

AMS 1001: Introduction to American Studies

Syllabus / Fall 2011

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Course Description:

This course has two aims: to introduce you to the field of American Studies and then to have you “do” American Studies through working with primary source materials. As you will soon learn, American Studies as a field has historically been committed to crossing disciplinary boundaries and as a result is hard to define. The name “American Studies” is even contested. But the arguments about what American Studies is or is not – and whether it has a distinct “method” in its approach to subject matter – have been fruitful debates that have helped professional academics and students alike think about how we learn, what we learn and why we learn what we learn. American Studies is often an exciting field because of its very “undisciplined” nature. In its pursuit of understanding the complexity and diversity of American cultures, it takes what it needs from English, History, the Social Sciences (Anthropology, Sociology, etc), and from the lessons learned from academic areas like Women’s Studies, Ethnic Studies, African-American Studies and Cultural Studies. Similarly, American Studies scholars aren’t particularly hung up on *what* their object of study should be. So while (for example) an English course will most likely take as its object of study a novel, poem or play (that is, Literature), an American Studies course will look at photographs, paintings, speeches, maps, diaries, letters, sermons, newspaper articles, songs, material culture, popular culture objects like posters, movies, etc. (the list goes on).

Given the openness of American Studies and its long standing commitment to working with cultural institutions outside “the Academy” (that is, outside college and university campuses), I have decided to teach this course as part of a cooperative grant with the Brooklyn Historical Society (BHS). BHS is, among other things, an incredible repository of American culture. It houses materials that, like American Studies, cross the disciplines. They have (and this is only a partial list): paintings, photographs, legal documents, letters, diaries, maps, posters, and cultural ephemera (like Ferry tickets from a hundred and fifty years ago). What better place to practice American Studies? Additionally, working with BHS materials will give you an experience most college students don’t get

these days: working with real, original primary source documents and artifacts. In other words, you get to take a break from Google and sit down with a real letter from a Civil War soldier or look at one of the first hand written copies of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Given the strengths of BHS' holdings and the importance of this period to the America we live in today (and the fact that we are celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Civil War), the course will focus on the culture and cultural debates of the mid 19th century. This is a period in American history when questions about what America should (or shouldn't) be were right on the surface. This was a time of great change for America and Americans; indeed, many have referred to this period and to the Civil War itself as America's second revolution. The culture was in great flux and when a culture is going through such dramatic shifts the roots and preconceptions of that culture are called into question, making it an especially fruitful time for the American Studies student to understand the complex debates that go into creating what we call American culture. Perhaps just as important for us, these debates (in varying degrees) are still alive today. For example, we still feel a difference between the culture of the North and the culture of the South – differences that shape, among other things, nation elections and politics; we still debate issues of civil rights – though they now may more often apply to gays and lesbians or people with disabilities than the basic humanity of African Americans; we still haven't achieved equal rights for women; and we are hotly debating the role of religion in our daily lives and in politics. These are just a few of the "hot button" issues that connect this period of great upheaval to ours.

Procedure of the Course:

Close to half the classes will be spent at BHS. **You will be graded on your work at BHS - reading/discussing/answering questions.**

The other half of class will be held at SFC in the classroom. **You will be graded on your preparedness and participation.** These classes will be split between lectures, reading and discussing documents together, and in-class discussion of homework assignments.

Writing Assignments:

The writing assignments for the course will be "response blogs" that you post on the course website. The assignments will ask you to respond in some way to what we did/saw/discussed at BHS (and I am giving a lot of latitude here: your responses can take many forms).

What I am look for are insightful pieces that ruminate on the importance of what you saw or read. They must also investigate (again, in your own way) the themes or ideas of the course as a whole through the specific objects or ideas you saw or read on a specific day at BHS.

As the number of blogs increases and you gain more knowledge, you should be **making connections in your writings between ideas - linking previous blogs to your analyses/responses. I am happy to have you refer back to earlier blogs and revise your ideas, etc.**

There is much room for creativity here. I really see these blogs as ways to help you relate to the material more intensely and participate in class more effectively. Blogs are openly subjective: it's you responding to the material. And you get to choose how you want to do that. In order to get a B or better on these assignments, your writing must clear, focused and creatively conceived.

