

**Studies in American Culture
History/English 3300-W
Spring 2012**

Dr. Ann McCleary

Office: History Department, TLC 3-211; office telephone 678-839-6041/6141

Email: amcclear@westga.edu

Office Hours: Monday, 3:30-4:45; Wednesday 1:30-4:15, and Thursday, 11-1, and by appointment.
My office hours will be held at the Center for Public History, in the lower level of the Ingram Library (enter next to the elevators).

Course Description

The purpose of this class is to introduce students to American Studies, an interdisciplinary study of American culture. The academic field of American Studies evolved in the early twentieth century to integrate literature and history and create a better understanding of the American experience. Since that time, American Studies has grown to incorporate its own theory and methodology and integrates a variety of disciplines.

We will focus on two major areas. First, we will define and explore American Studies as a field of study. What are the disciplines involved in this study? What are the advantages of this interdisciplinary approach? We will examine methodological studies that employ different theories and perspectives, and we will evaluate what we feel works most effectively.

Secondly, we will focus on two important symbols that speak much about our culture and also dominate much of the American Studies scholarship. The first theme is the **American West**, including the frontier, the cowboy, and the interpretations of America's western experience. This image of America's "garden" clashed with the emerging **industrialization** of American culture in the nineteenth-century, a second important theme that we will explore. We will consider the impact that industrialization and new technology had on many facets of American life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the tensions between these symbols of the West and industrialization in modern America.

This course is required for the American Studies minor.

DSW Designation

A A W@ designation means that this course is a Discipline Specific Writing (DSW) course. DSW accepts as its guiding principle the idea that writing is a valuable tool for learning and communication. The writing components of a DSW course are designed to communicate what you have learned. Students completing majors in any area of arts and sciences are required to take two A DSW@ courses for the undergraduate degree.

Learning Outcomes

1. Students will demonstrate an understanding of the interdisciplinary field of American Studies, including its methods and theories, and the significant works that have shaped this field.
2. Students will demonstrate the ability to analyze cultural myths and symbols to understand American culture
3. Students will demonstrate the ability to think critically about American history and culture
4. Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively both in written and oral form
5. Students will demonstrate a knowledge of the American West and the process of industrialization in the United States

Required Texts

Owen Wister, *The Virginian: A Horsemen of the Plains* (copyright 1902). Any edition that you find is fine to use for the class.

Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. New York: Oxford Press, originally published in 1964, reprinted in 1992.

William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin, editors, *Under An Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1992.

Harriet H. Robinson, *Loom and Spindle: Life among the Mill Girls*. Applewood Press, 2010 reprint of 1898 volume. Please note the pages given on the syllabus are for this edition of the book.

Course Reserves

The other readings on the syllabus will be available on electronic reserve through the Ingram Library webpage... The password for the E-reserves is “studies” and the course is cross-listed under both History and English. Some books may also be placed on course reserves. More information will be provided on Course Den and in class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class Participation (15% of final course grade)

Students are expected to attend and participate in class each day. Your final grade will be lowered one full letter grade if you have more than three unexcused absences, two letter grades for more than six absences, and three letter grades for more than nine absences. Please note that anyone arriving to class late or leaving before the class is over will be counted absent for that day. To receive credit for class attendance, you must attend the entire class.

This class will involve discussion of the assigned readings. Please read each assignment **before** that class period and come prepared to discuss the readings. Your opinions count, so please bring them to class. To ensure that students are doing the reading, there will be two to three short reading “quizzes” during the semester. The grades from the reading quizzes will be included under class participation.

Written Assignments

Please note that all written assignments are due at the beginning of the class period on the date listed in the syllabus. Any late assignments (including those turned in at the end of class) will be marked down. No late papers will be accepted after three days. Any assignments not submitted during class must be turned in via Course Den only.

Plagiarism is a serious offense. Plagiarism means using someone else’s words as your own without providing appropriate citation. My policy is that any paper that includes any example of plagiarism—even one sentence—will result in an automatic “F” for the *final class grade*. There are no exceptions to this policy.

Any additional requirements or information regarding these class assignments will be posted on our Course Den page. Failure to check Course Den will not be an excuse for not keeping up with the readings or assignments.

