

American Studies 250A
Hudson River Culture

Pfitzer
Spring '09

This course is designed to introduce students to the culture of the Hudson River Valley. It deals with the Hudson River as an environmental entity, an economic and political concern, and especially as a cultural symbol. The focus will be both local and national. Students will be asked to consider how popular and official attitudes toward the Hudson have reflected changing cultural priorities for residents of the valley and for the nation at large. The course begins with indigenous cultures and extends to the present, but the focus will be on the nineteenth-century experience, since it was in that century that the Hudson had its greatest influence on regional and national history. In the early nineteenth century the Hudson was projected as the center of American commerce, a vital link between the mercantile East and the agrarian old Northwest. By the end of the nineteenth century, it was an economic backwater of sorts, a loser in the competition with the railroad for new and more diverse markets. One of the goals of this course will be to account for these historical changes.

The course also has an ecological aim. Rivers have played a crucial role in historical development, determining patterns of settlement, nurturing crops, transporting goods, destroying cities. Issues of water control are among the most important communities face. Yet curiously little attention has been paid to river management and still less to the ecological preservation of a river like the Hudson. Consequently, the Hudson River was badly polluted in the 1960s with nuclear waste and PCBs, thick brown liquids used in electrical transformers. This course will deal with the implications of such pollution and contemporary efforts to reverse its devastating effects.

Throughout American history, novelists, essayists, poets, painters, photographers and many others have recorded the Hudson's changing fortunes. Therefore, students will study a wide variety of interdisciplinary sources--archeological records, geological surveys, travel accounts, community histories, works of fiction, state reports, music, paintings, etc. In addition, because we have ready access to the Hudson, each student will be required to take at least three field trips to the river and its environs. Each trip will require the submission of summary of activity sheet, and such participation will be a factor in determining a student's "classroom" grade.

In addition, students will be required to write three short papers (5-7 pages each) in the fields of literature ("Rip Van Winkle"), film ("The Last of the Mohicans"), and painting (a

Hudson River School piece). Toward the end of the semester, students will submit a term project based on personal reactions to the Hudson today as experienced through trips to the river. This project may take any form--poetry, music, essay, journal, art, or ecology report--but it must provide an individualized contemporary perspective on the river and be based on personal contact with it. In addition, there will be a final exam. Grades will be apportioned as follows: Literature paper (15%), Movie Critique (15%), Painting Analysis (15%), Final Project (20%), Final Exam (20%) and Classroom Participation/Field Trip Activity Sheets (15%).

Students should purchase the following from the Skidmore Shop:

Donald S. Johnson, Charting the Sea of Darkness
Arthur Adams, The Hudson River in Literature
Carol Sheriff, The Artificial River
James Fenimore Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans
Carl Carmer, The Hudson
Frances Dunwell, The Hudson: America's River

Unit I: Establishing a Regional Identity (B.C.-1763)

Week 1: Historical Headwaters and Currents

Wednesday

September 9 -- Introduction: Learning the River

Viewing: "A Hudson River Portfolio"

Reading: Dunwell, *The Hudson: America's River*,
Foreword and Prologue, ix-xxii.

Friday

September 11 -- Henry Hudson's Encounter

Reading: Johnson, *Charting the Sea of Darkness*, xerox
82-132, 192-202; Dunwell, *The Hudson: America's
River*, Chapter 1: "World's End, World Trade, World
River," pp. 1-23.

Week 2: Transplanted Europeans

Monday

September 14 -- Dutch Beginnings: The Rise of River
Mythologies

Reading: Washington Irving, selections from *Diedrich
Knickerbocker's History of New York*, Chapters 1-10,
28-33, 55 (reserve).

Wednesday

September 16 -- Dutch Patroon Culture

Reading: Charlotte Wilcoxon, *Seventeenth-Century
Albany: A Dutch Profile*, pp. 97-119 (xerox); Carl
Carmer, "The Regeneration of Jochem Wessels," in *The
Hudson*, pp. 30-41.

Friday

September 18 -- British Settlements on the Hudson

Reading: Jasper Danckaerts, "Journal" (xerox); Carl
Carmer, "By the Grace of God--The English," in *The
Hudson*, pp. 42-45.

* * * Literature Paper due in class on Monday, September 21

Unit II: The Hudson's as America's River Highway (1763-1836)

Week 3: Revolutions on the Hudson

Monday

September 21 -- Rip and Petticoat Government: The Emerging American Personality

Reading: Washington Irving, "Rip Van Winkle," in Adams, *The Hudson River in Literature*, pp. 64-76.

