

DOI 10.63407/629008

## AMERICAN STUDIES: INTEGRATING CULTURAL, SOCIAL, AND POLITICAL ASPECTS

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**ABSTRACT.** *This article examines the historical context and contemporary relevance of American studies. It explores the primary paradigms of the discipline and their relevance within social and cultural contexts. The piece examines the evolution of American studies from its roots in the colonial era to its establishment as a recognized academic discipline in the mid-20th century, as well as its subsequent global expansion. Additionally, it analyzes the subject matter, sources, geographic reach, and methodologies of American studies, highlighting some contemporary trends in the discipline.*

**KEYWORDS:** *American studies; interdisciplinarity; methodology; sources; literature; culture; identity.*

### **Introduction**

American Studies, also referred to as Americanistics, is an interdisciplinary field that examines the history, culture, politics, economy, and other facets of the United States of America. It boasts a rich history of development and offers a broad spectrum of research topics.

### **The Formative Period of the Discipline**

American Studies emerged as a distinct field of scholarly inquiry only in the mid-20th century. However, the United States had been a subject of extensive academic exploration for centuries prior to this formalization.

Scholars ranging from naturalists to political philosophers, geographers to literary critics, engaged with America, driven by objectives as diverse as their respective disciplines.



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The pre-disciplinary phase of American Studies spans from the arrival of Puritan settlers in New England in the early 17th century to the early 20th century, during which scholars from various traditional disciplines increasingly turned their attention to the United States as a subject of study.

Following the American Revolutionary War and the signing of the Treaty of Paris in September 1783, the United States established itself as a sovereign nation, compelling major European powers to acknowledge its status.

However, this political independence did not immediately translate into a widespread perception among its citizens that their nation warranted rigorous academic scrutiny. Instead, a temporal disconnect existed between the political self-realization of the new nation and its intellectual self-assurance. As noted, "Throughout the 19th century.

Americans felt an irresistible pull toward Europe, which they continued to regard as the epicenter of knowledge production... for some time, an intellectual disparity persisted between Europeans and Americans, with the latter often perceiving the former's superiority in scientific matters.

Although universities existed in America from the first half of the 17th century, their curricula, even after independence, remained heavily indebted to the models of higher education in the 'Old World'... American students emulated their counterparts at Oxford and Cambridge, studying Greek, Latin, logic, rhetoric, and theology" (Yokota, 2011).

In the context of Europe's intellectual dominance during the first half of the 19th century, the development of academic programs focused on the traditions and practices of the United States was not deemed a priority. Nevertheless, the remarkable dynamism of the new nation throughout the 19th century catalyzed the formation of American Studies, as American history became a subject of study in European universities.

A seminal contribution to early American Studies, which garnered international acclaim, was the work of 19th-century French diplomat and thinker Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. The first volume (in two parts) was published in 1835, followed by the second (also in two parts) in 1840. This historical-political treatise provided detailed insights into the young transatlantic nation, capturing its distinctive features that profoundly impressed educated Europeans of the era. De Tocqueville drew upon both his

observations as a traveler and the literature available to him. For numerous reasons, *Democracy in America* achieved the status of a classic work, widely utilized by historians, political scientists, and sociologists, with its ideas and propositions continuing to be extensively debated among American scholars (Schleifer, 2000; Hecló, 2007).

Another significant contribution to the development of the discipline came from the prominent French historian and publicist Jules Michelet, whose work, "History of the 19th Century," explored, among other topics, the American Revolution and the formation of the United States as an independent nation.

The key paradigms of American Studies emerged from a series of social upheavals and crises: the American Revolution; the War of Independence; westward territorial expansion; conflicts over the nation's developmental trajectory; the Civil War; Reconstruction and the rapid growth of corporations; financial crises and the Great Depression; the entrenchment of market-driven ideals and practices rooted in social Darwinism; populist and progressive ideological movements; global wars; the increasing role of the state in economic regulation; the rise of consumer culture and conformity in the 1950s; the civil rights movement and egalitarian mass mobilizations of the 1960s; and the influence of neoliberal and neoconservative imperatives promoting decentralization, privatization, and globalization, among others.

