



## **MUSICALS AND “AMERICA”**

Radio-Television-Film 345

Women’s & Gender Studies 340 / American Studies 321

### **Fall 2021 Syllabus**

Class meetings: 11am-12:15pm Tuesdays and Thursdays, CMA 3.116

Screenings: 5-7:30pm Tuesdays, CMA 3.120

**Professor:** Dr. Mary Beltrán

**Email:** [mary.beltran@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:mary.beltran@austin.utexas.edu)

**Office hours:** 3:30-4:30pm Tues, 9:30-10:30am Thurs, and by appt. **at CMA 6.124B or outside, at a table in the CMA Plaza**

**OR - Virtual hours:** 10:30-12 Weds on Zoom at <https://utexas.zoom.us/j/89267755064>.

You can use Professor Beltrán’s [Google Signup Sheet](#) to reserve a time (& it’s okay also to drop in).

**Teaching Assistant:** Nina L. Barker

**Email:** [nlbarker@utexas.edu](mailto:nlbarker@utexas.edu), **Office hours:** By appointment

### **Course Description**

The American musical has long been a popular genre through which storytellers, performers and audiences reimagine who we are and how the nation defines itself with respect to norms of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class and citizenship. It also has been a forum for stories about social issues of the day, with its conventions as popular entertainment allowing boundary-pushing content to be given voice. **Musicals and “America”** surveys the genre’s history and evolution, with an emphasis on musical films and television series since the 1950s, and provides tools for critical analysis of musical narratives, performances involving song and/or dance, and the representation of identities across the decades. We’ll watch a number of important films and television series in this history (including *Hamilton*, *Stormy Weather*, *Funny Girl*, *Hair*, *Zoot Suit*, and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*), and read and respond to scholarship on Hollywood and Broadway musicals, with a focus on the ways in which cinematic renditions of song and dance make meaning.

**Course Objectives.** *By the end of the semester, students will:*

- Understand the cultural context of many iconic film, theater, and television musicals;
- Gain a deeper understanding of how musicals as a genre have both reflected and challenged hegemonies in American culture and offered or denies a voice to particular social groups across time;
- Recognize how film and media industry shifts have influenced the evolution of the genre;
- Strengthen critical analysis, research, and writing skills, and understanding of how in-depth historical research can enrich our appreciation of artistic works.

### **Course Materials**

Our readings will be compiled in a two-part course reader for sale at Jenn's Copies, 2518 Guadalupe Street. They have an online shopping link at <https://jennscopies.com>.

A few of the readings will be available in PDF form to print from our "Modules" page on Canvas. The assigned readings are meant to be read before class; please come in prepared to discuss them. A few readings may be substituted or added during the semester, while the amount of reading will stay roughly the same. The weekly screenings also are required course materials.

### **Assignments and Grade Breakdown**

#### **Participation – 26%.**

Participation includes active engagement in and regular attendance in class. Regularly showing up for class, speaking up from time to time, and participating actively in activities will earn you a high grade in Participation. I strongly encourage you to share your thoughts on the course material, get actively involved, and get to know your classmates.

Your attendance will affect this grade as well. Everyone also has **three** "freebie" unexcused absences that will not affect your grade. Each unexcused absence after that will result in a half letter grade off the Participation grade. (See Attendance for more on excused and unexcused absences).

#### **Discussion Posts and Responses, 24% (8 x 3% each).**

Discussion is an opportunity for you to reflect and comment regarding your own thoughts on the course content and to engage with your classmates. You'll be asked to write discussion posts (a short paragraph or up to a page of writing) in response to prompts on the reading, screenings and course material, and also to briefly respond to **two** classmates' posts. You're expected to take part in the online discussions **8 out of the 11 possible weeks** during the semester (in other words, you can skip three weeks). You'll be graded on a 3-point scale for your posts, plus 2 points possible for your responses, for a total of 5 points.

#### **Film (or Television) Critiques (4-5 Pages): 25% (x 2 @10% and 15%).**

Using class readings, discuss one of musicals that we've watched for class or a musical that is directly related to a class screening in academic essay format. Make a claim regarding how U.S. identities are constructed in this film or television episode, providing historical, industrial, visual, musical, and/or narrative support for your arguments.

**Final Paper or Project (If a paper, 8-10 pages): 25%.** Choose a film musical or television musical episode that we have watched and focused on in class or from a list I'll provide and write about

several different levels (industrial, historical, representation, generic, musical, performance) at which it engages themes we have begun to address together. For example, this includes but is not limited to assimilation, otherness, cultural citizenship, the American Dream, proscribed gender roles, racelessness, and hybridity. Note: A creative project based on your research, such as a video or photo essay, is possible to propose instead of a paper. Regardless of the project, part of your grade will include a brief presentation during the last week of class on your work in progress. The papers and projects will be due on a date during Finals Week to be announced later.