Wednesday

September 23 -- Forging the Nation: The Battle of Saratoga and the American Revolution

Reading: Dunwell, *The Hudson: America's River*, Chapter 2: "The River That Unites, the River that Divides," pp. 25-47; Carl Carmer, *The Hudson*, pp. 77-100.

Friday

September 25 -- "The Heart of the Nation": Rivers and the Geopolitics of Nationalism

Reading: The State Papers of Washington, Hamilton and Jefferson (xerox); Carl Carmer, "Upriver in a Teakettle," in *The Hudson*, pp. 143-50; Dunwell, *The Hudson: America's River*, Chapter 3, "America's River of Empire," pp. 49-66.

Week 4: Promoting the River: Tourism and Business

Monday

September 28 -- "Fifteen Miles on the Erie Canal": Regional Technology and the Hudson

Reading: Carol Sheriff, *The Artificial River*, Chapters 1, 2, 4 and 5.

Wednesday

September 30 -- Neoclassicism on the Hudson

Reading: James Kettelwell, *Saratoga: An Architectural History*, selections; James Fenimore Cooper, selections from *Home as Found*; Dunwell, *The Hudson: America's River*, Chapter 4, "First Stop on the American Tour," pp. 67-83.

Friday

October 2 -- The Grand Tour and the Catskill Mountain House

Reading: James Kirke Paulding, "New Mirror & Guide to the Springs"; Nathaniel Willis, "Essays," in Arthur Adams, *The Hudson River in Literature*, pp. 9-46, 231-298; Carl Carmer, "Like a Palace Built for Angels," in *The Hudson*, pp. 239-46.

Week 5: The Hudson and the Literary Marketplace

Monday

October 5 -- The Knickerbockers and the Leatherstocking Tradition

Reading: James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*, Part I.

Wednesday

October 7 -- The Cooper Indian and the Hudson as Nature

Reading: Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*, Part II.

Friday

October 9 -- Cooper and the Allegorical Mode

Reading: Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*, Part III.

*** * * Movie Review Due in class on Monday, October 12**

Unit III: The Hudson River School of Painting (1836-1865)

Week 6: "Kindred Spirits": The Hudson as Literary Inspiration

Monday

October 12 -- Cooper and Popular Culture

Viewing: Ford Beebe, "The Last of the Mohicans," (1932); Selections from Mark Twain on "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," (xerox).

Wednesday

October 14 -- William C. Bryant and the Poetic Vision

Reading: William C. Bryant, "Poems," in Adams, *The Hudson River in Literature*, pp. 218-223 and xeroxed poems.

Friday

October 16 -- Thomas Cole and the American Sublime

Reading: Thomas Cole, "The Wild," in Adams, *The Hudson River in Literature*, pp. 223-24; Cole, "The Voyage of Life," (xerox); William Cullen Bryant, "To Cole, the Painter, Departing for Europe," (xerox);

Week 7: The Hudson as Icon

Monday

October 19 -- Thomas Cole and the Grand Vision

Reading: Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," (xerox); Carl Carmer, "Never More Truly Portrayed," in *The Hudson*, pp. 151-61. Dunwell, *The Hudson: America's River*, Chapter 5: "America's First Artists and Writers

Wednesday

October 21 -- Thomas Cole and Nature as History

Reading: "The Exaltation of American Landscape Painting," in *American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School*, Show Catalogue, pp. 21-48 (reserve).

Friday

October 23 - Study Break (Visit to the Albany Institute of History and Art)

Week 8: Grand Opera and the Still, Small Voice

Monday

October 26 -- The Landscape Tradition: Durand, Cropsey, Gifford and Heade

Reading: John Howat, *The Hudson River and Its Painters*, (reserve); "A Climate for Landscape Painters," in *American Paradise*, pp. 49-70 (reserve).

Wednesday

October 28 -- The Luminist Tradition in Hudson River Painting

Reading: John Wilmerding: *American Light*, Show catalogue, (reserve).

Friday

October 30 -- Frederick Church and the Bombastic Mode

Reading: Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture* (reserve).

*** * * Painting Critique due in class on Monday, November 2**

Unit IV: Rising and Receding Waters (1865-1965)

Week 9: Medicinal Waters and the Water Cure

Monday

November 2 - The Decline of the Hudson River School

Reading: "The Hudson River School in Eclipse," in *American Paradise*, pp. 71-90 (reserve); Dunwell, *The Hudson: America's River*, Chapter 6: "The Industrialized River," pp. 109-128.

