

050:101

Introduction to American Studies

Fall 2008

This course is an introduction to methods and central themes in the field of American Studies. Students learn to evaluate and make cultural sense of a wide range of sources—films, literature, music, objects, photographs. We also survey major developments in American cultural life, past and present. Members of the American Studies faculty present guest lectures throughout the semester, offering further introduction to a range of topics and influential approaches in the field.

This course focuses thematically on the meanings of the past and future in American culture. By many accounts, the United States stands in a peculiar relationship to both the bygone and the yet to be. In this class, we consider the ways various American identities have taken shape around novel understandings of the past and future, and we explore some of the most important expressions of memory, historical imagination, prophecy, and futurity in American life.