



MUSICALS AND “AMERICA”

Radio-Television-Film 345

Theater & Dance 357T / Women’s & Gender Studies 340

Unique #s 09450 / 26087 / 44494

Spring 2024 Syllabus

Class meetings: MWF 9-9:50, CMA 3.120

Screenings: 5-7:30pm Mondays, CMA 3.116

Course Canvas site: <https://utexas.instructure.com/courses/1379775>

Professor: Dr. Mary Beltrán

Office and email: CMA 6.124B, mary.beltran@austin.utexas.edu, or through Canvas, linked above

Office hours: 2-3pm Mondays and 12-2pm Wednesdays at CMA 6.124B, and by appointment.

You can schedule meetings on the [Signup Sheet](#) (meetings on Zoom can be requested) or just drop in when no one else is scheduled. Meetings also can be scheduled at other times 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 race, gender, sexuality, 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 and dance 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 ground-breaking films and television series in this history (including *Rent*, *Funny Girl*, *Zoot Suit*, and *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*), and read and respond to scholarship on Hollywood, Broadway and television musicals, with a focus on the ways in which cinematic renditions of song and dance make meaning.

This course carries UT's Cultural Diversity in the U.S. Flag, which means that it is meant to increase your familiarity with the cultural experiences and perspectives of marginalized groups in the United States as well as how culture works within a social and political context. We will critically study how African Americans, Latinos, and other Americans of color and how women and LGBTQ individuals have been depicted in and have participated in the creation of theatrical, film, and television musicals in the last century. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from the study of and reflection on these contextualized cultural experiences.

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 denied 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 copy of the course reader also will be placed on reserve for two-hour checkout at the Perry Castañeda Library (PCL). Please contact me any time you are not able to access the class readings; I'll help you out.

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 – 21%.

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 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. Excused absences, such as for illness, will not affect your grade, however! Please keep in touch when you have to miss class. (See Attendance for more information).

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 about 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 10 possible weeks** during the semester (in other words, you can skip

two weeks). You'll be graded on a 5-point scale for your posts, including 2 points possible for your responses to classmates.

Two Film (or Television) Critiques (worth 15% and 15%), 30%

Using class readings and lectures, you'll be asked to write two short papers in academic essay format about film or television musicals that we've watched, providing historical, industrial, visual, musical, and/or narrative support for your arguments. More details will be provided soon.

Final Paper or Final Project (Both options to entail the equivalent of the research and writing of a 6-9 page paper): 25%:

Paper or Photo/Video Essay Option: Choose a film musical or television musical episode since 1960. After careful analysis of the musical and of reviews of the musical published when it was exhibited to the public, present your interpretation of how American identities and social norms of the era are constructed in the film or TV episode, providing visual, aural, narrative, cinematic, and historical support for your argument. For example, you might focus on how this musical narrates ideas about assimilation, proscribed gender roles of a certain era, cultural citizenship, sexual identities, the American Dream, or gentrification. Your output can be a paper, or a video essay or photo essay. Draw on **at least two class readings and at least three reviews** of the film or television musical in your work, being sure to quote and properly cite your sources. Feel free to also draw on and cite class lectures. You may find it helpful to look for a source or two on the production of the musical as well. Be sure to cite your sources, and to include a properly formatted Works Cited page.

Project Option: Based on in-depth research on an "inspiration musical," begin brainstorming a musical narrative of your own. Roughly sketch out the narrative, the primary characters, how musical numbers will be integrated and add to the narrative. Perhaps also write the lyrics for a few songs. Your final output could be in a variety of forms, such as a video, treatment for an original musical, or a photo essay. You should incorporate several (2-3) pages of content that discuss what your research on an inspiration musical or musicals, and how and why it/they inspired your ideas about your musical in progress. Include **at least one class reading, one outside source on the production of the musical(s), and at least three reviews** of the musical(s) in your mentions of your research and the brainstorming of your new musical.

Regardless of whether you complete a paper or a project, part of your grade will include a brief presentation during the last week of class on your work in progress. The final version will be due on a date during Finals Week to be announced later.

Class Policies

Names 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 roster and by the gender pronouns that you use (she/he/they, etc). Please advise me of this preference early in the semester. For instructions on how to add your pronouns and preferred name to your Canvas profile, visit [this site](#).