This confluence of crises and ascensions, coupled with the constant reevaluation of values and rethinking of political and economic principles, gave rise to a series of research paradigms encompassing historical manuscripts, novels, poetry, paintings, photographs, theatrical productions, films, television programs, dialects, geopolitical maneuvers, military campaigns, political parties, economic structures, industrial innovations, architectural styles, theme parks, educational systems, sporting traditions, and philosophical ideas. Many of the most productive frameworks and paradigms in American Studies arose from the dichotomy between the nation's commitment to isolationism, on one hand, and its proactive foreign policy in the spirit of the *Manifest Destiny* concept, which proclaimed the United States' unique mission to promote individual freedom and entrepreneurship globally (Mountjoy, 2009).

As global dynamics shifted in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with the United States emerging as an increasingly influential force, systematic inquiry into the nature of this

state and nation became more pertinent, not only for Americans but also for other countries worldwide. The emergence and formalization of American Studies as a discipline thus coincided with the growing economic and military-political power and influence of the United States. While early studies of America were sporadic and improvisational, lacking the support of a disciplinary infrastructure, later scholarship began to develop a robust network of university departments, degrees, modules, associations, and journals. By the 20th century, American Studies had evolved into a broader and more diverse discipline.

A pivotal milestone was the establishment of the American Historical Association in 1907, which significantly advanced the development of American Studies both within the United States and internationally. During this period, the first American Studies programs and research centers emerged in U.S. universities, laying the foundation for the discipline's further growth. Scholars sought to explain America through its unique circumstances and nature, with factors such as the availability of free land, abundant natural resources, religious pietism, immigration, and racial diversity regarded as keys to a society asserting its distinct identity and functions. This movement involved scholars who, at the time, could challenge the capitalist ethos that appeared unassailable until the onset of the Great Depression. These scholars believed they could gain a comprehensive understanding of society by drawing on methods from history, literature, and the social sciences. Harvard University was a pioneer in this regard, establishing an interdisciplinary program in the history of American civilization in 1937.

### ***Subject and Methods of American Studies***

Interdisciplinarity remains a cornerstone of both the theory and practice of American Studies. Early investigations of America were predominantly fragmented, conducted by scholars from diverse intellectual domains who typically operated within the confines of their respective disciplinary boundaries, with little expectation or development of cross-disciplinary intersections. Humanities disciplines initially dominated the genealogy of American Studies, focused on the interpretation of verbal materials, primarily literary studies, history, philosophy, and religious studies. Disciplines oriented toward visual and audiovisual content were historically underrepresented. However, subsequent technological and cultural advancements firmly established the analysis of fields such as visual arts, architecture,

photography, cinema, television, music, and, more recently, the Internet within American Studies.

The evolution of American Studies can be traced through the integration of social sciences—anthropology, sociology, political science, economics, and legal studies—which emerged amid the rapid development of industrial and societal relations. These disciplines imparted a more applied character to American Studies, moving beyond the mere interpretation of texts or images to propose methods for scaling and modeling complex socio-economic processes and trends confronting American society. These include racial relations, interparty conflicts, social inequality, economic development, and other pressing issues that require scholars to devise strategic solutions to foster a more just and inclusive society.

The gradual rise of academic rigor in American Studies overcame the discipline's initial "atomization," forging an interdisciplinary methodology from disparate fields. While some topics taught in American universities have become traditional, others have diminished in significance or even disappeared, such as the module on the history of medicine in the United States at the University of Pennsylvania (McDowell, 1948). Nevertheless, the endeavor to integrate multiple disciplines remains a fundamental methodological principle of American Studies, one that has undergone no significant alteration.

The practice of American Studies has revealed the advantages and value of the interdisciplinary approach in expanding scholars' competencies, fostering a more diverse academic community, and consolidating the eclectic diversity of the sciences involved. Consequently, this distinctive form of "social justice" has become a driving force in American Studies, endowing it with a more radical potential compared to academic practices more inclined to adhere to disciplinary boundaries. Interdisciplinarity in American Studies has become a taken-for-granted phenomenon, challenging the claustrophobia of narrowly defined subject areas.