Informal Writing Assignments

Students will write two assignments requiring analysis of primary documents from American culture

1. A two- to three-page, word-processed analysis of one example of western art. The art should date prior to 1920 and may be a painting, lithograph, drawing, or similar type of two-dimensional work or a sculpture. If you are not sure about your selection, contact me in advance. Please include a copy of the artwork with your paper. **(10% of final grade)**

2. A two- to three-page, word-processed analysis of the lyrics for a contemporary country-western song of your choice. This song should be one written within the last twenty years. Please include the lyrics and appropriate citations (including writer and date published) with this assignment. **(10% of final grade)**

American Quarterly review (10% of final grade)

All students will write a two- to three-page review of an article published in the *American Quarterly*, the publication of the American Studies Association. Students may choose any article of interest to them. Please answer the following questions:

1. What is the author's argument and what types of evidence does s/he use?
2. What disciplines/methodologies does the author use to explore his or her subject?
3. Why do you think this article fits into the field of American Studies?

The American Western (15% of final course grade)

The American West has long been a popular symbol and myth of American culture. In this assignment, you will compare the movie *Stagecoach* and the novel *The Virginian* to a modern Western movie (from the last ten to fifteen years). How has the western changed in the twentieth century and why? In what ways has the Western stayed the same and why? What do these three westerns tell us about American culture? This paper should be approximately four to five pages, double-spaced and word-processed, and should be your own idea and analysis. This is not a research paper. You do not need to consult or use any secondary sources for this paper. Please use appropriate citations. English students may use MLA format, and historians should use the Chicago Manual of Style. **Due January 31.**

Technology and American Culture (20% of final grade)

All students will choose an artifact of American culture, either an object from an early twentieth century Sears Catalogue or a more contemporary object that represents some aspect of American technology (broadly speaking), with approval of the instructor. Each student will write a five-page, double-spaced essay analyzing that object and assessing what it says about American culture. Students will be expected to use three secondary sources, which may include books or articles (but no websites). Exceptions may be made for websites that are archival collections of sources, but please review any proposed website with me in advance. Please remember, however, that this essay should also contain your own interpretation of the object. Use appropriate citations. English students may use MLA format, and historians should use the Chicago Manual of Style. Works Cited or Bibliography pages must be included.

This essay is a "Writing to Communicate" assignment, a required element of a DSW class. It will **require** a rough draft, and I will offer comments for revision. The paper will be evaluated based on content, form, grammar, and spelling. According to the DSW requirements, this assignment should represent a sustained effort on the part of the student. Please note that students who do *not* turn in a rough draft on the due date will receive *no* credit for the entire assignment. **Rough draft due March 29. Final draft due April 19.**

Final Exam (10% of final grade)

The final examinations will contain several essay questions related to the readings and classroom discussions. This will be an in-class exam. Students who have had perfect attendance during the entire class will not be required to take the final exam. Students with *any* absences, including excused absences, will not be exempt from the exam.

Class Etiquette

1. Students will come to class on time and not leave class early, unless you have discussed a particular reason why you need to leave early with the instructor in advance.
2. Students will not use cell phones during class, including text-messaging and Facebook such programs. If I see cell phones in use, I will confiscate them for the rest of the class.
3. Students will not need to use laptop computers during class. If you feel you need your computer, please discuss your reasons with me in advance.
4. If you miss class on a date that an assignment is due, submit the assignment as an email attachment in Course Den. To receive full credit for the assignment, it must be submitted by 2 p.m. on the date that it is due.

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

Please note that any updates to the schedule will be announced in class and posted on Course Den. All students are responsible for checking Course Den for these updates. Missing the class announcements or failing to check Course Den for any updates will not excuse you for missed assignments or readings.

January 10: **Introduction to the Course**

Part 1: The American West

January 12: **The Ideal of the West**
Review: UWG's "Go West" Campaign
Begin reading: *The Virginian*

January 17: **What is American Studies?**
Visit the American Studies website at <http://www.theasa.net/> to learn more about the field.
Read through the program for the 2011 annual meeting at <http://asa.press.jhu.edu/program11/asa2011/>. What are the issues/topics/concerns of American Studies scholars now? Come prepared to discuss what you have learned.

January 19/24: **The Western Movie: John Ford's Stagecoach**
View in Class: "Stagecoach;@
Continue reading: *The Virginian*.

