



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute

1991 Volume I: Regions and Regionalism in the United States: Studies in the History and Cultures of the South, The Northeast and the American Southwest

Introduction

It is a pleasure to introduce the seven curriculum units that were completed in the seminar on "Regions and Regionalism in the United States," for each of them addresses aspects of regional history and literature in fresh, meaningful and effective ways.

The primary aim of the seminar was to see how three American regions developed distinctive social and cultural characteristics over time. First, settlement, economic and racial patterns in the early American South, New England and the Southwest were compared. The aspects of each regional society were discussed: the emerging black and white agrarian societies of the South, the urban commercial industrializing Northeast, and the Indian, Hispanic and Anglo-American irrigation and ranching societies in New Mexico, Arizona and California.

These broad approaches were followed by more specific studies of the South from the post-civil War period to 1920, by studies of the coming of various ethnic groups to New England, such as the Irish and French-Canadian, and after 1930, by the migration of Afro-Americans to the Northeast. The interaction of Indians, Mexican-Americans and Anglo-Americans in the Southwest in this century was also treated.

The majority of the curriculum units actually focus on Afro-American migration from the South to the North or on the contrasts between life in the South and the North as expressed in terms of inherited family values, religion, music, the legal status of persons, race, class and gender relations, and the ever-present phenomenon of prejudice, whether social, regional or cultural.

The result has been a remarkably coherent and complementary set of curriculum units. Rather than list them alphabetically by authors here, I have listed them in a logical topical sequence. Jeanette Gaffney, for example, has constructed a unit around the narrative of Indian-Spanish relations in the Southwest. Of all the units hers most fully develops the sense of the uniqueness of a region and of multiple race relations within a given area. That uniqueness is enhanced by the fact that her Spanish language class will not only use one of the languages common to the Southwest, but in so doing will become acquainted with a Latino subculture that is different from that of Puerto Rican Americans or Latinos in Florida.

Valerie Polino, on the other hand, has noted how during the Victorian Age, middle class Americans in the New Haven and New England area sought to identify themselves and their lifestyles through architecture. The contrasts between Spanish-Indian Southwest and Victorian New England, dramatically illustrate distinctive regional features and the value of regionally oriented studies.

Two units combine historical and literary approaches. Lystra Richardson has provided a brief history of the South as background for her unit dealing with the South as portrayed in literature. Using *Tom Sawyer*, *To Kill A Mocking Bird*, and *Souther*, she has assembled an array of vignettes about Southern people that is full of insight and understanding. Beverly White has focussed her unit on the way various Afro-American writers—and particularly novelists—have portrayed the South and how other Afro-American writers have portrayed their experiences once they moved to the North. Here regional features are seen through the eyes of talented creative black writers.

Barbara Trader has developed a curriculum unit more from an economic history point of view by noticing how Afro-Americans sought better opportunities by moving to northern industrial centers. She has combined a general history with a case study of how southern workers came to the Winchester Arms Factory in New Haven.

The last two curriculum units take a comparative approach. Lillie Jones' curriculum on Business Law compares Connecticut laws regarding divorce, bankruptcy, torts, rights of minors, etc., with those in North and South Carolina. Here again regional differences—in this instance legal differences and similarities in a northern and two southern states are highlighted. And finally, Jane Platt has developed a most imaginative unit on regional prejudice in which students in a New Haven school and one in North Carolina will conduct oral interviews with parents and older persons and attempt to find out the bases of prejudice, both in the student and the community and society in which they find themselves. This innovative unit shows promise both of promoting understanding of others and one's self.

Taken together these units address questions of ethnicity, race, class and gender, but in a regional-geographical, economic and cultural context. Prepared with careful attention to pedagogical methods, and an interdisciplinary approach, plus the use of audio visual aids and field trips, these curriculum units show every evidence of making a real contribution to the way history, languages and literatures can be taught in the public schools.

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