Grading scale. Final grades will be based on a standard + and – grading scale: A (94%+), A- (90%), B+ (87%), B (84%), B- (80%), C+ (77%), C (74%), C- (70%), D+ (67%), D (64%), D- (50%), and F (less than 60%). I will round up final grades that are .5 and above.

Late assignments: Please communicate with me as soon as possible when you will miss a deadline. In the spirit of fairness to all students, late work is typically subject to a penalty of a **half-letter grade per day late**. Late work will be accepted **up to 10 days** (including weekend days) after a missed deadline, with communication citing a specific plan for submission or need for support in office hours.

Mutual Respect, and Safe Space in our classroom: It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that everyone's learning needs be addressed, and that the diversity that everyone brings to this class can be comfortably expressed and viewed as a resource, strength and benefit to all students.

Everyone's participation is also 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. 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.

Except for approved exceptions, the usage of laptops will not be allowed in class. If taking notes on a computer is important to your learning process, please come talk to me.

Content Warning: Linked to this, some content in this course may include topics that some students find uncomfortable. I'll aim to forewarn you about potentially disturbing content and to create an atmosphere of sensitivity in this regard.

Attendance. Attendance will be taken during our class times. Everyone is granted three freebie unexcused absences, after which your participation grade will be lowered by a half letter grade for each unexcused absence. Please don't hesitate to stay home if you're not feeling well, however! I will always excuse absences for illness and will help you keep up with the course material. Excused absences also include absences discussed in advance for religious holidays, or that happen because of emergencies that arise. *Please let me know via email* if you have to miss a class, and I'll let you know if I'm able to excuse it. If you miss an assignment due to an excused absence, you'll be given an opportunity to complete it within a reasonable time afterward.

Academic Integrity Expectations. Students who violate University rules on academic misconduct are subject to the student conduct process and a potential disciplinary action. A student found responsible for academic misconduct may be assigned both a status sanction and a grade impact for the course. The grade impact could range from a zero on the assignment in question up to a failing grade in the course. A status sanction can range from a probation, deferred suspension and/or dismissal from the University. To learn more about academic integrity standards, tips for avoiding a potential academic misconduct violation, and the overall conduct process, please visit the Student Conduct and Academic Integrity website at: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct>. To learn more about what plagiarism is and how to avoid it, see the Avoiding Plagiarism tutorial developed by the UT Libraries in partnership with the Writing Flag program and Student Judicial

Services. Assignments in this course may be processed by TurnItIn, and other methods may be used to determine if a paper is the student's original work.

Sharing of course materials is also prohibited. No materials, including, but not limited to lecture videos and slides, class hand-outs, and assignment guidelines, may be shared online or with anyone outside of class without explicit, written permission of the instructor.

Title IX Disclosure. Since January 1, 2020, Texas Education Code, Section 51.252 requires all employees of Texas universities, including faculty, to report any information to the Title IX Office regarding sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking that is disclosed to them, whether in writing assignments, class discussions, one-on-one conversations, or third-party reports. The Title IX office has developed supportive ways to respond to a survivor and campus resources to support all impacted by a Title IX incident. If you would like to speak with someone who can provide support or remedies without making a report to the university, please email supportandresources@austin.utexas.edu. For more about reporting options and resources, visit <http://www.titleix.utexas.edu>, or contact the Title IX Office at titleix@austin.utexas.edu or 512-471-0419. Graduate teaching assistants also are mandatory reporters under Federal Title IX laws required to report a wide range of behaviors we refer to as sexual misconduct.

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, in Learning Commons, PCL 2.330, 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.

Sanger Learning Center. Did you know that more than one-third of UT undergraduate students use the Sanger Learning Center each year to improve their academic performance? All students are welcome to take advantage of Sanger Center's classes and workshops, private learning specialist appointments, peer academic coaching, and tutoring for more than 70 courses in 15 different subject areas. For more information, please visit <https://ugs.utexas.edu/slc> or call 512-471-3614.

Student Emergency Services in the Office of the Dean of Students helps students and their families during difficult or emergency situations. Assistance includes outreach, advocacy, intervention, support, and referrals to relevant campus and community resources. If you need to be absent from class due to a family emergency, medical or mental health concern, or academic difficulty due to crisis or an emergency situation, you can work with Student Emergency Services. SES will document your situation and notify your professors. Additional information is available at <https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/> or by calling 512-471-5017.