Throughout the discipline's evolution, the interdisciplinary method has faced criticism for several reasons. It has been argued that integrating such a vast array of subjects risks overwhelming the capacity of specialized university departments or faculties, let alone individual scholars. Indeed, the potential for incoherence, diffuseness, or excessive fragmentation in the objects of American Studies research has led to the merging of involved disciplines, resulting in a loss of their clarity and identity, with traditional

disciplines becoming "diluted" through sustained interaction with one another (Docherty, 2009). However, proponents of the method have countered that "interdisciplinary research consists in the creation of a new object that belongs to no one" (Barthes, 1989), and that transcending the routine study of literature, music, the U.S. political system, and other areas leads to the emergence of new domains of scientific knowledge through "the creation of a flexible comparative matrix" (Giles, 2006).

Other research methods in American Studies include historical, comparative, cultural, sociological, political, and economic approaches, which are directed toward examining various aspects of culture, identity, domestic and foreign policy, migration flows, immigration policy, assimilation, and the diversity of ethnic groups. A contemporary trend in American Studies is the adoption of a postcolonial approach, which focuses on investigating the postcolonial experience of the United States and its impact on shaping national identity.

### ***Geographic Boundaries of American Studies***

One of the pressing issues in the discipline, presenting a complex and multifaceted challenge, is determining its geographic scope. Many experts contend that the term "American" primarily refers to the United States as a whole, implying that the boundaries of the discipline align with the nation's borders. However, this assertion rarely withstands scrutiny in actual research practices. There is a straightforward extrapolation: some American Studies scholars, drawing on the historical reality of a regionally defined American territorial identity tied to specific regions or states, focus on examining cultural and social differences within the United States (Yaeger, 1996). Others, conversely, view the United States within a much broader geographic context, insisting on the necessity of transcending national boundaries to study its manifold global implications. The "transnational emphasis" in American Studies enables the exploration of U.S. policy in Central and South America, Pacific nations, and other regions of the world, lending a global dimension to the discipline. Thus, defining the geographic boundaries of American Studies is a question that requires a balanced approach, accounting for both national and transnational dimensions.

### ***Primary Sources of American Studies***

The transformation of eclectic works and reflections on the causes of America's ascendancy into a fully-fledged, accredited academic discipline was facilitated by the

publication of foundational scholarly works that played a significant role in the development and consolidation of American Studies. A prominent place among these is occupied by Vernon Louis Parrington's *Main Currents in American Thought* (Parrington, 1930), published in three volumes in the late 1920s. This work was pivotal in diversifying approaches to American culture and society.

The central focus of Parrington's research is literature, particularly the reflection of socio-economic and political events in the works of prominent American writers, including Cooper, Mark Twain, Sinclair, Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, Longfellow, and Turner, among others. Parrington does not approach literature from the perspective of its historical development but rather as a distinctive reflection of the evolution of political thought. His interest lies not in the "belles-lettres" of texts but in literature's contribution to the formation and development of a prolonged ideological conflict in America. In Parrington's view, American literature is not a domain separate from "our political, economic, and social development; it is fully engaged in the ideological battle" (Parrington, 1930). He evaluates it as a series of interventions in American politics, yielding both progressive and reactionary consequences. Notably, Parrington's work includes chapters on political thinkers of the American Revolution, such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, and Thomas Jefferson.

Parrington identified the origins of two opposing traditions in the Declaration of Independence of 1776 and the Federal Constitution of 1787, which he argues encapsulate the concepts of human rights and property rights: "We would not err greatly if we viewed American political history after 1790 primarily as a struggle between the ideals of the Declaration of Independence, which primarily proclaimed human rights, and the provisions of the American Constitution, designed to serve the narrowly practical purpose of protecting property rights" (Parrington, 1930). He noted that during this period, two enduring traditions emerged in American political thought and practice: "the first of these irreconcilably hostile philosophical concepts was adopted by the leaders of America's agrarian movement and found expression in Jefferson's program, while the second took root in the minds of representatives of commercial, capitalist America and manifested in the form of Hamilton's federalism" (Parrington, 1930).

Parrington's work provided the United States with a significant intellectual genealogy, though its popularity

waned somewhat after World War II. Nevertheless, the author's commitment to a progressive manifesto for the United States continues to inspire many works in American Studies. This is particularly evident in Parrington's adherence to the principle of interdisciplinarity, which he describes as "the complexity and multifaceted nature of materials, their influence on theology, politics, and economics" (Parrington, 1930).

