

# Major Developments in American Culture

American Studies (AMRU) 2000:001

SPRING 2008

Fordham University

Instructor: Glenn Hendler

## **Keyword Project** 25% of grade (in two parts; see #7 below)

This project gives you a thread to follow through all of our readings and discussions, and an opportunity to use that thread to tie the course together at the end. The project continues through the whole semester, and it involves several distinct steps. However, there are two major elements, both of which are collaborative:

- 1) **Tracking a keyword** through the readings, lectures and discussions every week
- 2) **Writing a keyword essay.**

As you'll see, these two elements are closely connected, and both take place in the Keyword Collaboratories online at <http://keywords.nyupress.org>. Here are the first three steps in the process:

- a) By the end of the first week of class each student should send me an e-mail ([ghendler@fordham.edu](mailto:ghendler@fordham.edu)) indicating which of the following keywords you are interested in following throughout the semester: "African;" "empire;" "ethnicity;" "immigration;" "Indian;" "market;" "marriage;" or "white." In case there are too many who choose a single keyword, please give me three choices, in order of preference. I will then assign you to "keyword working groups."
- b) By the following Monday, read the entry on that keyword in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*. Do this right away; don't wait until the rest of the class is assigned to read your entry later in the semester.
- c) Each group will get its own Keyword Collaboratory. In your collaboratory, you will find a number of different venues for discussion and one blank "project page."
  - i) You'll be using "discussion" for **tracking your keyword** through the term, and for commenting on your keyword essay as it develops.
  - ii) You'll use "project page" for your collectively written **keyword essay**.

Now, to return to the two major elements of the project:

- 1) **Tracking your keyword:** From now on, after each reading, after every discussion or lecture, your task is to think about how your keyword was used, what it meant in that context, and how that usage and meaning connect (or fail to connect) with the entry in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*. Have our readings and discussions served as illustrations for arguments made in the original entry? Have they raised issues and questions about the keyword that the original entry does not address? Have they contradicted or complicated points made in the original entry?
  - a) Use the "talk" section of your collaboratory as a space to track your keyword. Each member of the group should write in the collaboratory *at least* once a week. Your contribution can be simply to archive your keyword's appearances in the readings, lectures, and discussions ("white" appears repeatedly in the second chapter of Smith's book, and Jane brought it up in class in the context of our discussion of James Baldwin") and/or as a place to raise and discuss questions about the meaning of the term in these contexts ("when Melville writes about Africans, he seems to have a different understanding of the term than Douglass did, but I'm not sure exactly what the difference is. Did anyone else notice this? Is there anything in the Gaines entry on 'African' that accounts for this difference, or have we found something new here?")
  - b) There may be weeks when your keyword comes up in several readings and in each of our class discussions. There may be other weeks when it does not come up at all. Use your judgment about how often you need to log on to your collaboratory to keep up with your group's discussion. At an

absolute minimum you should check in twice a week, the evening before class, so that everyone in your working group is on the same page when you arrive in class the next day. But there may be weeks when you get involved in a lively discussion with others in your group and end up contributing several times over the course of the week.

- 2) **Writing a keyword essay:** Your final essay for the semester will be a collectively written essay on your keyword. To be clear, you are not being asked to rewrite or improve upon the entry from *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, but to write an entry on the same term that has a different scope, a different archive of materials. The original entry, after all, was a keyword entry for "American Cultural Studies" as a whole; your new entry will be a "Keyword for AMRU 2000:001." You may find that your entry (or one of the other entries in the book) is a good formal model for the essay your group produces, even if the content is different.

You will write this essay in the blank "project page" in your collaboratory. Each of you can generate new text, edit one another's text, delete, add to it, and so on.

- a) Your conversations in the "talk" section of the collaboratory throughout the semester can serve as notes toward this essay, giving you an extra motivation to keep tracking your keyword continuously.
- b) Be aware that each edit you make is recorded, with your name attached, in the "history" section of the collaboratory.
  - i) For that reason, especially if you are revising someone else's part of the text, you may want to explain your revision in the "comments" or "discussion" section of your collaboratory.
- c) Your keyword essay will be stronger if you start working on it fairly early in the semester.

**Grades:** 25% of your final grade comes out of your keyword project. That is broken down as follows:

- a) At the end of the term, your working group's comments on the original keyword entry will be graded. Though this is a collective enterprise, each member of the group will receive his or her own grade on this part, so everyone must contribute in order to do well. This part of the assignment is worth 10% of the final grade.
- b) Everyone in a working group will receive the same grade on the final keyword essay. This essay will be worth 15% of the final grade

**Also note:**

- a) When you check in on your collaboratories, you may also want to look at other keyword collaboratories in this class. You're welcome to read the discussion sections of other working groups, and to look at the keyword essays as they develop in the project pages. But only members of that working group should actually edit their project page.
- b) I and the rest of the class will also view you and the other members of your keyword working group as "experts" on that keyword. At any point in the discussion, one of us may turn to you for insight on a reading or topic of discussion, with a question such as "how does this topic look when viewed through the lens of your keyword?" or "How does this author, or critic, or historian, use your keyword differently from other people who have used it?" Your responses to such questions are not formally graded, but of course factor into your attendance and participation grade.