



## An Introduction to American Studies: American Studies 1020



This course introduces students to the interdisciplinary study of the history, culture, and politics of the United States. It stresses how the national idea of America has evolved, and how artists, labourers, immigrants, Indigenous peoples, and others, have grappled with the conflicting definition of what it means to be "American."



Tuesdays 2:30-4:30,  
plus 1 tutorial hour  
SSC 3028



Prof. Laurel Shire and  
Prof. Rob MacDougall

INTRODUCTION to American Studies (AMS 1020)  
Professors Laurel Shire (fall) and Robert MacDougall (winter)  
Western University  
2017-2018

Tuesdays, 2:30-4:20 in SSC 3028

Laurel Shire  
2226 Lawson Hall  
[lshire@uwo.ca](mailto:lshire@uwo.ca)

Office Hours: Thursdays, 10am-12

### Goals

In this course, students will be introduced to some of the key events, ideas, and concepts in American Studies; the interdisciplinary study of the culture and society of the United States. Moving chronologically from First Contact through the present, each week we will explore the history, culture, and politics of U.S.-American society. We will be especially interested in how categories and identities related to race, gender, class, modernity, technology, citizenship, democracy, and national identity developed in U.S. culture, and how each continues to influence Americans (and their neighbours) in the present.

### Objectives

Students will be able to:

1. define and describe the development and continuing relevance of major categories and problem in American culture, such as whiteness and race, capitalism and class identity, gender and citizenship, civilization, technology, and “progress,” and, of course, who counts as a “real” American and what kinds of rights and privileges that bestows on them.
2. read and assess the value of a scholarly article or book chapter for argument and sources, and not get bogged down in the small details
3. read and analyze historical primary and contemporary media sources, including film, podcasts, poetry, visual art, music, drama, and fiction
4. write short, properly cited and well-researched essays that summarize, analyze, and evaluate past and present cultural materials as objects that American Studies scholars might use to illuminate US-American culture and society

<b>Assignments</b>	<b>Length (words)</b>	<b>Weight %</b>
Participation in class, tutorials	n/a	10
Weldon Library Research Exercise	n/a	10
Primary Source analysis	750	10
Mid-term examination (December)	n/a	25
Winter term short essay	1500	15
Final Examination (April)		30

**Required Readings are likely to include selections from the following, which will be made available on OWL:**

Kathryn Derounian-Stodola, Ed., *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives* (Penguin Classics, 1998)

Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (1791)

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Dover Thrift Edition, 2001, c. 1861), also available free online

Deborah Larsen, *The White: a Novel* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2002)

James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (Simon and Schuster, 2007)

Venture Smith, *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa: But Resident above Sixty Years in the United States of America. Related by Himself* (New London, CT: Printed by C. Holt, at The Bee-office), 1798.

**Film and TV:**

"Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North," DVD (Ebb Pod Productions, 2008)

John Adams miniseries, HBO, 2008

"CSA: Confederate States of America," DVD, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJtH\\_5vcmM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJtH_5vcmM)

**Podcasts:**

Ben Franklin's World – episodes with Profs. Jennifer Morgan and Ari Kelman

This American Life – "The Trail of Tears"

Semester 1 Schedule

Weekly Topics:

1. Syncretism and Conflict: First Contact and Early Colonies
2. Colonial America: Spain, Britain, France
3. Revolution or Rebellion?
4. Citizenship for whom? Race, Gender, and American Rights
5. Myths of the Founders (Library exercise due)
6. Race and Slavery
7. Race and Indian Removal
8. Democracy, Reform, and Religion
9. Democracy, Gender and Citizenship
10. Democracy and Capitalism
11. Democracy and Empire (Primary source analysis due)
12. Slavery and Disunion