Another foundational work in the institutionalization of American Studies is Perry Miller's *The New England Mind*, published in 1939, which revealed the intellectual potential of the emerging discipline. Miller explored the roots and influence of Puritanism, which flourished in New England during the 17th and 18th centuries and profoundly shaped America's national identity, philosophical, and moral values. He examined the first century of Puritanism in America through the lens of its doctrinal characteristics, education, cosmology, anthropology, and sociology. The Puritans arrived in America to build a life governed by biblical laws. As ascetic Calvinists, they believed in the absolute authority of God, predestination, the inherent sinfulness of humanity, and the doctrine of election, whereby only divine grace could save a select few from eternal damnation. Miller's primary sources included sermons, theological treatises, histories, diaries, biographies, travel narratives, and poetry from 17th-century New England.

These sources encompass some of the earliest writings from the colonial period, such as Captain John Smith's (1580–1631) *A True Relation of Such Occurrences and Accidents of Note as Happened in Virginia*, John Winthrop's (1588–1649) *The History of New England from 1630 to 1649*, and William Bradford's (1590–1657) *History of Plymouth Plantation*, which articulate foundational political doctrines of Puritanism. A later scholarly advocate of Miller asserts that "his work is far from a static portrayal of an abstract set of ideas; it is dramatic, developed, and ironic" (Butts, 1982). Miller's work remains a benchmark for scholars studying this period.

Harvard graduate Henry Nash Smith made a significant contribution to the development of American Studies with his 1950 study, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Smith, 2007). This work examines key features of American literature in the post-Civil War period, addressing various aspects of the socio-economic and cultural life of the United States in the second half of the 19th century. Beginning with an acknowledgment of U.S. expansion

through the acquisition of new territories, Smith discusses economic development, the role of immigration in the nation's cultural life, changes in American historical thinking, and the significance of the natural sciences in shaping the worldview of American writers. This work contributed to the advancement of interdisciplinarity and the expansion of the geographic scope of the discipline's research.

It is noteworthy that in the 1930s and 1940s, American political thought was significantly influenced by European thinkers, primarily Austrian and German philosophers, sociologists, and political scientists who fled to the United States to escape Nazi persecution. These scholars elevated the level of scientific inquiry and contributed to establishing the United States as a significant hub for global political thought and the study of politics. The emergence of influential research "think tanks" and associated academic schools, which both competed and complemented one another, created a robust political science industry serving both domestic and international audiences.

The growing interest in the United States, driven by its rise as an economic, military, and cultural superpower, as well as the codification of American Studies as an academic discipline, spurred the emergence of new publications and works in the field. Notably, Henry Luce's 1941 article, "The American Century," became a significant phenomenon, reflecting society's burgeoning sense of American power (Luce, 1999).

In a prophetic tone, Luce described a future world order shaped by American influence, emphasizing the potential already demonstrated by the United States. He noted that Americans are "richer in food, clothing, and entertainment" than the rest of humanity (Luce, 1999). However, Luce argued that America's greatness is determined not only by its material achievements but also by its cultural and ideological factors. He referenced "great American ideals - love of freedom and equality of opportunity, capable of elevating human life from the level of beasts to just below that of angels" (Luce, 1999; Brinkley, 2010). Thus, Luce portrays America as not only an economic but also a spiritual leader on the global stage.

A pivotal event in the establishment of American Studies occurred in the summer of 1947 at the 18th-century Schloss Leopoldskron in Salzburg, Austria. Over the course of six weeks, an intellectual event took place that significantly advanced the international dissemination of American Studies: the inaugural Harvard Student Council Seminar on

American Civilization. Scholars specializing in various aspects of the discipline from eight American universities conducted sessions for 92 delegates from 17 European countries, including university students, professors, writers, artists, and union activists.

American professors aimed to "provide education in the core areas of American Studies - history, social sciences, literature, and art" (Smith, 1949). In line with the emerging concept of interdisciplinarity, segregation between different research strands was eliminated to provide attendees with a multifaceted understanding of America. Beyond academic objectives, the organizers hoped that an event focused on a topic distant from European concerns would help diffuse lingering postwar antagonisms among participants. As one American participant remarked, "the opportunity to reflect on the United States allowed attendees to somewhat detach from their own political-cultural circumstances, enabling them to sit side by side with people they might have killed just a few years earlier" (Mead, 1947).

