

skidmore college's

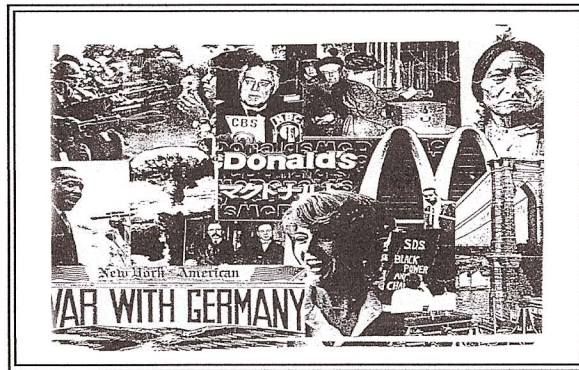
AMERICAN STUDIES

department /am 102

am 102—introduction to american culture: post-civil war

Gregory M. Pfitzer

MWF, 9:05-10:00 a.m., TLC 304
and either F, 10:10-11:05 a.m. or F, 1:50-2:45 p.m., TLC 304



An examination of American life and culture from the Civil War to the present. Topics include social movements, westward expansion, immigration, urbanization, the Horatio Alger myth, the rise of labor, economic growth and class differences, the role of the federal government, racial and ethnic conflict, gender roles, war and peace, and criticism of American culture. Various resources, such as popular culture, music, film, sermons, diaries, trial transcripts, literature, historical studies, art and architecture, and various primary documents are used.

American Studies 102
Introduction to American Culture

Pfizer
Spring '08

This course is designed to introduce students to the development of American culture from the Civil War to the present. It differs from ordinary survey courses in American history in two ways: 1) in addition to standard political and institutional sources used in many history courses, it concentrates on a wide variety of cultural expressions, including fiction, folklore, satire, art, poetry, music, maps, journals, trial transcripts, material culture, mass media, etc., and 2) it is episodic rather than comprehensive; that is, it focuses on representative events which are symbolic of the larger patterns of national development.

The thematic emphasis of the course will be on the term "culture"--both how a culture is perceived by others and how a culture perceives itself. The assumption is that American culture, like any culture, is multi-faceted and many-layered. Therefore the assignments are designed to make connections among a wide array of historical sources associated with specific epochs in the American past. On most Mondays throughout the term, students will receive a set of documents related in some way to the specific time period to be covered the following week. On the following Monday students will submit a brief description of each document and a paragraph-long discussion of how they are related (approximately two pages). For instance, you might find the following in your set of documents for the 1890s: an 1896 campaign poster, a description of Coxey's Army, a copy of William Jennings Bryan's "Cross of Gold" speech, and an agribusiness report on drought conditions, a Thomas Nast cartoon, and a chapter from Frank L. Baum's "Wizard of Oz." After identifying each of these documents, you might then speculate that they have something to do collectively with growing discontent among farmers in the Midwest in the 1890s. The documents will be used as foundations for Professor Pfizer's lectures, so students will be able to compare their hypotheses with the themes developed in class. Students will not be judged on their ability to anticipate Professor Pfizer's connections but on the basis of their ability to present plausible theories about the relatedness of the documents. Participants in AM 102 must complete 6 of 8 of these weekly exercises.

In addition to these brief document analyses, students are expected to attend class, participate in discussion, write two short papers (5-7 pages each), and take a midterm exam and final exam. The two papers will be worth 15% each, the midterm and final exam will be worth 20% each, the cumulative document analyses will be worth 20%, and class participation will be worth 10%. Late documents and papers will be penalized.

Note: Although American Studies 101 serves as a useful introduction to the material in this course, it is not a formal prerequisite. American Studies 101 and 102 are independent courses and may be taken in any sequence.

Students should purchase the following books from the bookstore:

Booker T. Washington, Up From Slavery

Joanna Stratton, Pioneer Women

Horatio Alger, Ragged Dick

Jane Addams, Twenty Years at Hull House

Daisy Bates, The Long Shadow of Little Rock

Bruce Barton, The Man Nobody Knows

Ron Kovic, Born on the Fourth of July

Tom Wolfe, The Purple Decades

There is no assigned textbook for the course. For those students who desire a more comprehensive approach to the period, a survey textbook--Gary Nash, et. al., The American People--has been put on reserve in Scribner Library.

Unit I: Reconceiving the Nation: The Meaning of the Civil War (1861-1890)

Week 1: A House Divided: The American Civil War

Wednesday

January 23 -- Introduction: Expectations and Realities

Friday

January 25 -- Survivor Guilt: The Aftermath of the Civil War

Friday

January 25 -- The Unwritten War: Journalism in the Post-Civil War Era

Reading: (newspapers) Harper's Weekly: A Journal of Civilization (1866)

Week 2: Starting Over: Reconstructing the Nation

*** * * Document packet #1 due**

Monday

January 28 -- Waving the Bloody Shirt: Post-Civil War America

Wednesday

January 30 -- Healing Wounds: The Centennial Celebration

Friday
February 1 -- The Origins of the "New South"

Friday
February 1 -- Jim Crow and the African American Experience

Reading: (ex-slave narrative) Booker T. Washington, Up from Slavery.

