

Introduction to Arab American Studies

Instructor: Amir Aziz

Level: 3-credit undergraduate/graduate seminar; meets twice a week

Targeted enrollment size: 20-30 students

Keywords: Ethnic Studies; Asian American Studies; Arab American Studies; Cultural Studies; Gender & Women's Studies

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This interdisciplinary course offers a comprehensive introduction to Arab American identities, literatures, histories, and cultural productions as they take shape in various historical, cultural, and local contexts from the US nineteenth century to the contemporary era. The course aims to introduce students to an interdisciplinary array of humanities and social science approaches to conceptualizing and studying the field broadly called Arab American Studies.

Topics include the political, literary, cinematic, and cultural productions of Arab immigrants and diasporic communities in the US, in particular how their works explore complex issues and conceptions of home, identity, exile, migration, and community-formation. Particular attention will be directed to approaching Arab American Studies from an intersectional critical race, feminist, and queer studies perspective, focusing on Arab American subjects and creative makers who are women, queer, transgender, gender non-conforming, and gender non-normative.

In keeping with the revolutionary spirit of Ethnic Studies and Asian American Studies and the histories of their founding in the US, this course includes practical, hands-on activities and projects that require students to engage in various forms of archival research and interact with community activists and leaders. The aim is to enable students to conduct original work in Arab American Studies that promotes critical thinking, transformative healing, and student-centered research.

COURSE ASSESSMENT

1. Class Prep and Class Participation: 40%

- Each week, students will prepare a "Class Prep" that they will upload online prior to class.

- Class Prep is at least 2 pages and consists of three parts: (a) a summary, (b) a glossary section of key concepts and definitions, and (c) a set of three questions that students have about the readings.

- (a) The summary comprises 500-700 words, in which students will give a detailed description of each reading by providing its primary thesis, an explanation of the types of arguments and evidence present to support its claims, and a brief statement on the methodologies used to support its arguments.
- (b) The glossary section involves a description of at least 2-3 new concepts, terms, and definitions, from across all the assigned readings, that pertain to the weekly theme.
- (c) The final section comprises three questions that students may have when reading or that they may wish to clarify in class. This section will be used in discussion sessions, providing students the forum to ask their questions and/or expand upon arguments in the readings.

2. Bi-weekly Assignments: 15%

- Every two weeks, students will complete an online assignment—a short-essay quiz or a discussion forum post submitted online—that covers the current and previous weeks. The assignment will evaluate student ability to compare and contrast readings between different weeks.

3. Practicum Project on Arab American Issues: 45%

- In this semester-long practicum project, students are required to conduct original research examining a specific aspect of contemporary Arab American identities, experiences, and cultures. The project can take any form — whether as essay, poetry, short film, digital media, photography, etc. — as long as it focuses on an issue of interest to Arab Americans and/or engages with Arab and Arab American community members, activists, and leaders. Students will then present their original work at the conclusion of the semester, with the possibility of collaborating with local and regional institutions across northern California to exhibit their works.

GENDER, QUEER & TRANS-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM

Just as misogynist language excludes women’s experiences, non-gender-inclusive language excludes the experiences of transgender, intersex, gender non-binary, genderqueer, and gender non-conforming individuals, language should be gender- and sex-inclusive when we use words that recognize and affirm how people describe, express, and experience their gender, sex, sexuality, and embodied identities.

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 – Introductions

Session 1: Introductions and Course Expectations

Session 2

- Activities on Arab migration to the US and cultural politics
- Evelyn Alsultany, “Introduction,” in *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11*

WEEK 2 – Theories of Racial and Ethnic Formation

Session 3

- Michael Omi and Howard Winant, “The Theory of Racial Formation,” in *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s*.
- Nadine Naber, “Introduction: Articulating Arabness” in *Arab America: Gender, Cultural Politics, and Activism*

Session 2

- Randa Kayyali, “US Census Classifications and Arab Americans: Contestations and Definitions of Identity Markers”
- Sawsan Abdulrahim, “Whiteness and the Arab Immigrant Experience,” in *Race and Arab Americans*

WEEK 3 – Cultural Identities

Session 3

- Ella Shohat and Evelyn Alsultany, “The Cultural Politics of ‘the Middle East’ in the Americas” in *Between the Middle East and the Americas: The Cultural Politics of Diaspora*
- Stuart Hall, “The Question of Cultural Identity” in *Modernity and Its Futures*