Basic Needs. If you face challenges securing food or housing, it is suggested that you contact the Dean of Students Office for support. UT maintains the UT Outpost, which is a free on-campus food pantry and career closet.

Counseling Support: All of us benefit from support during times of struggle. Know you are not alone. If you or anyone you know is experiencing symptoms of stress, anxiety, depression, academic concerns, loneliness, difficulty sleeping, or any other concern impacting your wellbeing –you are strongly encouraged to connect with the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC). The CMHC provides a wide variety of mental health services to all UT students including crisis services, counseling services with immediate support and well-being resources. Additionally, CARE Counselors are located within the academic schools and colleges. These counselors get to know the concerns that are unique to their college’s students. For more information on CMHC, visit <https://cmhc.utexas.edu> or call 512-471-3515.

University Health Services (UHS) is an on-campus high-quality medical facility providing care to all UT students. Services offered by UHS include general medicine, urgent care, a 24/7 nurse advice line, gynecology, sports medicine, physical therapy, lab and radiology services, COVID-19 testing and vaccinations and much more. For information, visit <https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu> or call 512-471-4955.

I am committed to creating an accessible and inclusive learning environment consistent with university policy and federal and state law. 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 **Disability & Access (D&A)**. Please refer to the D&A website at <http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/> for more information. If you are already registered with D&A, please deliver your Accommodation Letter to me as early as possible in the semester 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, and What is a Musical? (W 1/17 & F 1/19)

Reading (W): Course syllabus

Reading (F): Desiree Garcia, “Introduction,” *The Movie Musical*; Steven Cohan, “Analyzing Musicals” (pp. 67-81)

Week 2: Musicals and National Identities (M 1/22, W 1/24, & F 1/26)

Reading (M): Cohan, “Analyzing Musicals” (pp. 100-107); Phoebe Rumsey, “Reading Dance”

1/22 Screening: *Rent* (Chris Columbus 2005. 2hr, 15min. Adapted from 1996 Broadway version: book, lyrics and music by Jonathan Larson)

Reading (W): Mark Shields, "'Bohemia is Dead': *Rent* Celebrating Life in the Face of Death"

Friday (before class): Discussion 1 posts

Week 3: Musicals and Whiteness (M 1/29, W 1/31, & F 2/2)

Reading (M & W): Warren Hoffman, "All Singin'! All Dancin'! All White People?"

1/29 Screening: *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1952), 103 min.

Reading (W): Carol Clover, "Dancin' in the Rain"

Friday (before class): Discussion 2 posts

Week 4: Mythologies of Gender and Heterosexuality (M 2/5, W 2/7, & F 2/9)

Reading (M): Stacy Wolf, "Gender and Sexuality"

2/5 Screening: *Swing Time* (George Stevens, 1936), 103 min.

Reading (W): Margaret T. McFadden, "'Shall We Dance?' Gender and Class Conflict in Astaire-Rogers Dance Musicals" (pp. 678-691)

Friday (before class): Discussion 3 posts

Week 5: Performing & Disavowing Blackness (M 2/12, W 2/14, & F 2/16)

Reading (M): Lauren Berlant, "Pax Americana: The Case of *Show Boat*." Watch: 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)

2/12 Screening: *Stormy Weather* (Andrew L. Stone, 1943), 78 min.

Reading (W): Susie Trenka, "Appreciation, Appropriation, Assimilation: *Stormy Weather* and the Hollywood History of Black Dance" (pp. 123-158)

Week 6: Constructions of Latinidad & Whiteness (M 2/19, W 2/21, & F 2/23)

Reading (M): Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez, "Carmen Miranda and Desi Arnaz" (focus on pages 21-43)

Paper 1 Due

2/19 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). **4:55pm-7:25pm**

Reading (W): Brian Eugenio Herrera, "How the Sharks Became Puerto Rican"

Friday (before class): Discussion 4

Week 7: 1960s Musicals and the Single Woman (M 2/26, W 2/28, & F 3/1)

Reading (M): Stacy Wolf, "The 1960s: 'If My Friends Could See Me Now'"

2/26 Screening: *Funny Girl* (1968, William Wyler. Adapted from 1964 Broadway version: book by Isobel Lennart, lyrics by Bob Stennart, music by Julez Styne), **4:55-7:25pm**

Reading (W): Pamela Robertson Wojcik, "The Streisand Musical"

Friday (before class): Discussion 5

Week 8: Dance as a Narrative Agent, and New Hollywood Danceploitation Films (M 3/4, W 3/6, & F 3/8)

Reading (M): Angela McRobbie, "Dance Narratives and Fantasies of Achievement"

3/4 Screening: *Saturday Night Fever* (John Badham, 1977), 1hr, 59 min.

