

# American studies



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Parrington is credited to be the person who founded American studies due to his winning Pulitzer Prize in the American thought. American studies are an interdisciplinary discipline which deals with the studies of United States. Incorporated in the American studies are disciplines like economics, literature, history and women's culture. Also included in the American studies are the film and urban studies as well as the culture of United States. Traditionally, it was believed that knowledge was meant for men and thus was discriminatory.

The modern American studies have challenged that in that in today's culture and practice, women have been given equal opportunity to pursue careers in all fields which were earlier male dominated. Also, the traditional setting of studies segregated the aliens on basis of race and color. The modern studies have challenged this believe by incorporating all individuals in the scholarship arrangements. Critics in favor of traditional approach argue that incorporating multiculturalism in American studies may deny the students from experiencing their real culture.

This has been challenged by modern studies with scholars arguing that multiculturalism would lead to democracy in America thus is beneficial. Traditional studies also had dismissed some scholarly projects which have been lately accepted by the modern studies. Modern studies also allows interdisciplinary work and which has led to more women being accepted as equal partners by their male counterparts (Kessler-Harris Alice, para 2). This paper will thus focus on the patterns the American studies have taken and the importance of multicultural integrated studies to both the students and the United States.

American studies history, patterns and its implications American studies dates back to the 1920s and 1930s but was more profound during the Second World War and also during the post war era which fostered a climate of patriotism and nationalism. The war led to the need of defending the values of the United States which led to the alteration of most of the careers and this also altered the view of the whole world on academics. The traditional method of the American studies was explained by the use of myth and symbol.

Scholars advocating for this form of system claimed to have identified some recurring themes which were being used in American texts. Such recurring texts were meant to illuminate and esteem the American culture which was unique (Levander Caroline, para 3). During the myth and symbol era which was in led to innovation of American studies, white men Protestants were the scholars. Their aim was to try to understand and single out the American exceptionalism. In so doing, they left out everybody else.

This mode of studies emerged during the cold war period and was seen as an effort to justify the dominance of America after the Second World War and also to celebrate the exceptionalism of America. This was the first shape the American studies took in the 1950s. However, the politics of 1960s led to the transformation of the academic field as well as the society at large. After this transformation, women and racial diversity as well as other workers were recognized. This creation story is criticized on the ground that it failed to acknowledge the scholarships which characterized the post war years.

Also this traditional approach of studies does not acknowledge the fact that American studies were invented long before the cold war era. American

studies emerged in 1930s and was being practiced by many scholars both within and outside the myth and symbol academy. The concerns of these scholars paved way for today's American studies (Maddox Lucy, pp 12). The Marxism school of thoughts helps in explaining the different patterns that the American studies have gone through to the currents multicultural form of scholarship.

However, they are not distinct and tend to overlap at various intervals. The first school of thought is that of Karl Marxism. This school focused on the struggle existing between capitol and labor as well as the tradition of politics which engaged in scholarship and which motivated people to pursue their craft. Scholarship in this period was founded on recognition of the negative impacts of the industrial capitalism and class divisions which were profound in United States. The practitioners of those days were the public intellectuals and were involved in both the politics and social matters.

This group of scholars advocated for a socialist tradition as they termed industrial capitalist to be hostile and against democracy (May Elaine Tyler, para 4). These academic practitioners engaged in fields which were emerging known as the academic mavericks challenged the state of the studies in practice and also expanded the scope of the study both in method and also in content. In doing this, they first explored the unique characteristic of American culture. During this era, America was thought to be an inferior extension of Europe.

The intellectuals of the time had ignored the literature of America since it was viewed to be of low standards. The practitioners had a task to retrieve and restore American literature from the set academic considerations

margin. American literature was legitimized and instituted within the academy of learning. Post war critics however focused their analysis on the text but the researchers sought to base their analysis on the literature's history as well as the cultural changes. Focusing on the cultural diversity led to emergence of the modern multicultural American studies (May Elaine Tyler, para 6).

Evolution of American studies is also credited to the historians of the 1920s and 1930s. Unlike their counterparts in literature, these historians focused their study on government, politics and the prevailing wars. Some of the historians focused their attention on the democratic spirit exhibited by American people as they were fighting the aristocracy of the Europeans and also the monopoly of the American capital. A study by Mary Beard acknowledged the role of women in history making unlike in traditional setting where women were not recognized.

Democracy which emerged in United States at this era led to more minorities being given a chance to exercise their abilities thus the emergence of American studies (Kessler-Harris Alicev, para 5). Another school which explains the pattern the American studies have taken is the Leo Marxism School which takes a myth and symbol approach. This school emerged during the cold war time. The political and intellectual culture which had earlier developed started to wane after the Second World War. During the cold war, Americanism and democracy as well as capitalism and established institutions were classified together.

During this era, international affairs and official activities took the central stage of the United States. This in turn led to the destruction and elimination

of capitalism which in turn led to United States being described as classless by some intellectuals and policy makers. Elimination of social classes led to the cohesion of America thus setting it apart from all other states (May Elaine Tyler, para 9). The effects of post war period led to many changes occurring in the American studies.

This era was characterized by institutions building and full institution of interdisciplinary fledging enterprises. Interdisciplinary field was more visible during this period which saw most of the scholars identifying with it. American studies were incorporated in the universities, at home as well as abroad during this period. During this period, regional associations emerged which were managed through grants from the public and also from private funding. The need for an informed nation and the values the country was deriving from this informed nation led to an increase in interest in the studies.

This saw United States becoming the market leader in offering studies (Guernsey Lisa, para 3). The traditional believe about scholarship was that only the people considered to be ' intellectuals' were in a position to make important decisions concerning the direction the state was to take. This was meant to esteem the uniqueness of the United States and in doing so, the intellectuals left out all other people. The minority groups mostly the blacks were also not considered as being capable of contributing to the overalldevelopment of the country.

With the current or modern American studies program, this has been challenged in that America is a multicultural country and as such the contribution of every person is necessary to ensure its growth. Introduction

of American studies program led to a more informed people in the country thus more development making the United States to be ahead of all other states in terms of development (May Elaine Tyler, para 11). Traditional approach to scholarship also advocated for maintenance of a national identity by ensuring that all minor groups and aliens were alienated from the American studies.

However, this has been proved to be erroneous in that the introduction of black history has not so far been troublesome in the country. Such inclusion has also led to changing and shaping and avoiding dominance by one particular group especially the whites and has helped in promoting the notion of a common vision in the country. Also, the traditional believe was that women were a minority and could not contribute to the general growth of the economy. This is erroneous since accomplishments of great women such as Jane Addams have not posed any threat in terms of gender and class divisions.

Whereas the traditional approach to studies fostered divisions and racism, the modern form of study program fosters more unity in the country (Guernsey Lisa, para 7). Conclusion American studies have evolved over long period from the time when it was believed that the minorities and women were not to be integrated into the country's form of scholarship to the modern integrative form of scholarship program. American studies have also been adopted by different countries and thus has helped in forging more cooperation and understanding among nations.

Recognition that all individuals have a right to pursue their careers without any form of discrimination on either gender, racial or even color and

integration of multiculturalism in American studies have helped in shaping and the superiority of the modern American studies. Work cited: Guernsey Lisa: A Movement in the Mirror: American Studies in the 1970s. Retrieved on 5th January 2009 from, [http://xroads.virginia.edu/%7EMA95/guernsey/chap1\\_1.html](http://xroads.virginia.edu/%7EMA95/guernsey/chap1_1.html) Kessler-Harris Alice: Cultural Locations: Positioning American Studies in the Great Debate. (1992). Retrieved on 5th January 2009 from,

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