Session 4

- Nadine Naber, “The Politics of Cultural Authenticity” in *Arab America: Gender, Cultural Politics, and Activism*
- Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience*

WEEK 4 –Arabs in Early America: Slavery, Settler Colonialism, Politics

Session 5

- Sylviane Diouf, Excerpts from *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas*
- Laila Lalami, *The Moor’s Account*

Session 6

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- Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native”

WEEK 5 – Orientalism and Colonialism

Session 7

- Sylvia Shin Huey Chong, “Orientalism” in *Keywords for Asian American Studies*.
- Edward Said, “Latent and Manifest Orientalism” and “Style, Experience, Vision: Orientalism’s Worldliness” in *Orientalism*

Session 8

- Watch and discuss (in class) *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (2006) by Sut Jhally

WEEK 6 – Racialization and the ‘War on Terror’

Session 9

- Leti Volpp, “The Citizen and the Terrorist”
- Watch *Amreeka* (2009) by Cherien Dabis

Session 10

- Su’ad Abdul Khabeer, “Citizens and Suspects: Race, Gender, and the Making of American Muslim Citizenship”
- Sunaina Maira, “Surveillance Effects: South Asian, Arab, and Afghan American Youth in the War on Terror” in *At the Limits of Justice: Women of Colour on Terror*

WEEK 7 – Arab American Feminist Formations

Session 11

- Sunaina Maira, “Belly Dancing: Arab-Face, Orientalist Feminism, and U.S. Empire”
- Nadine Naber, “Diasporic Feminist Anti-Imperialism” in *Arab America: Gender, Cultural Politics, and Activism*

Session 12

- Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*
- Evelyn Alsultany, “Arab Jews, Diasporas and Multicultural Feminisms: An interview with Ella Shohat” in *Arab and Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, and Belonging*.
- Sylvia Chan-Malik, “Chadors, Feminists, Terror”

WEEK 8 – Palestine in Arab America

Session 13

- Suheir Hammad, *Born Palestinian, Born Black & the Gaza Suite*
- Watch (in class) *Return to Ramallah: A Palestinian-American Story* (2021) by Ziad Foty

Session 14

- Rajini Srikanth, “Asian American Studies and Palestine: The Accidental and Reluctant Pioneer” in *Flashpoints for Asian American Studies*
- Discuss *Return to Ramallah: A Palestinian-American Story* (2021) by Ziad Foty

WEEK 9 – Black Feminisms and Arab America

Session 15

- Rabab Ibrahim Abdulhadi, “Framing Resistance Call and Response: Reading Assata Shakur’s Black Revolutionary Radicalism in Palestine”
- Michelle Hartman, *Breaking Broken English: Black-Arab Literary Solidarities and the Politics of Language*

Session 16

- Nadine Naber, “Arab and Black Feminisms: Joint Struggle and Transnational Anti-Imperialist Activism”
- Angela Davis, Excerpts from *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*

WEEK 10 – Break

WEEK 11 – Queering Kinship

Session 17

- Fatimah Asghar and Safia Elhillo, *The BreakBeat Poets Vol. 3: Halal If You Hear Me*
- Amir Rabiya, *Prayers for My 17th Chromosome*

Session 18

- George Abraham, *Birthright*
- Lisa Suhair Majaj, *Geographies of Light*

WEEK 12 – Arab/Asian America

Session 19

- Lisa Lowe, “Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian-American Differences”
- Viet Thanh Nguyen, “Palestine Is in Asia: An Asian American Argument for Solidarity”
- Sunaina Maira and Magid Shihade, “Meeting Asian/Arab American Studies: Thinking Race, Empire, and Zionism in the U.S.”

Session 20

- Moustafa Bayoumi, “Asian American Studies, the War on Terror, and the Changing University: A Call to Respond” in *Asian American Matters: A New York Anthology*
- Carol W.N. Fadda, “Arab, Asian, and Muslim Feminist Dissent: Responding to the “Global War on Terror” in Relational Frameworks”

WEEK 13 – Arab American Studies as Feminist Praxis

Session 21

- Various readings on the *Save Arab American Studies!* campaign in California
- Sahar Mustafah, *The Beauty of Your Face*
- Mohja Kahf, “The Pity Committee and the Careful Reader” in *Arab and Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, and Belonging*.

Session 22

- Watch and discuss (in class) *The Sacred* (2012) by Özge Dogan
- Larissa Sansour, *Palestinians* and other works

WEEK 14 – Practicum Project Presentation