January 26: **The Western Novel: Owen Wister's The Virginian**
Complete reading: *The Virginian*

- January 31: **The Frontier Ideal: Buffalo Bill and Frederick Jackson Turner**
Ann Fabian, "History for the Masses: Commercializing the Western Past," in Cronon, *Open Sky*, 223-238;
Richard White, "Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill," available at <http://www.studythepast.com/his378/turnerandbuffalobill.pdf>
Assignment due: Paper on Westerns
- February 2: **The Western Journey and the American West as "Garden"**
Leo Marx, *Machine in the Garden*, 3 - 144
- February 7-9: **Artists of the American West**
View in class: "The West of the Imagination"
Martha A. Sandweiss, "Views and Reviews: Western Art and Western History," 185-202, in Cronon, *Open Sky*.
Assignment Due: Analysis of Western Art
- February 14 **The New Western History**
William Cronon, George Miles, Jay Gitlin, "Becoming West: Towards a New Meaning for Western History," 3-27;
William Cronon, "Kennecott Journey: The Paths Out of Town," 28-51
Patricia Nelson Limerick, "Making the Most of Words: Verbal Activity and Western America, 167-184;"
Clyde Milner II, "The View From Wisdom," 203-22; all in *Under an Open Sky*
- February-16: **The Cowboy: Myth vs. Reality**
Bring to class: Any examples of how the "cowboy" image is used today, such as the Marlboro Man
Read: "Obituary: Wayne McLaren—Marlboro Man" on reserve
Read and review website: American Folklife Center, "Buckaroos in Paradise," at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/buckaroos/>
- February 21: **Other voices from the West**
Katherine G. Morrissey, "Engendering the West," in Cronon, *Open Sky*, 132-14;
Sarah Deutsche, "Landscapes of Enclaves: Race Relations in the West, 1865-1990," in Cronon, *Open Sky*, 110-131;
George Miles, "Rediscovering Native Americans in American History," in *Open Sky*, 52-70;
John Mack Faragher, "Americans, Mexicans, Metis: A Community Approach to the Comparative Study of North American Frontiers," 90-109.

Part 2: The Machine and Technology

- February 23: **Technology as Symbol: The Brooklyn Bridge**
Begin reading: Leo Marx, *Machine in the Garden*, 144-226.
- February 28: **The Machine in America**
Complete reading: Leo Marx, *Machine in the Garden*
- March 6-8: **The Beginnings of Industrialization**

Robinson, *Loom and Spindle*, iii-59, for Tuesday and 60-131, 202-216 for Thursday

- March 13: **A View through Photography**
Peter Sexias, "Lewis Hine: From 'Social' to 'Interpretive' Photographer,"
American Quarterly 39 (Autumn 1987) 3:381-409, on reserve
- March 15: **The Sears Catalog**
Thomas Schlereth, "Country Stores, Country Fairs, and Mail Order Catalogues:
Consumption in Rural America," on reserve;
John Kouwenhoven, "American Studies: Words or Things," on reserve
- March **Spring Break**
- March 27: **Industrialization in the Home**
Ruth Schwartz Cowan, "The Industrial Revolution in the Home: Household
Technology and Social Change in the Twentieth Century" on reserve
- March 29: **Visions of Technology: Yesterday's Tomorrows**
Due: Technology and American culture paper draft
- Part 3: Cultural Conflicts**
- April 3 **Discussion of *American Quarterly* Article Reviews**
Due: review of American Quarterly article
- April 5** **"Modern Times"—America in the 1920s and 1930s**
Carroll Pursell, "The Decade of Prosperity and Consumption," on reserve
Class assignment this day: we will develop a group of documents and sources that
one could use in analyzing American response to industry and technology in the
1920s and 1930s. All students will be assignment a type of document (such as
novel, film, artwork, etc) and we will share and discuss our ideas. No papers are
due this day; this is an in-class discussion.
- April 10: **Depression and Disillusionment: 1930s Photography**
"Carroll Pursell," Depression: Study and Subsidy," on reserve
- April 12: **Country Music**
Read: Bill C. Malone, "Mountaineers and Cowboys: Country Music's Search
for Identity," on reserve
Due: Assignment on Country Music lyrics
- April 17: **Modern Symbols**
Read: Joseph F. Trimmer, "Monuments and Myths: Three American
Arches," on reserve
- April 19: **No class**
Due: Revised Technology in American Culture paper
- April 24: **Final Exam**