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

Friday: Final Paper Proposal Worksheet due

Friday or Saturday: Discussion 6

Week of March 11-15: Spring Break! Enjoy
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Week 9: The Folk Musical and Jewish, Chicana/o, & Black Identity (M 3/18, W 3/20, & F 3/22)

Reading (M): Desirée Garcia, "'Ease on Down the Road': Folk Musicals and the Ethnic Revival: *The Wiz* and *Zoot Suit*," pp. 152-170

3/18 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 (W): Garcia, "'Ease on Down the Road" pp. 170-184; Rosa Linda Fregoso, "Intertextuality and Cultural Identity in *Zoot Suit* (1981) and *La Bamba* (1987), pp. 21-38

Friday (before class): Discussion 7

Week 10: Mixed Ideologies of Ensemble-cast Musicals (M 3/25, W 3/27, & F 3/29)

Reading (M): Adrienne Gibbons Oehlers, "Ensembles in Motion"

Paper 2 due

3/25 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)

Reading (W): Warren Hoffman, "*A Chorus Line*: The Benneton of Broadway Musicals"

Friday, 3/29. **Class will not meet. Use time to work on Final Paper**

Week 11: LGBTQ+ and Non-Binary Gender Identities (M 4/1, W 4/3, & F 4/5)

Reading (M): James Lovelock, "'What about Love?': Claiming and Re-claiming LGBTQ+ Spaces in Twenty-first Century Musical Theatre"

4/1 Screening: *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (John Cameron Mitchell, 2001, 92 min. Adapted from 1998 Off-Broadway version: book by John Cameron Mitchell, lyrics and music by Stephen Trask)

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

Friday (before class): Discussion 8

Week 12: Television Musicals (M 4/8, W 4/10, & F 4/12)

Reading (M): Elizabeth M. Downey, "*Glee*, Flash Mobs, and the Creation of Heightened Realities." Optional: Mary Jo Lodge, "'Beyond Jumping the Shark': The New Television Musical"

4/8 Screening: *Glee* "Dream On" (S1, Ep 19, Ryan Murphy, Brad Falchuk, and Ian Brennan, 2010); *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, "Josh Just Happens to Live Here!" (S1, Ep 1. Rachel Bloom, 2015)

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

Friday (before class): Discussion 9

Week 13: Post-Millennial Musicals and Lin-Manuel Miranda (M 4/15, W 4/17, & F 4/19)

Reading (M): Elizabeth Titrington Craft, "Can We 'Leave Behind the World We Know': Exploring Race and Ethnicity in the Musicals of Lin-Manuel Miranda"

4/15 Screening: Class's choice: *Hamilton: An American Musical* (Thomas Kail, 2020, 2hrs 40 min. Adapted from 2015 Broadway version: book, music and lyrics by Lin Manuel-Miranda), OR *In The Heights* (John M. Chu, 2021, 2hrs, 23 min. Adapted from 2008 Broadway version: book by Quiara Alegría Hudes, music and lyrics by Lin-Manuel Miranda).

Reading (W): Marvin McAllister, "Toward a More Perfect Hamilton;" *New York Times* staff, 'In The Heights and Colorism'

Friday, 4/19: Class will not meet. **Watch video lecture and complete worksheet** for attendance credit

Week 14: Immigrant & DREAMer Imaginaries (M 4/22, W 4/24, & F 4/26)

Reading (M): **TBD**

4/22 Screening: *Yellow Rose* (Diane Paragas, 2017, 94min.)

Reading (W): Casey Mecija, "The desert's no home for a rose: Filipinx childhood and music as aesthetic experience"

Before Friday: Discussion 10

Week 15: Presentations of Final Projects in Progress / Class wrap-up (M 4/29)

Reading (M): **Presentations, Part 1**

Screening time 4/29: **Presentations, Part 2**

<p>Final Papers & Projects Due: By midnight, Friday, May 3</p>