Wednesday

November 4 -- The Therapeutic Landscape

Reading: Frederick Law Olmstead, "Essays on Central Park"; Dunwell, *The Hudson: America's River*, Chapter 7: "Going Up the River for Health and Fun," pp. 129-144; Chapter 8: "Design with Nature," pp. 145-162.

Friday

November 6 -- Saratoga: The Spa City

Reading: Grace Swanner, *Saratoga, Queen of Spas*, (selections); Dunwell, *The Hudson: America's River*, Chapter 9: "Gateway to America," 163-174; Chapter 10: "Millionaire's Row," 175-196.

Week 10: Rivers of Empire: Preservation-vs-Conservation

Monday

November 9 -- The Watershed Issue

Reading: Carl Carmer, "Come All Ye Gallant Shanty-Boys," in *The Hudson*, pp. 282-91; George Marsh, *Man and Nature*, (xerox).

Wednesday

November 11 -- Adirondack Portraits: Photographing the Hudson

Reading: Jeffrey Simpson, *The Hudson River, 1850-1918: a photographic portrait* (reserve); "Photographs," Hudson River Portfolio, <http://www.nypl.org>; Dunwell, *The Hudson: America's River*, Chapter 11: "A Forest to Protect a Commercial River," pp. 197-214.

Friday

November 13 -- Portrait of a Friendship: Whitman and Burroughs

Reading: John Burroughs, *A River View and Other Hudson River Essays*, pp. 1-74, 183-208 (reserve).

Week 11: The Hudson River in Historical Memory

Monday

November 16 -- The Hudson-Fulton Tricentennial Celebration

Reading: Souvenir Program for the Hudson Fulton Celebration (xerox); Dunwell, *The Hudson: America's River*, Chapter 12: "An Interstate Park for the Palisades and the Highlands and a New Progressive Vision," pp. 215-234; Chapter 13: "Over, Under, Across, and Through," 235-254..

Wednesday

November 18 -- The Hydraulic Culture: Harnessing the River

Reading: "Hudson Valley Commission Survey," (xerox);
Dunwell, *The Hudson: America's River*, Chapter 14:
"Surviving the Depression, Connecting with Nature,"
pp. 255-278.

Friday

November 20 -- General Electric's War: The PCB Problem

Reading: Hudson River Conservancy Reports (xerox)

Week 12 Historical Undercurrents: The River as "Power"

Monday

November 23 - Tang Project Round Table

Wednesday

November 25 - Thanksgiving Break

Friday

November 27 - Thanksgiving Break

Week 13 Historical Undercurrents: The River as "Power"

Monday

November 30 -- Sloop Clearwater and the Clean Water Act

Reading: "The Hudson: That River's Alive," *National Geographic* (xerox); "America's Environmental Flagship," *Clearwater*, <http://www.clearwater.org>;
Dunwell, *The Hudson: America's River*, Chapter 15:
"The 1960s," pp. 279-304.

Wednesday

December 2 -- Moving Mountains: The Storm King Controversy

Reading: Carl Carmer, "Afterward," in *The Hudson*, pp. 313-20; Political Campaign materials.

Friday

December 4 -- The Nuclear River: Dumping in the Hudson

Reading: "The Deadliest Garbage of All," *Science Digest* (xerox).

* * * Final Projects due in class on Monday, December 7

Unit V: The Politics of River Management (1965-Present)

Week 14: Deformations and Landscapes of Ruin

Monday

December 7 -- Hudson River Roundtable

Reading: Presentation of Final Projects

Wednesday

December 9 -- Hudson River Roundtable

Reading: Presentation of Final Projects

Friday

December 11 -- Reflections on the River

Reading: "The Hudson is Forever" and "Despite Abuse:
Hudson Remains a River of Life," *The New York Times*
(xerox). Dunwell, *The Hudson: America's River*,
Epilogue: "A River of Power," pp. 305-313.

* * * Final Exam (to be scheduled)

Tentative Field Trip Schedule

Dutch Apple Cruise

New Netherland Project, State Library, Albany

Saratoga Battlefield, Stillwater, New York

Erie Canal Museum

Walking Tour of Saratoga Springs

Fort William Henry, Lake George & Prospect Mountain

The Cooper Home, Cooperstown

Catskill Mountain House/Kaaterskill Falls Hike

The Cole Home, Hudson, New York

Albany Institute of History and Art

Church's Olana, Hudson, New York

Tour of the Lincoln Baths

The Bolster Collection, Saratoga Springs

Speier Falls Dam, Corinth, New York

GE Plant Tour, Corinth, New York

Sloop Clearwater

Storm King Mountain Art Museum

Steamboat River Tour: Dutch Apple Cruises

Whitewater Rafting on the Hudson