“Placing” American Identities
American Studies 115 • Spring 2005

Class: T, Th 10:10-11:55
Location: Leighton 330

Deborah Appleman (Educational Studies) x4010
Willis 108 – Office hours: W 10-12, Th 1:30-3:00, & by appt
Adriana Estill (English, American Studies) x7498
Laird 202 – Office hours: MW11:00-11:45, T 1:30-2:30, and by appt

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is about a topic that is often taken for granted, or not even considered, yet is extremely salient. Place is often transparent; typically, we don’t examine how place structures the identities, perceptions, and behavior of individuals and communities. Like race, class, and gender, place, both material and conceptual, impacts how we see our world and ourselves.

The topics for this course represent sites (border, malls, and high schools) that are the foci of American studies scholarship. They are also places that are integral to the everyday lives of Americans.

All readings for the course are on e-reserve at Gould library. We expect that students will come to class prepared.

There will be a movie night almost every week; please reserve Thursdays, either from 7-9 pm or from 9-11 pm. Movie nights are not optional since the viewings represent an integral part of your “reading” work for the course.

On Sunday, April 24, we will take a field trip to the Mall of America. Like movie nights, this field trip is compulsory and non-negotiable.

COURSE GOALS

We hope this introduction to American studies will raise some important questions for all of you and inspire some of you to become American studies majors. The course is designed to help you begin thinking about different disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives in order to help you discover how American studies is different from other disciplines. We will also examine why the study of “place” requires interdisciplinary methodology. Finally, we will explore the concept of text by expanding our notion of what texts can be, and we will learn together to read, critique, and, if necessary, resist a variety of scholarly and cultural texts.

COURSE WEBSITE

The course Web site is located at: http://www.acad.carleton.edu/curricular/educ/classes/AMST115/S05/index.html. It can also be accessed through the Educational Studies home page under Courses or through the American Studies home page. The course folder is linked on this site. We will use the course folder to post course material, to exchange written assignments, to share work, and to conserve as much paper as possible.

COURSE MATERIALS

Required Texts

Olsen, Laurie
 Made in American
 Farrell, James J.
 One Nation Under Goods
 Vila, Pablo
 Crossing Borders, Reinforcing Borders

Additional readings will be distributed in class or placed on e-reserve in Gould Library. Specific readings will be assigned by topic to ensure maximum flexibility.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

| Attendance and Participation | 20% |
| Participation in mandatory field trip to the mall of America | |
| Four short (2-5 pages) papers (10% each) | 40% |
| • Personal analysis, place your identity | April 1 |
| • Analytical essay/historically informed analysis | April 22 |
| • Mini-ethnography | May 6 |
| • Critical essay on film | May 25 |
| Written response to comps talks | 10% |
| Quizzes | 5% |
| Final paper/comprehensive synthesis | 25% |
| Due Date | |
| April 24 | |
| | |
| April 1 | |
| April 22 | |
| May 6 | |
| May 25 | |
| June 6 | |
## Topic 1: Course Introduction

- Tue, Mar 29
- Thu, Mar 31
- Friday, Apr 1 **Personal Essay Due**

## Topic 2: The U.S.-Mexico Border

- Tue, Apr 5
- Thu, Apr 7 Movie night: *Lone Star*
- Tue, Apr 12
- Thu, Apr 14 Movie Night: *Born in East LA*
- Tue, Apr 19

## Topic 3: Malls

- Thu, Apr 21 Movie Night: *Scenes from a Mall*
- Friday, April 22 **Historically Informed Analysis Due**
- Sun, Apr 24: Mall of America field trip
- Tue, Apr 26
- Thu, Apr 28
  - Apr 29-May 2 **Mid-Term Break**
- Tue, May 3
- Thu, May 5 Movie Night: *Merchants of Cool*
- Friday, May 6 **Mini-Ethnography Due**

## Topic 4: School Spaces

- Tue, May 10
- Thu, May 12 Movie night: Scenes from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*
- Tue, May 17 School field trip
- Wed, May 18 Movie Night: Adolescent film festival
- Thu, May 19
- Tue, May 24
- Wed, May 25 **Critical Analysis Due**

## Topic 5: Other Places: How to Do Research in American Studies

- Thu, May 26
- Tue, May 31

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**Final paper is due by the last finals period on Monday, June 6, but you may turn it in anytime beforehand.**