

AMERICAN STUDIES 101/HISTORY 113
EARLY AMERICAN CULTURAL HISTORY

Taught by **Professor Teresa Murphy**

This course starts with the argument that understanding culture is key to understanding American history. Culture can refer to art and literature—and we'll look at some of that in this class. But culture can also refer to more popular forms of expression and the way people act. It is this broader notion of culture that we'll be employing as we look at some of the major issues scholars have debated about the evolution of American culture from the colonial period through Reconstruction.

Here are some of the questions we will consider:

- Did the American colonies have the same kind of colonial culture as other British outposts such as India? If not, why not?
- Why did no one want to publicly celebrate the Boston Tea Party until 50 years after it happened?
- How did some of the ridiculous beehive hairstyles of the Revolutionary period become a political issue?
- How did a steady stream of stories about Indian captivity work to legitimize conquest in the West?
- What made minstrel shows so popular? Why did white people try to make themselves look black? And how did African Americans have to these performances?

We'll look at what scholars have had to say about these questions and more; and then we'll form our own opinions. We'll examine old newspapers, read popular literature, and explore the museums here in Washington DC to shape our analyses.

This is an upper division course, but it is one that is geared to freshman and sophomores who are looking for a challenge.

This course meets **WF 2:20 – 3:10**. Students must also sign up for a discussion section.