Week 3: The Mechanization of American Culture

*** * * Document packet #2 due**

Monday
February 4 -- The Six-Gun Mystique: The Wild, Wild West

Wednesday
February 6 -- Of Railroads and Robber Barons

Friday
February 8 -- Labor Unrest and the Unionization Movement

Friday
February 8 -- Women and the Populist Revolt

Reading: (letters and personal recollections) Joanna Stratton, Pioneer Women, Chaps. 1-6, 13.

Unit II: Building the American Dream (1890-1941)

Week 4: Exporting the Dream: Ethnic Diversity

*** * * Document Packet #3 due**

Monday
February 11 -- "Machine Politics" and the Melting Pot Ideal

Wednesday
February 13 -- Social Darwinism and the Struggle for Survival

Friday

February 15 -- The Golden Door: Immigration in America

Friday

February 15 -- The Shame of the Cities

Reading: (novel) Horatio Alger, Ragged Dick

Week 5: Protecting the Dream: The Age of Reform

*** * * First Paper due in class**

Monday

February 18 -- Foreign Affairs: The Splendid Little War

Wednesday

February 20 -- The Strenuous Life and Muscular Christianity

Friday

February 22 -- The Muckraking Tradition and Status Anxiety

Friday

February 22 -- Progressive Reform and the Settlement House Movement

Reading: (social commentary) Jane Addams, Twenty Years at Hull House, chapters 1-11.

Week 6: The Age of Turmoil

*** * * Document packet #4 due**

Monday

February 25 -- Over Here/Over There: America in World War I

Wednesday

February 27 -- Normalcy and the Politics of Exceptionalism

Friday

February 29 -- A Culture of Conspicuous Consumption

Friday

February 29 —The Great Crash and the Paradox of Prosperity

Reading: (advertising and religious tract) Bruce Barton's The Man Nobody Knows.

Week 7: Testing the Dream: A Culture in Crisis

Monday

March 3 -- Fear Itself: The Great Depression

Wednesday

March 5 -- Coping with Depression: FDR and the New Deal

Friday

March 7 -- Midterm Examination (identification and quotes)

Friday

March 7 -- Midterm Examination (essay)

Unit III: Fantasy and Nightmare: Fluctuations in the Dream (1941-19653)

Week 8: March 10-14 -- Spring Break (no assignments)

Week 9: Redefining Culture: Homogeneity and the Lonely Crowd

Monday

March 17 -- Hot War: America in World War II

Wednesday

March 19 -- The Cold War and the American Century Concept

Friday

March 21 -- The Great Fear: The Return of American Exceptionalism

Friday

March 21 -- Happy Days? The Lonely Crowd and the Culture of Exclusion

Reading: (memoir) Daisy Bates, The Long Shadow of Little Rock.

Week 10: Blowin' in the Wind: The 1960s

*** * * Document packet #5 due**

Monday

March 24 -- New Frontiers and Shattered Dreams

Wednesday

March 26 — Camelot and Conspiracy: The Assassination of the President

Friday

March 28 — The Great Society and Cultural Orthodoxies

Friday

March 28 — The Student Movement and the New Left

Reading: (political manifesto) Tom Hayden, "The Port Huron Statement"

Unit IV: Rude Awakenings: The Dream Exposed (1965-Present)

Week 11: Culture and Counterculture

*** * * Document packet #6 due**

Monday

March 31 -- Vietnam: The Making of a Tragedy

Wednesday

April 2 -- The National Quagmire and Student Unrest

Friday

April 4 – The Counterculture and the War at Home

Friday

April 4 – Vocal Minorities and Silent Majorities

Reading: (war reminiscence) Ron Kovic, Born on the Fourth of July

Week 12: American Culture in an Age of Limits

*** * * Second paper due in class**

Monday

April 7 — The Culture of Crisis: The Meaning of Watergate

Wednesday

April 9 — America at 200: The Meaning of the Bicentennial

Friday

April 11 — The Age of Limits and the Misery Index

Friday

April 11 — From Yippie to Yuppie: Culture in the Me Decades

Reading: (journalistic essays) Tom Wolfe, "The Me Decade and the Third Great Awakening"

Week 13: The Culture of Narcissism

*** * * Document packet #7 due**

Monday

April 14 -- Actors and Stages: The Search for an American Identity

Wednesday

April 16 -- We Live in a Material World: Cultures of Convenience

Friday

April 18 — Greed, Corporate Take-Overs and the "Me"anness Decade

Friday

April 18 -- Images of Ourselves: Fantasy Amplifiers in a Technological Age

Reading (visual record): "Television: The Series" (reserve).

Week 14: Contemporary American Culture

*** * * Document packet #8 due**

Monday

April 21 – Generation X and the Balkanization of America

Wednesday

April 23 – Multiversities and the Closing of the American Mind

Friday

April 25 — “Youthquake” and America in the New Millennium

Friday

April 25 – American Terrorism and the Meaning of September 11th

Reading: (political diatribe) Theodore Kaczynski, “Unabomber’s Manifesto”

Week 15: America in the 21st Century

Monday

April 28 -- “Red State--Blue State”: Secessionism Revisited

*** * * Final Exam (Tuesday, May 6, 9:00-12:00)**