



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1987 Volume III: Writing About American Culture

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## Introduction

Our theme in this seminar was “self and society” in American culture. We read a series of non-fiction works that engage this theme—some quite standard, others not so standard. Our reading, writing, and discussion took us from the Declaration of Independence, the *Federalist Papers*, and the Constitution on to works by Emerson, Thoreau, Henry Adams, W.E.B. DuBois, Black Elk, William Carlos Williams, Edmund Wilson, Studs Terkel, and Wendell Berry. Something of that historical sweep is reflected in at least three of our curriculum units, but most deal with the twentieth-century and one considers the African roots of our mixed heritage. Indeed, it is striking that all of our units seem to urge some revision of emphasis in the usual school curricula on American culture. Those that engage the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries emphasize American humor, the ethics of non-violence, and the experience of Afro-Americans. The unit on art gives a major place to Native American and Afro-American art. And the other units focus entirely on aspects of twentieth-century Afro-American writing. The school calendar now gives “Black History” an official place, but these units go well beyond that limited attention. If one important aim of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute is the encouragement of curricular revision that will be responsive to the classroom teachers’ own sense of social needs and “cultural literacy,” these units certainly show some of the ways in which that aim may be realized.

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