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As a student returning to university at a graduate level well over ten years since my undergraduate degree, I stumbled upon American Studies via proxy of my partner. I was intrigued as someone who was born and raised in Wyoming and yet, had never heard of the discipline. Inquiring with my partner and other academics in the field of study, I learned while it may be difficult to articulate a hard definition, that is what gives American Studies a unique beauty. Yes, there are parameters to try and stay within regarding American culture, politics, economics, etc., but there is also a broad range of freedom to comment and articulate a point of view based on American life. This point of view is not only given to those that are Americans from birth, but also those that become citizens or simply observe the impacts of America as it pertains to them.

Tremaine McDowell elaborates on the distinction of American studies vs other academic disciplines such as History, English, Sociology, etc. as being uniquely the ability to pragmatically paint a picture of American culture by tying all aspects of these disciplines together. It is the ability to reference the past, predict possible future outcomes and portray a snapshot of American life in the present moment. This in turn can be a historical reference as the present inevitably becomes the past and allows for reflection on what has since transpired from the academic viewpoint.

Henry Nash Smith in "Can American Studies Develop a Method" conveys that American Studies to shed light on an American topic with new perspective and from as many angles as possible. This is a critical component of the academic discipline as it requires a broad spectrum of knowledge on American life in general, American and global history as well as personal experience. Our nation alone is so vast you could encompass almost 30 separate European countries into the continental United States alone. To provide angles that step outside of a social and economic bubble, one must travel across the United States into different regions both urban and rural. Each lifestyle and geographic area will come with its own rich history and cultural norms. I would suggest as well that one must also travel outside the US. Travel should not be confined as well to just other first world countries but third world to give perspective on American lifestyle differences as well as how America is perceived by other countries and cultures around the globe.

A great example of this would be from Barbara Tomlinson and George Lipsitz in an article written back in 2013. In our initial read of "American Studies as Accompaniment", I stumbled upon multiple concepts that required a great deal of reflection for what American Studies is and stands for. One concept conveyed throughout is the increased privatization of all aspects of American life which in turn has great impacts on the "middle class" and poses a monumental threat of its continued existence. We are generating a nation of "haves" and "have-nots". This could be considered a form of class warfare which may be true through both policies set by those in seats of power and a natural byproduct of this neoliberal society.

The past few years we have increasingly become more polarized in our politics and having a duopoly for representation does not help add to the fire. Americans are increasingly being out priced on what used to be considered possible and a standard of Americans such as a single-family home, a reasonable car, retirement and travel potential a few times a year. There is something to be said about American's way

of life compared to those in other countries, especially in comparison to 3rd world regarding what are “needs” vs “wants” but we have entered an era of run-away capitalistic society in which numbers and calculations have entered fields as sacred as healthcare.

Healthcare in America has become a system that is both unaffordable to many and riddled with complexity and inconsistency which turns an industry that should be one of the most humane into one of the most inhumane. The Hippocratic Oath has a physician pledge to prescribe only beneficial treatments, according to his/her abilities and judgment and to refrain from causing harm or hurt. This gets to be contradictory though when we have insurance companies that treat people based on a risk calculation for not only how much to charge but what to cover. Doctors in return must navigate such a convoluted system designed to provide the bare minimum while reaping maximum ROI.

Housing and rental market has been consumed by private venture capital firms buying up property throughout various parts of the country. This artificially inflates the market as well as causes first time homebuyers to be both outbid and potentially out of options for something in their price range. This causes the buyers to have to look elsewhere or accept defeat and to rent the best option presented to them. The sheer power of a hedge fund is like comparing a race in which one person is on foot and the other is on a motorbike, yet they would like us to have the perception that the power dynamic is minimal at best.

Education in America has been on the decline over the past decade for a multitude of reasons. Our primary education system is filled with teachers who get paid at one of the lowest salaries that could be considered an “affordable” wage as an American citizen. There are added pressures to simultaneously be a parent to the children to whom you teach yet be only an educator when your teachings or accountability to the child conflicts with that of their caretakers. The education field has started to enter a state of crisis for finding and retaining teachers which has a great impact on counties across any state and the country.

Higher Education has become extremely expensive and undergraduate and graduate programs are beginning to only be for those of a financial privileged background or willingness to take on an astonishing amount of debt with high risk to pay it back in a timely fashion. We are seeing the latest generation choose to opt out of higher education to seek work immediately or to enter a trade instead. While this has its benefits and is a natural shift from an overly saturated market with an inflated cost compared to ROI ratio, where will that leave colleges in the future and what gaps may begin to occur in the next twenty years with roles in organizations that benefit from degree seeking students.

These three examples alone only begin to scratch the surface of what was once thought to be an American right and has slowly been turning into an American “dream”. The neoliberal society that by design will only create larger gaps between wealthy individuals and the poor can only be challenged and changed when enough people begin to take what is occurring around them and point their energy and power at the system itself; not one another. To invoke change, one must counter the status-quo with new concepts and demand a new set of rules and structure henceforth.

As a technology major, one aspect to take into consideration with the fact that neoliberalism naturalizes both hierarchy and exploitation is mobile technology and social media. Mobile phones have been on the rise since 2010 as it relates to our modern term of the “smart phone” which is essentially a laptop in our hands in both its computing capabilities and applications specifically designed to go from a desktop to mobile adaptation. This quickly allowed for social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and

Twitter to have constant engagement from its users and slowly be tweaked in ways that we are now discovering is not healthy to the human mind. This is because the incentives for a free application come from where money is made and an ad-based revenue model will demand engagement in exchange for a societal cost that addicts the minds of adults and adolescence alike. We also have seen the spread of misinformation, conflating social commentary and news, confirmation bias via the echo chamber effect and a large downturn in patriotism.

We are living in a country that could be compared to a game of monopoly, yet your start is randomized by the family in which you were born into. There will be some that start the game with one die and ten dollars and some with six dice and ten thousand dollars. You are told that there are not many advantages to the other person though with six dice and through hard work and perseverance, you should both have an equal chance at the same level of success. There is an illusion of choice and like magicians, the choice was already made for you. Subsequently, it becomes increasingly difficult to create a life of dignity, security, and one of purpose.

The era we currently reside in was foreshadowed within the writing of "American Studies as Accompaniment" and this gives weight to the importance of American Studies as a discipline to take a snapshot in time, convey logical arguments from many aspects and speculate on possible future outcomes as a result. A piece written a decade ago has had many truths to it come to fruition such as the fracturing of our civilization between the wealthy and poor and the quick and vast reach of government and companies. This has created a system in which the American "dream" is dying and Americans now must focus on how to make ends meet and retain a decent job to have basic human dignities and needs met.

American Studies does not need a hard definition but rather a general parameter to what its purpose is like that of a mission statement within an organization. The American studies discipline is a deep study and commentary on American culture, politics, economics, art, literature, etc. with a distinct point of view that is both informative and thought provoking. Its goal is to educate, inspire and pursue all things American.