

American Studies 335
New England
Roger Williams University
CAS 228
M, W, & F 11:00-12:00
Fall Semester, 2008

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Week of November 3

For *Monday, November 3*

Read, in *Hansen*,

Review Chapter 2. "I Never Forget What I Remember" pp. 29 - 51
Chapter 3, "Unbosom your Heart: Friendship and the Construction of Gender" pp. 52 - 78

Hansen's observations in Chapter 3 explores a concept we neglect too often, in my humble opinion: *Friendship*. The idea of *gender construction* is interesting. More typically we think of gender as something we're born with. You'll notice, however, that what Hansen is interested in primarily is the way gender *behavior* is constructed. What kinds of expression of friendship and affection were tolerated and indeed encouraged in New England communities, and how were these expressions different, depending on the gender involved.

- Note that there are at least three different types of friendships to consider: friendships between women, friendships between men, and friendships between men and women.
- Note, too, that there seem to be some class and race differences in the ways friendship was expressed.
- Finally, think about what friendships mean to us today? Have our concepts of friendship and the value of friendship changed in any ways? How about the ways we express friendship?

For *Wednesday, November 5* (assuming we're not dead to the world from Election activities)

Read, in *Hansen*,

Chapter 4, "Social Work: Visiting and the Creation of Community" pp. 79 - 113

Regarding Chapter 4, one of the things we observe is that friendships were formed and sustained through working together. Amongst the elite and members of the upper middle class these projects took place within the confines of the houses of neighbors. Hansen will look at the situation amongst men and women (though women, primarily) of the working classes. Do these patterns change significantly? What should we understand about the idea of "visiting"? How does the transient

labor of domestic workers and the intrusion of the factory system as it develops in larger communities affect the ability to make and hold friends?

For *Friday, November 7*

Read, in *Hansen*,

Chapter 5, "True Opinion, Clear of Polish"

114 - 136

Gossip may be one of the most universal forms of human behavior. If it is so pervasive, it must have some social purpose, even if persons generally condemn its practice. Hansen looks at this question from a sociological and anthropological point of view, and this forms the focus of Chapter 5. We'll want to look at the content of gossip, at the reasons why reputation was so jealously guarded, at what kind of sanctions arose against persons based on "community juries," and how all of these tended to enforce the solidarity of communities.

Communities as close knit as New England communities are become subject to all sorts of stresses. Often these stresses lead to varieties of anti-social behavior: drunkenness, abuse of children and spouses, and the like. Against those forces of disintegration are arraigned informal practices like gossip and formal social institutions like the Church. We'll look at religion next week.

I'm working on sorting out your legends and folk tales choices. If I get that completed by Monday, I may modify this schedule a little, just to get us into storytelling mode. What I'd like is for each class member to present their selection using about 5 minutes, more or less, leaving about 2 minutes for comments and observations from the rest of us. The focus will be on what the stories reveal about New