

## **Introductory note on Interdisciplinary Methodology and the framing of this course.**

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Reading for method requires that we focus on different aspects of scholarly works than we may be used to. Instead of focusing on the content of the arguments in the books that we are reading for this class, we will look “behind the scenes” to discuss the way that the author arrived at the argument, what scholarly conversations the work is informed by and contributes to, and how the author uses particular kinds of sources as evidence in order to persuade the reader.

At the foundation of all research methods, regardless of discipline, are research questions. These questions can come from many places: from ideological commitments; from the author’s experiences; and from disciplinary expectations and conventions, to name some important ones. Within any disciplinary method, there are a number of different methodological approaches. We will spend a good deal of time each week discussing not just the sources that the author used, but how the sources related to the question the author was trying to answer, where those questions might have come from, and how those questions could contribute to interdisciplinary scholarship

Truly interdisciplinary scholarship does not just use different sources (such as discussing song lyrics to add flavor to a historical argument) but attempts to expand knowledge by pushing beyond standard disciplinary questions as well as engaging in conversations that are happening in more than one discipline. When a scholar is interdisciplinary, he or she is familiar with and able to work within or across multiple disciplinary frameworks. What makes interdisciplinary work dynamic and interesting is the way it pulls together conversations that are occurring simultaneously among multiple different groups of scholars who may not be aware of each other’s work. So, even as we discuss the basic and fundamental questions and primary sources addressed in these books, we will also be looking at the author’s references to secondary literature and how these literatures influenced the questions and approaches that the author took. In some cases, books and articles were chosen specifically because they show contrasting methodological approaches to the same general subject area and might help us with this conversation more completely.

Because the primary methodological impetus in American Studies is interdisciplinary, this course is structured around works that are grounded in different disciplines, but that bring interdisciplinary insights to their scholarship in one way or another. A primary goal in this class is that you practice interdisciplinarity and reflect on the experiences of using disciplinary approaches that are not familiar to you. Because it would be impossible to survey all the different methods in American Studies in one semester (or even in two), consider the works that we are reading this semester as a sample, rather than as an exhaustive set of works.