American Studies 602: Approaches to Understanding the American Experience: From Local to Global

This course will serve a number of educational purposes. First, as the second course in the American Studies seminar sequence it will continue the discussion of what America is and how it can be studied. Second, the course will examine different and possibly competing methodologies that might be used to study America. These include political economy, social science history, cultural studies, historical, and literary approaches. Third this course will give special attention to Marxist political economy approaches to understanding America. Fourth, Marxist and other approaches will be used to examine communities, the nation-state, and the global political economy.

Among our most general questions are, "What is America?" and "What is/are American Studies?" We are particularly interested, as well, in the question, "What is imperialism?" particularly since our American Studies fall semester seminar was entitled, "Imperialist Designs." Here we look to supply a theoretical foundation, in Marxist-Leninist theory, to the study of imperialism. We will also use this foundation as a perspective on the interdisciplinary and diverse analyses that we shall read in the course of the seminar.

To serve these multiple purposes, the seminar will discuss a thorough array of texts reflecting substantive and methodological traditions in American Studies and affiliated disciplines. Texts will address a variety of “levels of analysis,” from the community, to the state, to the international system.

Students will participate actively in seminar discussions, will present critical examinations of assigned texts in the seminar, and will complete a research paper or research proposal toward an analysis of the American experience, using an approach or combination of approaches highlighted in the seminar.

*Required texts ordered by Von’s Book Store.

Schedule of Weekly Readings and Discussion Topics

Week One: Introduction and Overview: Interdisciplinary scholarship and methods.
- No required readings

Week Two: Marx and the Roots of Imperialism
Week Three: Imperialism, Classic Statements

Week Four: Engendering and Imagining Incursions

Week Five: Participant Observation and Community Studies

Week Six: Social History, Social Movements and Social Change

Week Seven: Local History
  Week Eight: The New Local/Social/Community Studies

Week Nine: Where Local Meets Global: Imperialism Today

Week Ten: Imperialism and Culture: Part 1
- Required: Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*, *Verso, 2004*

Week Eleven: Imperialism and Culture: Part 2
- Required: Michael Parenti, *The Culture Struggle* Seven Stories Press, 2006

Week Twelve: Financialization and Imperialism
  2 pages (both readings will be made available by the instructors)

Week Thirteen: Imperialism and Militarism

Weeks Fourteen/Fifteen: Papers, Presentations, Conclusions
- No required readings