The Salzburg Seminar reshaped European perceptions of the United States. American organizers emphasized the absence of patronage from governmental or propagandistic institutions and encouraged open discussions, which heightened European interest in the event. Consequently, "the group was unanimous in recognizing the need for a center of American Studies in Europe - not just a single 'center,' but multiple centers of study scattered across the continent" (Mead, 1947).

Processes of transatlantic cooperation, led by the United States, such as the Marshall Plan and the establishment of NATO, as well as the Cold War, facilitated the geographic expansion of the discipline. The internationalization of American Studies gained global momentum. In Japan, which had been defeated in the war and was still under American military occupation, the American Institute began coordinating studies of the United States in 1947. In 1953, the German Association for American Studies (DGfA) was established, helping to steer the country's intellectual life away from the toxic nationalism of the Nazi era. In 1955, the British Association for American Studies (BAAS) was established, followed by the Australian and New Zealand Associations for American Studies in 1964. In 1967, the Institute for the United States of America was established under the Soviet Academy of Sciences. American governmental, corporate, and charitable organizations actively supported the international development of

American Studies through financial backing; for instance, the Ford Foundation facilitated the creation of an American Studies department in New Delhi, India (Shrivastava, 1987). Today, American Studies organizations operate in over 30 countries across all continents.

Regarding the internationalization of American Studies, it should be noted that the discipline's objectives outside the United States differ from those within the country. While research and teaching in American Studies within the United States assume a baseline familiarity with the studied culture, scholars in regions such as the Middle East often work in challenging environments marked by preconceptions. Many researchers, who are also educators, must account for varying levels of knowledge and perspectives among their compatriots when publishing in their home countries. Countries like the United Kingdom and France, due to historical, cultural, and ideological proximity, are better informed about America. However, former socialist bloc countries have yet to fully restore longstanding American Studies traditions disrupted by associations with the USSR during the Cold War. In many former Soviet republics, American Studies remains in its infancy, as the personnel, resources, and infrastructure established during the Soviet era are concentrated in Moscow and select regional centers in Russia.

### ***American Studies in Uzbekistan***

Despite the relevance and significance of American Studies as a field of knowledge, it did not experience significant development in Uzbekistan during the years of independence due to both objective and subjective factors. Throughout this period, no specialized institutions dedicated to the study of this discipline were established in the country, and even in specialized universities, relevant courses were absent from academic curricula.

This situation changed in 2022 with the establishment of the Institute for Advanced International Studies at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy (UWED), which includes the Center for American Studies (hereinafter referred to as the Center). The creation of the Center and the introduction of courses on U.S. domestic and foreign policy into the academic curriculum have led to a notable surge in student interest in American Studies. Currently, UWED's academic program offers comprehensive courses on the political system, political history, political thought, foreign policy, and fundamentals of the U.S. economy. As a result, over the past three years, there has been a significant increase in the

number of thesis projects addressing a wide range of topics in American Studies, indicating growing academic interest and the rising importance of this discipline within Uzbekistan's educational and research environment.

The Center operates as a structural subdivision of the Institute, tasked with organizing and conducting research, information, and analytical activities, as well as providing educational and methodological support to students and faculty of the University on topics related to the domestic and foreign policy of the United States and countries of North and South America. As the first institution of its kind in Uzbekistan, the Center has opened new opportunities for in-depth study of the United States.

The Center has already published several monographs, articles, analytical reports, and methodological materials, including a textbook titled *Fundamentals of Public Administration and the U.S. Political System*. It actively collaborates with the diplomatic corps to establish partnerships with academic institutions of similar focus. At the Center's initiative, several foreign American Studies scholars have been invited to UWED to assist in its development, enhance the quality of teaching, and advance research efforts. The establishment of the Center marks a significant milestone in the development of American Studies in Uzbekistan, overcoming decades of stagnation in this field and creating new opportunities for comprehensive studies of U.S. domestic and foreign policy, as well as that of North and South American countries.

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