## Class Policies

**Grading scale.** Final grades will be based on a standard scale and will include + and – grades: A (93%+), A- (90-92%), B+ (88-89%), B (83-87%), B- (80-82%), C+ (78-79%), C (73-77%), C- (70-72%), D+ (68-69%), D (60-67%), and F (less than 60%).

### **Late assignments:**

For purposes of fairness for all students, you will be given a reasonable amount of time to complete all assignments. Late assignments are typically subject to a penalty of a half-letter grade per day late; however, the penalty may be waived during some circumstances. If you find yourself struggling with unexpected personal events, please keep let me or your TA know.

**Attendance:** Attendance will be taken during our class times. Excused absences include absences discussed in advance for religious holidays, absences related to serious illness or crises in your home, and other approved absences. *Please let me know via email* if you have to miss a class; I'll let you know if it can be excused. If you miss an assignment due to an excused absence, you'll be given an opportunity to complete it within a reasonable time afterward. Each student is granted **three freebie** unexcused absences, *after which your participation grade will be lowered by a half letter grade for **each** unexcused absence.*

**Mutual respect, and Safe space in our classroom:** Everyone's participation is important to what I consider a successful class. I strongly encourage you to share your reactions throughout the semester. Please keep in mind that everyone comes from a wide variety of backgrounds and histories and help to make this a comfortable place for students who have *no* familiarity with the topics we discuss. Everyone is here to learn. Aim to engage with each other with openness, patience, careful listening, and mutual respect. Part of my job is to keep our class a safe space for everyone; please let me know if you have any concerns about interactions that take place.

**Name and Personal Pronoun Preferences.** Class rosters are provided to me with your legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by a name that is different from what appears on the official roster, and by the gender pronouns you use (she/he/they, etc). Please advise me of this preference early in the semester.

**Classroom Safety and COVID-19.** Sadly, the pandemic is not yet behind us. To help preserve our in-person learning environment, the university recommends the following: Adhere to university [mask guidance](#). I strongly encourage the wearing of masks and social distancing in the classroom and screening room.

[Vaccinations are widely available](#), free, and not billed to health insurance. The vaccine will help protect against the transmission of the virus to others and reduce serious symptoms in those who are not vaccinated.

[Proactive Community Testing](#) remains an important part of the university's efforts to protect our community. Tests are fast and free.

Visit the [Protect Texas Together](#) web pages for more information.

### **Academic Honesty:**

Work turned in by a student should be solely their own work. Any time an outside source is utilized in a paper and is not properly acknowledged, this is a form of plagiarism. Plagiarism, cheating on an assignment or exam, or other academic misconduct will not be tolerated and results in severe sanctions, which can include failing the course or expulsion from the university. Please don't put yourself in this position. For more information on scholastic dishonesty, please visit the Student Judicial services Web site at <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs>.

**Title IX Reporting.** Title IX is a federal law that protects against sex and gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual misconduct, dating/domestic violence and stalking at federally funded educational institutions. UT Austin is committed to fostering a learning and working environment free from discrimination in all its forms. When sexual misconduct occurs in our community, the university can:

1. Intervene to prevent harmful behavior from continuing or escalating.
2. Provide support and remedies to students and employees who have experienced harm or have become involved in a Title IX investigation.
3. Investigate and discipline violations of the university's relevant policies.

Faculty members are considered "Responsible Employees" or "Mandatory Reporters," which means that they are required to report Title IX violations to the Title IX Coordinator. I am a Responsible Employee and must report any Title IX-related incidents that are disclosed in class or to me personally. If you want to speak with someone for support or remedies without making an official report to the university, email [advocate@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:advocate@austin.utexas.edu). For more information about options and resources, visit the Title IX Office website or contact them at [titleix@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:titleix@austin.utexas.edu).

## **STUDENT RESOURCES**

### **Writing Support:**

If you have difficulties with writing, I encourage you to seek help from the Moody College Writing Support Program or the University Writing Center. The Moody Writing Support Program offers online assistance and some in-person appointments without charge to students seeking to improve their writing in all fields of communication, including film and television studies. Students may book half-hour appointments at <https://sites.utexas.edu/moodywriting/> during all stages of the writing process. The University Writing Center, located in Learning Commons, PCL 2.330, also offers individualized online assistance to students who want to improve their writing skills. There is no charge; students can make appointments at 512-471-6222 or at [uwc.utexas.edu](http://uwc.utexas.edu).

### **Counseling Support:**

Taking care of your general well-being is an important step in being a successful student. If understandable stress in response to current events, racing thoughts, feeling unmotivated or anything else is getting in your way, there are options available for support.