Web Exhibit Project:

Your big project for this course is to create a virtual exhibit for me and your classmates on the course's website. This project will incorporate both image and text. The images will be from the BHS holdings - so one of the things you will be doing is photographing important documents and objects when we are at BHS. I will get much more specific about this as we get into the semester but basically you will take some aspect of your choosing from the period we are looking at and create an exhibit - again using both text and image - that teaches your audience something important about American culture using a variety of different types of primary sources. The way you construct your exhibit and the learning goals you have for your audience will be up to you.

Course Grading:

Late blogs/reflections will be penalized one-half a letter grade for each day it is late. If you are having trouble writing, please make an appointment to see me. I will be more than happy to look at your work.

This is a discussion class. Therefore, participation and attendance are required. **Because this course only meets twice a week, students get a maximum of two absences from class** - this includes any reason, from just not feeling like coming to being sick or participating in official college events. **After two, each absence means a half-letter off your final.**

Academic Honesty:

This course's curriculum is designed to enable you to develop communication skills essential to your life as an educated person and citizen. To emphasize your responsibilities to yourselves and to the academic integrity of the College, you are to complete your own assignments. Cheating and plagiarism are expressly forbidden and can result in an F for the semester.

Cheating:

I consider cheating to be the misrepresentation of others' work as your own in papers, quizzes, exams or final projects. It is assumed that policies against acts of cheating such as these are probably familiar to you. Copying others' work violates class policy.

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is a form of cheating. The Modern Language Association defines plagiarism as the use of another person's ideas or expressions in your writing without acknowledging the source. Any instance of plagiarism, whether it is intentional or accidental, is prohibited. Perhaps the most common form of plagiarism is paraphrasing, that is, to put the ideas of another or others into your words. If you read a book or an article and write about ideas from it, give written credit to its author or authors. Other sources of information and ideas, including any information from the Internet or any form of mass media, should be cited as well. To use information gleaned from outside sources without acknowledging its source constitutes plagiarism.

One area requiring good judgment is using comments given by peers and/or tutors. Using suggestions made by classmates is not considered plagiarism. If a peer makes a suggestion a writer wishes to follow, then you may do so. In this case, it is still proper academic protocol to include a written acknowledgment of the source of the idea or suggestion. Similarly, students seeking outside tutoring are encouraged to learn from their mentors. However, in both cases, I urge students to be responsible, and to think about how others' ideas may be honestly incorporated into their writing without compromising their academic integrity.

Less common, but much more insidious, are incidents of deliberate plagiarism. Any willful attempt to pass off as one's own the work of others will be met with the most serious disciplinary action available to me. Examples of deliberate plagiarism include, but are not limited to, buying papers from "tutoring centers" or from magazines; copying others' essays with or without the author's permission; inserting parts of articles and books into one's writing

without crediting the source; and having someone else, such as a friend or parent, write one's essays.

Readings: Most reading will be either hand outs or available on-line (usually through Google Books).

One major text, *The Most Famous Man in America* will be given to you free of cost (a little gift for your participation in this new and newly conceived course).

The only books you need to purchase are listed below and available at the SFC bookstore:

- *Hospital Sketches* by Louisa May Alcott
- *The Gettysburg Address* by Abraham Lincoln (Penguin Great Ideas)

Reading and Assignment Schedule: This reading schedule is tentative and subject to change (it usually does). So if you miss a class, you must check Angel for assignments.

Thurs: 9/8: What does the Fourth of July mean to you: An Introduction to American Studies.

Look together at sections of: "The Fourth and the First: Abolitionist Holidays, Respectability, and Radical Interracial Reform" by W. Caleb McDaniel

HW: Finish McDaniel essay and read selections from Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself"

Tues: 9/13: Why are Primary Sources Important and, what has the middle of the 19th century to do with American Culture today?

