Greetings, fellow Americanists. Welcome to H-AMSTDY!

H-AMSTDY is a member of the H-NET "family" of scholarly lists operating out of the University of Illinois at Chicago (H-Net@UICVM). Though H-NET primarily runs history listservs, subscribers should understand that H-AMSTDY discussions will involve a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives, in keeping with the unique identity of American Studies as a scholarly field.

H-AMSTDY is a moderated H-NET list. This means that your email posts will be sent to me prior to being forwarded to other subscribers. It also means that as the H-AMSTDY moderator I will have access to an invaluable pipeline of information and technical help available from H-NET. H-AMSTDY will thus conduct the usual business of a scholarly list, but will also keep all subscribers fully informed about new and interesting developments in areas relevant to American Studies.

Before I invite you to begin submitting material, I want to say a few words about H-AMSTDY. I will try to keep what I have to say reasonably concise, but I think there are important things that I should cover.

My comments cover four areas:

1) EXPRESSING OURSELVES ON H-AMSTDY

2) ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION
3) ORGANIZATION OF THE LIST

4) BEGINNING

1) EXPRESSING OURSELVES: I would like if this list seemed like a safe place where subscribers could express their views. I think we're all familiar with "flaming," which can be anything from an overtly prejudicial post bashing some interest-group, to a cutting remark like "so and so doesn't know what he's talking about; here are the facts." Flames don't stimulate a sense of community, and it is often very unpleasant to be involved in a flamewar.

I have faith in the ability of subscribers to exert control over what goes on in the list, but I should point out that I will make an active effort to minimize flaming here.

However, flaming may not be the only reason that people feel timid about posting to the list. We have here, on H-AMSTDY, a wonderful group of individuals from all areas of the scholarly world. It is natural to feel in awe when someone whose research you admire posts to the list. I myself am in awe of someone who has got two chapters of their dissertation done, let alone written a scholarly monograph.

But what I would say is that on the Internet, and in this list, we're all on first name terms. You should not be afraid to submit a contribution, no matter how uninformed you think it may be. You should not worry about making a misstep in reply to other posts. You should never hesitate to ask a question, either about American Studies or using your computer to send and receive files, or to use the resources of the Internet.

You'll see, as a conversation takes shape on this list, that it is often very hard to decide whether the messages are from students or professors. Once you yourself stop thinking of who you are and where you're coming from, you'll slip into belonging as a member of a true scholarly community. You'll learn that the computer-mediated conversation we're having can help you discover your own voice, and transform you from being a passive consumer of knowledge to an active producer of it.

So don't be afraid to be heard--look forward to it!

That said, I acknowledge there will always be "lurkers," people who for one reason or another rarely post to the list. Lurking is fine; lurkers are as much a part of the community as anyone else. If you are so busy you only have time to read, if being an onlooker is more useful to you, if you are just finding your sea-feet, then lurk. This list will always respect a subscriber's right to keep silence.

One other thing on expressing ourselves. If you are following up to someone else's post, it is common practice to quote that part of it which you want to discuss. If you don't know how to do this on your system's editor, please ask me via email. There are a variety of ways it can be done, depending on how you're accessing the list.

Finally, if you have any question whatsoever about using your system, computer, text editor, software, modem, etc., that has to do with sending to the list, or retrieving files from the H-NET

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fileservers, please ask me about it. All your questions are invaluable, and will give me an accurate sense of your Internet experience. From time to time I will be able to post your concerns in the form of list FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions).

2) ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION: There is no fixed agenda, in the sense of a prescribed list of subjects pertaining to the field, and therefore no way of predicting what we will discuss. It does seem relevant to me, however, to reference three things which will have a moderating influence on our reflections.

First, obviously, we're all Americanists, and we see American experience through a wide range of methodological frames; so we'll be discussing American experience and culture via the texts and media that we have found important in our own research.

Second, we probably need to consider where American Studies fits in the general academic scheme of things. Many of us are working in fields other than American Studies, or even American History; I myself make my living by teaching composition, but I see myself as teaching American experience. So what does being an Americanist mean, in scholarly and practical terms?

Third, we're online scholars, using this great catalyst, the Internet, to get a grip on the information revolution that surrounds us. Inevitably, because this revolution becomes a part of culture and because we are relying on it, we'll find ourselves talking about ways and means, search methods, databases, resources, etc. We may also talk about the culture of electronic communication, whether it privileges gender, and so on.

This is just to give people a taste of things to come. Once again, once a conversation takes shape via email, it breaks boundaries and continually acquires new forms. There is no knowing what direction our online reflections will take us.

3) ORGANIZATION OF THE LIST: H-AMSTDY, in common with other H-RETS listservs, has a Board of Directors. The Board will serve a variety of purposes, such as coming up with suggestions for improving H-AMSTDY's modus operandi, procuring reviewers for new scholarly books, and reporters for conferences, and contributing on issues raised in list discussions.

Everyone, however, should understand what the main role of the Board will eventually be. **H-NET seeks to introduce historians to the benefits of e-mail and the resources of the Internet**, and the Board of H-AMSTDY will be seeking to do the same for Americanists. In due course this will involve the Board in casting a large trawl to draw in those still skeptical, and in publicizing and seeking funding for H-AMSTDY.

The Internet originated as a Cold War military grid, was adapted for use by computer techies (who also wrote the language we use to access it), and is only now coming to be taken seriously by Humanities scholars. **There are still, as you know, an awful lot of academics who think email is a "game" played by people who lack true scholarly ability.** Over the course of time, the Board of H-AMSTDY will be invited to work in unison to spread the word, convince others, and establish legitimacy for scholarly electronic lists such as this one.

As you may imagine, running a listserv is not entirely expense-free. And running a listserv that tries,
as H-AMSTDY will, to establish an information center for those in the field may prove somewhat costly. **H-AMSTDY will need funding:** to pay for postage when dealing with organizations (such as ASA) not connected to email, to pay for materials that cannot be sent via the Internet, to maintain the H-NET fileserver, to pay reviewers for books reviewed, etc. Board members, in time, will look out for likely sources of funding, and will work together to procure it; it is also very much in the interests of the list's scholarly status to be a funded entity.

Initial inquiries to the American Studies Association about getting publicity for H-AMSTDY in the ASA Newsletter produced a favorable response; I'll be able to report more on this as time goes on. But we should not stop at the ASA; all organizations, scholarly presses and foundations which can be of help to American Studies should be approached.

4) **BEGINNING:** OK! Enough! I'll stop my motormouth now and invite you to start submitting stuff. As I say, contributions get sent to me first; I'll review your post, trim the header and forward it to the list. In the unlikely event that there is some problem, I'll be in touch with you by private email. Depending on when I log in (which is often, since I'm a confessed Internet junkie 8-)), subscribers should get your post not later than twelve hours after you mail it out.

Whatever you want to start off with will be fine, but if I may make a suggestion: why don't you all submit who you are, what interests you in American Studies, and what you'd like to see happening on the list. I saw this done on another list last year, with powerful results.

I think you'll see that if fifty or so of us start off that way, there'll be enough to get a conversation going by the time we're through. Also perhaps it would help rid us of the fear of publicly goofing.

And, of course (finally!), please feel free to followup to anything I said in this post. I would hope you'd find some material for threads here too.

Looking forward to hearing from you all!

Jeff Finlay

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