For immediate support:

- Contact the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC). They are located on the fifth floor of the Student Services Building, 100 W. Dean Keaton Street, and are open M-F 8-5pm | 512-471-3515 | [cmhc.utexas.edu/](http://cmhc.utexas.edu/). Tele-sessions and in-person sessions.
- CMHC Crisis Line: 24/7 | 512.471.2255 | [cmhc.utexas.edu/24hourcounseling.html](http://cmhc.utexas.edu/24hourcounseling.html)

I aim to offer an accessible and inclusive learning environment. Please let me know if you experience any barriers to learning so I can work with you to ensure you have equal opportunity to participate fully in this course. If you are a student with a disability, or think you may have a disability, and need accommodations, please contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). See SSD's website for more information: <http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>. If you are already registered with SSD, please share your Accommodation Letter to me as early as possible so we can discuss your approved accommodations and needs in this course.

Please also inform me early in the semester if you are dealing with another issue that could affect your performance in class or your work outside of class. I will do my best to work with you.

## Semester Schedule

### Week 1: Introductions (Th 8/26)

Reading (8/26): Course syllabus

### Week 2: What is a Musical? (T 8/31 & Th 9/2)

Reading (T 8/31): Desiree Garcia, "Introduction," *The Movie Musical*; Steven Cohan, "Analyzing Musicals" (67-91)

8/31 Screening: *Rent* (Chris Columbus 2005. 2hr, 15min. Adapted from 1996 Broadway version: book, lyrics and music by Jonathan Larson)

Reading (Th 9/2): Cohan, "Analyzing Musicals" (91-107); Mark Shields, "'Bohemia is Dead': *Rent* Celebrating Life in the Face of Death"

### Weekend: Discussion 1

### Week 3: The Musical and Whiteness (T 9/7 & Th 9/9)

Reading (T 9/7): Warren Hoffman, "All Singin'! All Dancin'! All White People?"

9/9 Screening: *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1952. 103 min.); *Illusions* (Julie Dash, 1982. 34 min.)

Reading (Th 9/9): Carol Clover, "Dancin' in the Rain;" Wes Felton, "Rewriting Hollywood History in Julie Dash's *Illusions*"



## Weekend: Discussion 2

### Week 4: Early Musicals' Mythologies of Gender and Sexuality (T 9/14 & Th 9/16)

Reading (T 9/14): Stacy Wolf, "Gender and Sexuality"

9/14 Screening: *Swing Time* (George Stevens, 1936), 103 min.

Reading (Th 9/16): Margaret T. McFadden, "'Shall We Dance?' Gender and Class Conflict in Astaire-Rogers Dance Musicals"

## Weekend: Discussion 3

### Week 5: Performing & Disavowing Blackness (T 9/21 & Th 9/23)

Watch before Tuesday: excerpts from *Show Boat* (James Whale, 1936. Adapted from 1927 Broadway version: music by Jerome Kern, lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II and P.G. Wodehouse, book by Hammerstein II)

Reading (T 9/21): Lauren Berlant, "Pax Americana: The Case of *Show Boat*"

9/21 Screening: *Stormy Weather* (1943, Andrew L. Stone)

Reading (Th 9/23): Susie Trenka, "Appreciation, Appropriation, Assimilation: *Stormy Weather* and the Hollywood History of Black Dance" (pp. 123-158). Optional: Kathryn Fuller-Seeley, "Rochester and the Revenge of Uncle Tom in the 1940s and 1950s"

Dr. Kathy Fuller-Seeley guest lecture

## Weekend: Discussion 4

### Week 6: Constructions of Latinidad & Whiteness (T 9/28 & Th 9/30)

Reading (T 9/28): Excerpt, Brian Eugenio Herrera, "Conga! Latin Numbers;" Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez, excerpt, "Carmen Miranda and Desi Arnaz"

9/28 Screening: *West Side Story* (Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins, 1961; adapted from 1957 Broadway version: book by Arthur Laurents, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, music by Leonard Bernstein)

Reading (Th 9/30): Brian Eugenio Herrera, "How the Sharks Became Puerto Rican"

## Film Critique 1 due

### **Week 7: 1960s Musicals and the Single Woman (T 10/5 & Th 10/7)**

Reading (T 10/5): Stacy Wolf, "The 1960s: 'If My Friends Could See Me Now'"

10/5 Screening: *Funny Girl* (1968, William Wyler; adapted from 1964 Broadway version: book by Isobel Lennart, lyrics by Bob Stennart, music by Julez Styne)

Reading (Th 10/7): Pamela Robertson Wojcik, "The Streisand Musical"

