

AMST2701 Essay Questions, Semester 1, 2020

2,500 words, DUE JUNE 10, 2020 (via Turnitin through Canvas)

Choose ONE question.

Answer it.

- 1) “Second wave feminism was about sisterhood, third wave feminism was about difference. The two can never be reconciled.” Analyse and discuss.
- 2) “Is Big Data good for American Democracy?” Discuss. In your answer, take into account the methods of data collection, the choice of variables and categories of analysis, and its use by political parties and lobbyists.
- 3) Established in 1976, the annual Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival has been a women’s only music space that has provided refuge, community, and empowerment to thousands of women-born women. In April 2015, in the face of protests against its exclusion of trans women, the festival organisers announced that this year would be the festival’s last. To what extent do the divisions between people in the debate over the festival reflect differences between second and third wave feminism? (Be sure to consider issues of gender essentialism, sisterhood, and intersectionality.)
- 4) In discussing her concept of Borderlands, Gloria Anzaldúa writes that “[t]he Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.” How do these Borderlands manifest in American Studies? In what ways have Borderlands been used to understand minority people, communities, and populations in the US? (You may want to consider how Regionalism affects these understandings.)
- 5) Discuss ONE of the following statements in relation to *S-Town* AND a text from another module OR a text of your own finding (consult with unit coordinator):
 - i.) “A region is in some sense both a margin and a center” Crowe, in *Blackwell Companion* p. 394.
 - ii.) “Regionalism provides a refuge from the ills of modernity and modernisation.”
 - iii.) “Regionalism works to bind the nation as it simultaneously narrates local cultures.”
- 6) To what extent has Beyoncé (or another famous or infamous woman) adapted and reinvented the Cult of True Womanhood? Is it possible for a non-hegemonic American woman to be a True Woman? To what extent has the Cult of True Womanhood continued to inform ideals of American womanhood? Do Victorian ideals of female purity and/or passionlessness have any role in the way American women and American women’s sexualities are produced and/or idealised?
- 7) Scott Herring claims that “we should be wary of collapsing metropolitanism with modernism and regionalism with ruralism.” How does the ‘spatial turn’ in the critical humanities—as described by Edward Soja—help us to separate the rural from the regional and the metropolitan from the modern in the United States?

- 8) “The Asian woman is an absent/present, dead/living subject on screen upon whose body, race, sex, and gender colonial narratives are kept open with possibilities for various interpretations. Moreover, the Asian woman functions as a haunting presence within this scene, for in the historical moment she cannot occupy a viable role” (Celine Shimizu). Chart and discuss the “viability” of a “non-central”* American figure (e.g., the Asian American woman, the Native American man, the lower-class white southern labourer, a Mexican-American lesbian) at different times in the United States, and the role this figure has played for the United States writ large.
*We might describe the central, default American as male, white, straight, middle-class, middle-aged, native-born.
- 9) Is Yellow Black or White in the United States? On what bases do you make this comparison? What is at stake in this question, and the attempts to answer it?
- 10) In what ways can Americanness be read into or read out of the Bible? How have different kinds of Americans attempted to accomplish this, and to what effect?
- 11) What happened to cause religious devotion to be so strongly associated with partisan politics in the United States, and what will the future likely hold for the connections between religion and politics? Who is right: those who make the case for the positive contribution of religion to civil society, or those who make the case against?
- 12) “One nation, under God”: Profile this “God,” this American God, and how this God is manifest in the United States.
- 13) “Lipset suggests that the first American Studies scholars were the travel writers of the first half of the 19th century who saw America as a vision of the future and/or as a rather peculiar experiment. These generalisations have enduring appeal and are often recycled in textbooks. However, American Studies scholars tend to dismiss them for underplaying conflict and difference in America.” Discuss.
- 14) Is the spectrum of politics in the US more narrow than in other Western nations? Why?
- 15) Toby Ditz has commented on a trend in gender studies that “[t]he emphasis on the unstable and provisional features of (masculine) identity formation has underwritten the curious, and widely remarked upon, tendency to see the masculine subject as everywhere fragile and endangered, and even in constant crisis.” To what extent has American masculinity been in a state of crisis? In answering this question consider the following: Is masculinity singular or should we better think of multiple masculinities? To what extent is “American masculinity” code for hegemonic straight white privileged American men?
- 16) How do the regional identities of Americans relate to other forms of identity such as race and gender?
- 17) Kanye2024. Bernie2020. Trump2016. Oprah2020. President The Rock. Senator Kid Rock. NYC Governor Miranda Hobbes (Cynthia Nixon). Offer a critical analysis of American politics and mass and popular media. What effect has the Fourth Estate

(however you construe the practice of journalism) had on politics in the US? How has this changed across generations, and how has it remained the same?

- 18) “American foreign policy is Manifest Destiny by another name.” Investigate the validity of this claim, taking into account the continental expansion of the US in the nineteenth century, its subsequent interaction with the Pacific, and its contemporary global position.
- 19) Come up with your own question and answer it (in consultation with the unit coordinator).