Discuss sources used by McDaniel as well as Whitman's vision of citizenship.

Read together selections of Frederick Douglass' "What to the slave is the Fourth of July?" and The Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments

Introduce Beecher.

HW: Beecher sermon: "The Gentleness of God" (Google Books) and

"Introduction" (pp 1-17) and first part of Chapter 7 (pp 199-219) of Beecher biography: *The Most Famous Man in America*

Thurs: 9/15: **How does the life of H.W. Beecher reflect/illuminate the world of mid 19th century Brooklyn, USA?**

Discuss Beecher "Gentleness of God" and Biography

HW: Finish Chapter 7 and Chapter 8

Tues: 9/20: **Understanding the major debates of the period: Race, Gender and Citizenship**

In class read excerpts of Whitman's comments on slavery from "I Sit and Look Out"/Beecher's Speech to the American Anti-Slavery Society: "American Slavery" (1851) (Political Addresses - Google books)/Douglass: "The True Ground Upon which to Meet Slavery" (1855) and "The Final Struggle" (1855) (pp333-336 in *FD*)/Lincoln's Cooper Union Address (selections) (all handouts)

HW: Chapters 9 and 10 of *The Most Famous Man*

Thurs: 9/22: **The Civil War**

Discuss Beecher; continue to read and discuss excerpts from Tuesday and biography reading.

HW: Beecher, "The Battle Set in Array"; Douglass: "The Fall of Sumpter"; "Sudden Revolution in Northern Sentiment"; "How to End the War" (pp442-449 in *FD*/ Whitman poetry on War from "Drum Taps"

Tues: 9/27: BHS: **Introduction to the Archive: Focus on mid 19th Century Holdings)**

HW: Write blog on what you saw at Archive

9/29: Discuss Archive Visit

HW: Beecher Sermon/lectures on slavery (from Political Addresses - Google books) and article "The Plymouth Pulpit: Henry Ward Beecher's Slave Auction Block" by Wayne Shaw

10/4: **BHS: Beecher**

HW: Blog

10/6: Discuss BHS visit

HW: Prologue and Chapter One of *1861* (handout) and Lincoln's First Inaugural Address, March 4th 1861 (from *Gettysburg Address* collection)

10/11: **Walking Tour of Brooklyn**

HW: Blog

10/13: Discuss Walking Tour; Civil War

HW: from Whitman's *Drum Taps*: "First O Songs for a Prelude"; "Eighteen Sixty-One"; "Beat! Beat! Drums!"; "Song of the Banner at Daybreak" and selections from Lincoln's Speeches in *Gettysburg Address* collection.

10/18: **BHS: Civil War Ephemera**

HW: Blog

10/20: **Due: Project Proposals. You will present proposals to class**

HW: Alcott's *Hospital Sketches* and selections from Whitman's *Specimen Days*

10/25: Discuss readings/Finalize Projects

HW: Finish Hospital Sketches & Selections from Specimen Days

10/27: Discuss readings/Projects

HW: Lincoln's "Address at a Sanitary Fair" (1864)/Civil War/Emancipation Proclamation (Civil War Readings -- should read some of the BHS letters ahead of time?)

11/1: **BHS: Civil War Letters**

HW: Blog

11/3 Discuss visit; introduce Fair

HW: Selections from *History of the Brooklyn and Long Island Fair, February 22nd, 1864*. Google Books; Selections from "The Drum Beat" (handout)

11/8: **BHS: Sanitation Fair**

HW: Blog

11/10: Discuss Fair

HW: Beecher excerpts from oration delivered at Fort Sumpter Flag Raising; Excerpts from sermon delivered to Zion Church (Google Books) and Cleveland Letters on Reconstruction (Google Books); Chapter 11 of *Most Famous Man in America*

11/15: **BHS: Beecher and Post Civil War Era**

HW: Blog

11/17: Discuss visit

HW: Women's Suffrage Movement: Speech by Beecher at first annual American Equal Rights Association Meeting (Google Books); Speeches of Stanton and Anthony from same meeting.

