I prepared this assignment for “Concepts in American Studies. Introduction to American Studies”. The course is a broad overview of the discipline with a focus on its historical development, its interdisciplinary dimension and approach to American culture, and on how the symbolic construction of “America” and “American” intersect the material construction of these two terms. This assignment covers what might be considered the second stage of the critical development of the discipline after the so called School of Myths and Symbols. It is the second short assignment that deals with criticism, in this particular case “ethnicity” and American Studies. It is especially apt to introduce students to more recent critical terms (example: Eurocentrism) and to show them the process of periodization and its significance for American Studies.

My aim is for the students to familiarize themselves with an important section of the critical vocabulary of the discipline, understand the relationship between criticism, the society, and historical periods, and start metabolizing the critical terms they learn in the article, terms that they will apply critically to future readings. In short, promote informed inquiry.

The important features of the assignment are the recognition of a disciplinary vocabulary that does not have to sound as a foreign language to the students; the fact that students familiarize themselves with the idea of the relationship between a discipline and institutions such universities, departments, academic journals. One rhetorical strategy that I employ is the sport analogy in the content-based section of the assignment, which makes the students more comfortable with what might otherwise seem academic jargon. Possibly it will also make them curious about thinking about “criticism” as an intellectual activity that, broadly understood, most of them perform if not on a daily basis, most likely on Monday morning from September to January.
The Assignment I Distribute to Students

AMS 210A – Concepts in American Studies: Introduction to American Studies

Short Assignment 3: Ethnicity and American Studies

This assignment will enable you to achieve the following course goals:

- Identify the existence of the “Ethnicity School” within the field of AMS.
- Identify the development of the Ethnicity School.
- Identify the main constitutive elements of the Ethnicity School.

For this assignment you will work alone outside of the class and with a group of 4 (four) people in class (your usual group assigned to you by the instructor at the beginning of the semester and posted on Moodle). Email the final assignment to spardini@elon.edu on the due date (see the syllabus). Word.docx or PDF file only. Write your last name and Short Assignment 3 as the file name: PardiniShortAssignment3.doxc/PDF.

The assignment consists of three sections: 1) at home preparatory work; 2) 15-minute in-class activity; 3) at home two-part activity.

At Home Preparatory Work


- Your job #1: Familiarize yourself with the author of the article (man/woman, profession, institution, scholarly interests. Visit Wald’s school website, his department website, his own website, classes he teaches, books he wrote, project he is working on).

- Your job #2: Familiarize yourself with the kind of publication where the essay appeared (what kind of publication is that? What is its likely audience? What is its mission/goal?).

- Your job #3: Familiarize yourself with the historical time of its publication (year of publication; what was happening in America and the world in that time period. Example: an essay written in 1943 would be written while WWII was fought).
• Your job #4: Write a 100-word summary of the article. Bring three printed copies of your summary to class and email the summary to your group the day before class.

15-Minute In-Class Activity
Read the summaries of your group’s members and discuss/brainstorm in preparation for the first part of the next activity, to be done at home. You may find useful using Prezi.com to do brainstorming.

At Home Two-Part Activity
Part I
• Break the article down in conceptual units/moments, by which I mean create a bulleted list of these units/moments (think of the article as a football game. If you had to prepare a summary of the critical moments of the game, you would break the game down to touchdowns, interceptions, turn overs, injuries etc. Each conceptual unit/moment equals one such moment. Example: touchdown equals Wald’s use of periodization as an interpretative tool that links society and critical practices).

• Your audience is a student/group of students that is not in or has not yet taken AMS210. Your language needs to reflect this kind of audience. Your job is to explain the conceptual moments/units to this audience. Again, think of the football analogy. Your job is to explain to a person who does not know football what is a touchdown.

Part II (to be emailed to the instructor)
Write a two-page paper where you discuss Wald’s final assertion:

• “In the end we must recognize that there is no such a thing as American culture.” Do you agree or disagree with Wald? Do you want to modify his assertion?

You are writing with this purpose: your argument supports, rejects, or modifies the given assertion with factual evidence. To continue with the football analogy, think of yourself as the coach of a team. Think of your audience as fans that did not get to see the game. Your purpose as a coach (=writer) is to tell the fans (=your audience) how and why things went the way they went (= criticism in the piece and the conceptual units that constitute the criticism). This means that your audience masters the general language of the sport (so you can use idioms, technical terms, etc.) and that your purpose is to explain why your team has won/lost the game (= American culture does/does not exist).

Grading
• General rule: your grade is an accumulation of your work. You don’t start from A. You start from zero and build your grade with the goal to get to an A. Again, to stick with the football analogy, think of your final grade as the final score of the game, which is the result of all the components of a
game (practice, strategy, touchdowns, interceptions, injuries, referees’ calls, etc.).

- What is graded: the final, emailed two-page paper.

**Rubric**

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<tr>
<th>Item 1</th>
<th>Outstanding</th>
<th>Inadequate</th>
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<td>Your (critical) argument, how effectively you support it with reason.</td>
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<th>Item 2</th>
<th>Outstanding</th>
<th>Inadequate</th>
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<td>Clearly identify the conceptual units/moments of the article.</td>
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<th>Item 3</th>
<th>Outstanding</th>
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<td>Show how ethnicity and periodization are intertwined.</td>
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<th>Item 4</th>
<th>Outstanding</th>
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<td>Polishing/Reviewing (spelling/style/grammar).</td>
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