

American Studies  
Summer Work 2017



Thomas Hart Benton's *The Sources of Country Music*  
1975

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## Summer Reading / Creating / Collaborating 2017

### Objectives:

- Instill a critical thinking approach to society and culture
- Develop a collaborative learning community for American Studies
- Expand creativity and freedom of expression

### Overarching Question:

- What is the idea of America?

### Required Reading:

- *Give Me Liberty*: first three chapters--assessed in the opening week of class.
- Walls, *Glass Castle*
- McCullough, *The American Spirit*
- Horwitz, *A Voyage Long and Strange* (excerpts)
- Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (excerpts)
- Schweikert et. al, *A Patriot's History of the United States* (excerpts)
- Loewen, "Memorial Essay"

### Assignment List

#### Required:

##### *The Glass Castle*: Essay

Critically read and evaluate Jeanette Walls' *The Glass Castle* (available through the LMC or school bookroom). In your response, consider:

*To what extent does Walls' story reflect the American Dream? What claim is she making about American culture and to what extent do you agree?*

Select pivotal passages that help support the meaning of your findings and read them closely as you respond to the prompt. Show how writer's craft contributes to the meaning you discover.

Format: (four-page maximum, Times New Roman, 11pt, double-spaced, MLA format)

##### *A Voyage Long and Strange*: Emulation

Step 1: Read the Prologue, chp 8 "DeSoto does Dixie", chp 13 "A Tale of Two Rocks" and another chapter (or more) of your choice.

Step 2: In a single page response, describe the thesis/purpose/aim of his book. Choose a passage or two that best illustrates Horwitz' purpose, analyzing how your selection is central to the argument of the text.

Step 3: Write a Horwitz inspired fragment from one of your summer journeys. (Emulate how Horwitz moves from narrative to commentary and his mode of lifting a facade to reveal an inner truth. Your site could be a NJ boardwalk, an Appalachian cabin, or a summer shot of Post Rd in Fairfield. Post your blog with accompanying picture on our shared .net google site: VLS

Emulation

### A New Memorial: response to Loewen

Step 1- Read James Loewen's analysis about monuments depicting historic events across the United States. Identify 5 key points you discovered from these readings.

Step 2 - In and around the Fairfield community; photograph/record 10 historic monuments on public display. What does each monument communicate to the public at large? Discover what evidence you believe should each of the monuments you studied also include. Simply, what other parts of the history should be known?

Step 3 - If you were given the task of designing a monument that was to be erected at Sherman Green or Town Hall, describe in detail what that monument should be in 2017. Write what the plaque/inscription would say. *Post your work on our shared .net google site: A New Memorial*

Choose 2 of 3:

### *Give Me Liberty*: A scene in an original play.

Craft a multi-role original skit using key characters from multiple readings. (This could be a small group task, with each student contributing one voice.) Imagine a potential relationship between anachronistic characters and a likely topic (i.e. John Winthrop and Anne Hutchinson meet Rex Walls discuss Utopia) based on pivotal similarities or differences of character and motivation and place in a setting and scenario of your choice.

- Import character(s) from 1st 3 chapters of *Give me Liberty*
  - Can also use fictional characters from any/all lit, or one of our writers
- "Submit" your doc to the google classroom assignment.*

### "A People's History" vs. "A Patriot's History: " Zinn vs Schweikert et. al.: Investigate Bias.

Step 1: Read the excerpts and in a brief response of one page, describe the greatest differences (use specifics) between these two versions of history and explain how the same facts can be evaluated so differently. What are the different motives of the writers, and are both legitimate in your opinion?--Explain.

Step 2: What major news story over the summer interests you? Choose one story and find a contrast of opinions from credible news organizations (i.e. Peggy Noonan *WSJ* vs. Maureen Dowd *NYT*). This should be two arguments presenting differing views on the same story. Cut and paste both stories (with links) into a google doc. In a single page response at the end, investigate: how do the same facts lead to different conclusions? Where does the truth lie? *Post your document to our shared .net site--"Investigate Bias"*

### *The American Spirit*, McCullough: Your Speech

Perhaps you will visit a historical location of deep American significance over the summer. (Or maybe you would like to.) Then, do what McCullough does. Perform your own "archeological" investigation into this location, then invent an occasion and audience for a "speech" where you unearth some truth about the American Spirit this location or edifice represents.

*Post your speech (image optional) onto our shared .net google site--AS: Your Speech*

Choose 1 of 2

Create a "Fake News" Story:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/18/us/fake-news-hillary-clinton-cameron-harris.html>

Invent a topic that you think would "sell" to a group of your choice (beyond liberal or conservative, consider other groups: Nascar fans, Opera goers, Elon Musk fanatics, etc.

Create: the story, the visual, and even create a "web-hosting" site that would appear legitimate to your audience.

*Post your fake news on the ~~internet~~ our shared .net site: Fake News*

A Film Component: a summer film release (or streaming TV show)

Choose a film or tv series you see over the summer that you think has interesting societal relevance. Take a screenshot from this film/show that you think expresses an insight or argument about life/culture. Explain the artistry in the image (in terms of the overall film), and what its creators are attempting to portray about our culture. Write this as if it was a blog post and you are a 'film critic'. Your audience is educated, literate, some are members of the Academy . . . they know of your show but they may not have seen it (so some intense summary is needed.) *Post on our .net site: 'Film Blog'.*