### **Weekend: Discussion 5**

### **Week 8: Social and Rock'n'Roll Revolutions (T 10/12 & Th 10/14)**

Reading (T 10/12): Barry Keith Grant, "The Classical Hollywood Musical and the 'Problem' of Rock'n'Roll"

10/12 Screening: *Hair* (Milos Forman, 1979. 121 min. Adapted from 1967 Broadway version: music by Galt MacDermot, lyrics and book by Gerome Rogni and James Rado)

Reading (Th 10/14): Andrew Buchman, "Fidelity Versus Freedom in Milos Forman's Film Version of *Hair*"

### **Weekend: Discussion 6**

### **Week 9: Affirming Jewish, Chicana/o, & Black Identity (T 10/19 & Th 10/21)**

Reading (T 10/19):

10/19 Screening: *Zoot Suit* (Luis Valdez, 1981. 1hr 43 min. Adapted from 1979 Broadway version: music by Daniel Valdez and Lalo Guerrero, lyrics by Lalo Guerrero, book by Luis Valdez)

Reading (Th 10/21): Desirée Garcia, "'Ease on Down the Road': Folk Musicals and the Ethnic Revival: *The Wiz* and *Zoot Suit*"

### **Weekend: Discussion 7**

### **Week 10: Dance as a Narrative Agent, and New Hollywood Danceploitation Films (T 10/26 & Th 10/28)**

Reading (T 10/26): J.P. Telotte, "The New Hollywood Musical;" Angela McRobbie, "Dance Narratives and Fantasies of Achievement"

10/26 Screening: *Saturday Night Fever* (John Badham, 1977)

Reading (Th 10/28): Jenny Oyallon-Koloski, "Danceploitation, Musical Disruption, and Synergy in *Saturday Night Fever*, *Flashdance*, and *Breakin'*"

### **Weekend: Discussion 8**

### **Week 11: Mixed Ideologies of Ensemble-cast Musicals (T 11/2 & Th 11/4)**

Reading (T 11/2): Warren Hoffman, "*A Chorus Line*: The Benneton of Broadway Musicals"

11/2 Screening: *A Chorus Line* (Richard Attenborough, 1985. 118 min. Adapted from 1975 Broadway version: music by Marvin Hamlisch, lyrics by Edward Kleban, book by James Kirkwood Jr. and Nicholas Dante) OR *Step Up 2 The Streets*

Reading (Th 11/4): Mary Beltrán, "Hip Hop Hearts Ballet: Utopic Multiculturalism and the *Step Up* Dance Films"

### **Weekend: Discussion 9**

### **Week 12: Television Musicals as Feminist Interventions? (T 11/9 & Th 11/11)**

Reading (T 11/9): Jessica Sternfeld, "Everything's Coming Up Kurt: The Broadway Song in *Glee*"

11/19 Screening: *Glee*, "Born This Way" (S2 Ep 18, Created by Ian Brennan, Brian Falchuck, and Ryan Murphy, Fox 2009-2015); *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, "That Text Was Not Meant for Josh!" (S1, Ep 11. Rachel Bloom, The CW, 2015-2019)

Reading (Th 11/11): Jessica Ford and Phoebe Macrossan, "The Musical Number as Feminist Intervention in *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*"

### **Film/Television Critique 2 due**

### **Week 13: Challenging Millennial Norms (T 11/16 & Th 11/18)**

Watch before Tuesday: *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (John Cameron Mitchell, 2001) 92 min; trailer *The Prom* (Ryan Murphy, 2020)

Reading (T 11/16): Matthew Henry, "One Inch Mound of Flesh: Troubling Queer Identity in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*"

11/16 Screening: Trailer, *In the Heights* (John M. Chu, 2021); *Hamilton* (Thomas Kail, 2020. 160 minutes. Adapted from 2015 Broadway version: music, lyrics, and book by Lin-Manuel Miranda)

Reading (Th 11/18): Elena Machado Sáez, "Blackout on Broadway: Affiliation and audience in *In the Heights* and *Hamilton*"



**Weekend: Discussion 10**

**Week 14: DREAMer Imaginaries (T 11/23)**

Reading (T 11/23): Casey Mecija, "The desert's no home for a rose: Filipinx childhood and music as aesthetic experience"

11/23 screening and discussion: *Yellow Rose* (Diane Paragas, 2017, 94min.)

Thanksgiving holiday, Nov. 24-26
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**Week 15: Class Wrap-up and Presentations (T 11/30 & Th 12/2)**

(T 11/30): **Presentations and Class Wrap-Up**

**This week: Discussion 11**

(Th 12/2): **Presentations and Class Wrap-Up**

<b>Final Papers &amp; Projects: Due during Finals Week, Date TBA</b>
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