

AMST 1201/ HIST 1503/ ENGL 1201
Fall 2012
Introduction to American Studies
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Monday and Wednesdays, 4:10-5:25, ACD 303
Office Hours: Mondays, 2:00-4:00 pm, ACD114c

Introduction:

American Studies “Defined”

Since the Enlightenment, people have been parsing their lives into slices for closer analytical examination. We think of politics, economics, art, religion, history, and contemporary culture as separate and distinct fields of inquiry: a tendency made all the more acceptable by academic departmental divisions made along similar lines. While this has allowed people to develop far greater insight into human experiences, such gains have come at a cost. By dividing our experiences into distinct and separate disciplines, we lose sight of the fact that all these influences bear down upon us as single entities. In other words, we do not experience the world in separated ways, but we study it in that way; and that distorts how we as a people have lived, grown, and experienced our world.

This course seeks to introduce methods by which we can study our lives in the same interdisciplinary fashion that we live them. Since its inception in the 1930s, American Studies has looked beyond the formal disciplinary bounds that defined university education to see what happens when history, art, literature, popular culture, politics, and law are all used in an exploration of the American experience. The results can be surprising: fiction, film, aesthetics, and political movements, for example, have all been found to wield influence far beyond their respective realms. Understandings of history, literature, and legal principles, too, have led to surprising changes in the way we art, nature, religion, and contemporary society. Consequently, for over seventy years, American Studies has been reminding the public at large, that as much as we need to break-down and analyze, we also must integrate and assess.

American Studies and Sense of Place

Such a methodology has proven particularly useful in exploring specific places. Indeed, many scholars see the American experience as one intimately tied to space and place. For this course, we will explore our immediate place—coastal southern New England—to understand this world from a variety of different perspectives, and to see what new visions emerge when we embrace such diverse views. We are fortunate to have such a fertile intellectual field to examine so close. For over 500 years, southern New England has witnessed many firsts: contact between Europeans and Native North Americans, colonial (as opposed to Jamestown’s more military) settlement, land crises, industrialization, tourism, fisheries collapses. Using the writings, paintings, maps, charts, and artifacts created by local people or inspired by this particular place, we will explore how and why this region emerged as it did. But far from simply a celebration of a unique area, we will take a critical knife to the region’s history, culture, self-identity, and established “truths” to understand more clearly how diverse interactions between different people, species and environments worked together. In doing so, students will see, hopefully, the power and importance of engaging the world from a variety of different perspectives.

Plagiarism and Academic Honesty:

Please refer to the UConn student handbook for definitions and policies regarding plagiarism and academic honesty. If you have questions, it is your responsibility to get

clarification from me or from the writing center. Any plagiarism and dishonest academic performance will be dealt with immediately.

Grading:

Midterm I:	15%
Paper I:	15%
Paper II:	15%
Project Presentation:	15%
Final Exam	30%
Participation:	10%

Student Presentations:

Students will prepare a 10-minute presentation for the last unit of this course using different disciplinary approaches to analyze a topic of their choice. More details about the project will be provided in class during the semester.

Readings:

The following reading list contains both printed and on-line sources. As there is a significant amount of reading assigned, it is good to remain on schedule: lectures will mean more, class activities will be more useful, and writing assignments will be easier. Stay on schedule—best advice I can give.

Required Texts:

Mourt's Relation, A Journal of the Pilgrims at Plymouth (Cambridge, Mass.: Applewood Books, 1986)
Henry David Thoreau, *Cape Cod*, Joseph Moldenhauer, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2004)
Henry Beston, *The Outermost House* (1928)
John Hay, *The Run* (1959)

Week 1:

8/29 Introductions
8/29 Moshup and Maps

Week 2

9/3 Labor Day, no class
9/5 Alternative Creation Stories

Week 3

9/10 *Mourt's Relation* discussion
9/12 *After the Mayflower* [video]

Week 4

9/17 Subsistence vs. Commerce
9/19 CSNE in a Commercial World: Descriptions Discussion

Week 5

9/24 Revolutions in the Coastal Zone
9/26 **Midterm I**

Week 6

10/1 The Coastal Zone in the New Nation
10/3 Thoreau, *Cape Cod* discussion

Week 7

10/8 Writing Workshop
10/10 Flowering of Arts and Letters in a New Nation

Week 8

10/15 New Ways of Working in CSNE
10/17 Slavery and Industry in CSNE
Paper I Due

Week 9

10/22 Adapting to the Loss of Innocence: the Aftermath of Armageddon in New England
10/24 Project Research

Week 10

10/29 Native Survivance and Immigration
10/31 **Project Presentations**

Week 11

11/5 Beston, *Outermost House* discussion
11/7 Tourism and the Coastline as Recreational Space

Week 12

11/12 Hay, *The Run* discussion
11/14 *A Fish Story*
Paper II Due

Week 13

11/19 Thanksgiving Break
11/21 Thanksgiving Break

Week 14

11/26: Project Presentations
11/28: Project Presentations

Week 15

12/3: Coastal Southern New England in the 21st Century
12/5: Conclusions

Final Exam: December 12, 4-6pm, ACD 303.