

**Sample Syllabus  
Comparative Studies 339**

**Transnationalism and Culture in the Americas**

Winter 2009  
JR 304  
MW 1:30-3:18

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**Course Description:** This course explores “transnationalism” as a central feature of social experience and cultural production in the Americas, focusing on those arts genres that cross national, ethnic, and racial borders, speak multiple languages, and forcefully engage the politics of citizenship, migration, and national belonging. Transnational experience has continually marked culture in the Americas through the historic conditions of European colonization and its aftermath: colonization, slavery, immigration, and today, the experience of market “globalization.” The arts do not merely describe such conditions; they have often functioned as tools to perpetuate or to contest them. In this course, we will consider the impact of such experiences as slavery, migration, and poverty on artistic production, noting their impact on literacy and literary production. We’ll consider the important role of performance in anticolonial aesthetics, focusing on performance art, experimental video, rap, salsa, dance, and theatre. Our studies will prompt such questions as: How does the “hip hop nation” challenge conventional notions of national belonging for black Americans? Is the “aural border” between the US and Mexico, or the US and Cuba, more fluid than the existing political borders? We’ll further consider the body as a prime site of public art and activism; music and rhythm as politicized vernacular style; and dance and theatre as forms of collective action and reflection.

**Course Objectives:** The course is designed as a GEC Arts and Humanities, Cultures and Ideas course and as a GEC Diversity Experiences, International Issues, Non-Western or Global course, as well as a course that will satisfy Comparative Studies major requirements. It will be of particular interest to Comparative Studies students in the Comparative Literature, Folklore, Cultural Studies, and Comparative Ethnic and American Studies tracks, but is likely also to be of interest to Comparative Studies students in other areas and to students in other departments (especially African American and African Studies, English, History, Spanish and Portuguese, and Women’s Studies), and to students interested in ethnic and Latino/a studies or in global or international studies. General goals include increasing students’ critical, analytical, and writing and speaking skills, as well as their awareness of

current issues related to the role of the arts in the context of national politics and globalization. More specifically, the course is designed to help students understand how the arts have contributed to social and political change in the Americas, both historically and in the contemporary world. Its focus on the study of performance – in music, dance, drama, film, video, and popular and vernacular culture generally – will help students analyze complex relations among commercial cultural production, ethnic and cultural identity, national and international politics, and ongoing processes of globalization in Latin America and the U.S.

**Required Texts** (essays and selections from the following):

- Coco Fusco, *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (New Press, 1995)  
Alberto Sandoval-Sanchez, *José Can You See? Latinos on and off Broadway* (U Wisconsin Press, 1999)  
Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (California UP, 1990)  
Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (Routledge, 1994)  
Floyd J. Miller, ed., Martin Robinson Delany, *Blake or, The huts of America: a Tale of the Mississippi Valley, the Southern United States, and Cuba* (1859; Beacon Press, 1989)  
Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (Verso, 1992)  
Werner Sollors, ed., *Multilingual America: Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and the Languages of American Literature* (NYU Press, 1998)  
Celeste Fraser Delgado and Jose Esteban Munoz, ed., *Everynight Life : Culture and Dance in Latin/O America (Latin America Otherwise)* (Duke UP, 1997).  
*American Jewish History* 87: 4 (1999)  
Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Wesleyan UP, 1994)  
Anna Deavere Smith, *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn and Other Identities* (Anchor, 1993)  
Catherine Ugwu, ed., *Let's Get It On: the Politics of Black Performance* (Bay Press, 1995)  
Coco Fusco, ed., *Corpus Delecti* (Routledge, 1999)  
Chon A, Noriega, ed., Harry Gamboa, *Urban Exile* (U Minnesota Press, 1998)

**Course Requirements and Grading:**

**3 Quizzes** (5% each)

Quizzes are in-class writing assignments on the assigned reading.

**Analytical essay**, 6–8 pages (25%)

Topics will be suggested, but students are welcome to pursue their own interests. Emphasis will be placed on careful analysis and argumentation.

**Group presentation** (25%)

A collaborative presentation of 15 minutes to the class based on independent student research. Emphasis will be placed on innovative research questions, thorough research, and

clear presentation.

**Final essay exam (25%)**

A take-home essay exam (3 short essays) which covers all of the material covered over the quarter. Emphasis on comparative analysis of essays, texts, and films.

