes or drafts. I also may require electronic submission of the paper to facilitate running the paper through plagiarism-detecting databases. If you have any questions about academic integrity, please talk with me. I can and will fail a student for major infractions.

Student Services: If you need help with written assignments or require guidance on note-taking and critical reading, please take advantage of the Writer's Resource Lab (LAB-312; 985-4329) or the Learning Assistance Center (Library East 12; 985-5350).

Technology: The CSULB Technology Help Desk is now available for students. Help is available on a wide range of computer issues including: BeachBoard, Windows and Mac OS, CSULB Internet Accounts, Remote Connectivity, Microsoft Desktop Applications, Anti-Virus, Internet and Web related topics. Visit them on the web at http://helpdesk.csulb.edu or contact the THD by phone at 562-985-4959 or send Email to helpdesk@csulb.edu.

Course Reading Schedule:

Despite its daunting appearance, there is substantial flexibility in this syllabus, which should be considered as a work in progress that will be changed during the semester as necessary and appropriate. Any changes, such as a reorganization of readings to accommodate guest lectures and/or field trips, will be discussed in class and distributed via e-mail. Supplemental in-class texts, such as film and musical selections, are not listed below. Remember, you should have these readings and papers completed prior to our meeting on the date listed.

Unit 1: Studying American Popular Culture

Tu Aug 31 Introduction
Th Sep 02 Lipsitz, preface
Tu Sep 07 Lipsitz, chapters 1-2
Th Sep 09 Lipsitz, chapter 3
Tu Sep 14 Lipsitz, chapter 5
Th Sep 16  Lipsitz, chapters 7-8
Tu Sep 21  Lipsitz, chapter 9-10
Th Sep 23  Lipsitz, chapter 11
Tu Sep 28  Reaction Paper 1 Due

Unit 2:  Labor and the City

Th Sep 30  Rotella, introduction
Tu Oct 05  Rotella, chapter 1-2
Th Oct 07  Library Orientation with Greg Armento, Spidell Room, Library
Tu Oct 12  Rotella, chapter 3
Th Oct 14  No Class Meeting (SLS, Durham)
Tu Oct 19  Rotella, chapter 4 & conclusion
Th Oct 21  Reaction Paper 2 due

Unit 3:  Representations of Los Angeles & California

Tu Oct 26  Mosley, chapters 1-10
Th Oct 28  Mosley, chapters 11-11
Tu Nov 02  Mosley, chapter 22-31
Th Nov 04  Schrank, "Picturing the Watts Towers"
Tu Nov 09  Lipsitz, chapter 6
Th Nov 11  No Class Meeting (ASA, Atlanta)
Tu Nov 16  May, introduction & chapters 1-3
Th Nov 18  May, chapters 4-6
Tu Nov 23  May, chapters 7-9
Th Nov 25  No Class Meeting (Thanksgiving)
Tu Nov 30  Reaction Paper 3 due

Unit 4:  Whadya Know?

Th Dec 02  Student Presentations
Tu Dec 07  Student Presentations
Th Dec 09  Student Presentations & Course-Wrap Up

Th Dec 16  Final Papers due in F02-109 by 2:30pm, the end of our scheduled exam time. An end-of-semester social event will follow.