11/22: **Independent Research Day at BHS**

11/24: NO SCHOOL. THANKSGIVING BREAK!

11/29: Discuss Post Civil War American and Women's Suffrage movement & Projects

HW: Project

12/1: Discuss projects

HW: Project

12/6: Project Presentations

HW: Project

12/8: Project Presentations; Wrap up & Assessment

HW: Project

Final Project Due: TBA

Grading Breakdown:

- ❑ Class Preparedness and Participation: 30%
- ❑ Blogs/Reflections 35%
- ❑ Final Project: 35% %

Grading Rubric

A Range

Originality: The student develops an authentic insight which challenges the reader's thinking. It is clear from the paper that a complex and curious mind is at work.

Clarity of purpose: The thesis is clear and precise and recognized as such by the reader.

Organization: The paper is organized so as to fully and imaginatively support the thesis. Consideration has been given to the sequencing of materials and supplies the reader with a paper that is complex, surprising, and unusual.

Support: Evidence and reasoning are in clear use in the enough so as to eliminate the question of reader's confidence in the thesis and sub-theses. It is clear that the writer is very well informed, researched, and appropriated effective evidence for the arguments. The research and reasoning is always relevant to the point being made. Through the use of telling detail, the reader is brought to experience what the writer is saying.

Use of Sources (when applicable): The student has used sources to support, extend, and inform ideas but not to substitute for the student's own development of an idea. The student has effectively combined material from a variety of sources. *This is not to say the student must use a certain number or type of sources.* The student uses quotations to capture the source's key points or turns of phrase, but does not substitute for the student's own development of an idea. The quotations, paraphrases, and citations are handled according to appropriate form.

Ethos: The student creates a "self" or "ethos" that sounds genuine, is relevant to the student's purpose, and is developing or consistent throughout the paper.

Style: Language is used with control, elegance, and imagination to serve the student's purpose. When read aloud, it pleases the eye and ear.

Edited Written Standard English (EWSE): Except for deliberate departures, the student uses EWSE forms of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and syntax.

Presentation: The paper looks neat, crisp, and professional.

B Range

Falls short of the **A** range in one or more ways.

C Range

Originality: The student develops an obvious or unimaginative idea.

Clarity of purpose: The thesis is clear to the reader.

Organization: The paper is organized so as to competently support the thesis.

Consideration has been given to the sequencing of materials but the student is not always in control and some logic becomes circular and repetitions appear.

Support: The student doesn't always use solid evidence and reasoning to convince the reader. More, detailed evidence is required.

Use of Sources (when appropriate): The student has used sources to support, extend, and inform ideas. The quotations, paraphrases, and citations are handled according to appropriate form.

Ethos: The student creates a "self" or "ethos" that sounds genuine, is relevant to the student's purpose, and is developing or consistent throughout the paper.

Style: Language is used competently, though it may be awkward at times. There are some passages or sentences which confuse the reader but none are incomprehensible.

Edited Written Standard English (EWSE): Except for deliberate departures, the student uses EWSE forms of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and syntax.

Presentation: The paper looks neat, crisp, and professional.

D - F Range

Any *one* of the following will result in a **D**, any *two* in an **F**:

Originality: The idea is obvious, cut-and-dry, trite.

Clarity of purpose: The reader cannot determine the thesis.

Organization: The organization is not clear to the reader.

Support: The organizational plan is inappropriate; it does not offer effective support or explanation of the student's ideas.

Use of Sources (when appropriate)

1. The student offers little or no effective support for the ideas.
2. The student has neglected important sources that should have been used.
3. The student has overused quoted and paraphrased material to substitute for the student's own ideas.
4. The student has used source material without acknowledgment, in which case, it is plagiarism and the paper is given an immediate F. (Other consequences of plagiarism may follow.)

Style: the language is so muddy the reader is frequently at a loss to understand what the student is trying to say.

Edited Written Standard English: The use of EWSE falls below the standard established above for a **C**.