**Participation, preparation (10%)**

**Grading Scale:**

A 93-100	B+ 88-89	B- 80-82	C 73-77	D+ 68-69	E 64-0
A- 90-92	B 83-87	C+ 78-79	C- 70-72	D 65-67	

More than two unexcused absences will affect your grade; .15 will be subtracted for every additional unexcused absence.

*All students are responsible for reading, understanding, and following university rules regarding cheating and plagiarism, which will be strictly enforced (see Faculty Rule 3335-31-02 on Academic Misconduct in the Ohio State University Student Handbook).*

*Any students who feel that they may be academically disadvantaged due to the impact of a documented disability should contact the instructor(s) and the Office of Disability Services in Room 150 Pomerene Hall (292-3307) to arrange accommodations.*

**Weekly Syllabus**

**Unit 1/ weeks 1, 2**

**"American" Art and Colonial Realities**

**1 Introduction: Course overview**

In class, screen: Couple in the Cage (Coco Fusco, Guillermo Gómez Peña)

**2 Whose America?**

Coco Fusco, "The Other History of Intercultural Performance" from *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas*, 37-63.

**3 Tropicalism**

Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez, "Carmen Miranda and Desi Arnaz: Foundational Images of 'Latinidad' on Broadway and in Hollywood" from *José Can You See? Latinos on and off Broadway*, 21-61.

Cynthia Enloe, "Carmen Miranda on my mind: the international politics of the banana," *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, 124-150.

In class, screen *Carmen Miranda: Bananas Is My Business*. Dir. Helena Solberg, Brazil, 1995.

#### **4 Eurocentrism and the Americas**

Ella Shohat, Robert Stam, "From Eurocentrism to Polycentrism," from *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, 13–27; 46–49.

### **Unit 2 weeks 3, 4**

#### **Transnational histories**

#### **1 & 2 Race and Representation**

Martin Robinson Delany, *Blake or, The huts of America: a Tale of the Mississippi Valley, the Southern United States, and Cuba* (1859)

Screen, Marlon Riggs, *Ethnic Notions* (1989)

#### **3 Language, genre, and imagined community**

Benedict Anderson, short selection from *Imagined Communities* (Verso, 1992)

Michel Fabre, "The New Orleans Press and French Language Literature by Creoles of Color," from *Multilingual America*, 29–49.

Aviva Ben-Ur, "The Ladino Judeo-Spanish Press, 1910–1948," from *Multilingual America*, 64–77.

#### **4 Languages of the Black diaspora**

Nicolas Guillén, "Josephine Baker in Cuba"

Nicolas Guillén, poems from *Diario que diario*.

### **Unit 3 / weeks 5, 6**

#### **Aural Borders: Rhythm and Transnational Experience**

#### **1 Translocations**

Mayra Santos Febres, "Salsa as Translocation," from *Everynight Life: Culture and Dance in Latino/a America*, 175–188.

#### **2 Aural Borders**

Josh Kun, "Against Easy Listening: Audiotopic Readings and Transnational Soundings," from *Everynight Life*, 288–309.

Screen: *Alma Punk*, dir. Sarah Minter. Mexico, 1994.

#### **3 Identity soundings**

Josh Kun, "The Yiddish Are Coming: Mickey Katz, Antic-Semitism, and the Sound of Jewish Difference," *American Jewish History* 87: 4 (December 01, 1999) 343–374.

#### **4 Hip Hop politics**

Tricia Rose, "Voices from the Margins: Rap Music and Contemporary Black Cultural Production" (1–20) and "Prophets of Rage: Rap Music and the Politics of Black Cultural Expression" (99–145), from *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*.

#### **Unit 4 / weeks 7, 8**

#### **Trans/performing: activism and imagined community**

##### **1 Anna Deavere Smith**

Anna Deavere Smith, *Fires in the Mirror*

Screen: *Fires in the Mirror*

##### **2 Bill T. Jones**

Paul Gilroy, "'to be real': The dissident forms of black expressive culture," from *Let's Get It On: the Politics of Black Performance*, 12–33.

bell hooks, "performance practice as a site of opposition" from *Let's Get It On*, 210–221.

Screen: Bill T. Jones, *Dancing to the Promised Land*

##### **3 Harry Gamboa/Grupo Asco**

Coco Fusco, "Introduction: Latin American Performance and the Reconquista of Civil Space," from *Corpus Delecti*

Harry Gamboa, *Urban Exile*

##### **4 Jesusa Rodriguez, Astrid Hadad**

Roselyn Constantino, "Visibility as Strategy: Jesusa Rodriguez's Body in Play," from *Corpus Delecti*

#### **Weeks 9-10: Student presentations**