

AMERICAN STUDIES 370 / HISTORY 350R/WGS 340
 American Popular Culture: 1682-Present
 FALL 2012
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 T 5:00-8:00 PM
 GEA 114

Instructor: Dr. Janet M. Davis
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 Office Hours: Wednesdays, 9:00 AM-12:00 PM

This course fulfills a Writing Flag and the Cultural Diversity in the United States Flag.

Scope of the course: In 1682, the first American bestseller was published. Audiences in the American colonies and in England devoured Mary Rowlandson's breathless account of her harrowing experiences as a captive of the Narragansett and Nipmunk Indians during King Philip's War in *The Narrative of the Captivity and the Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*. Taking a long, historical view, this course explores the evolution of American popular culture and its relationship to national consolidation (and at times, disunion) over the last 330 years. Starting with oral, religious, print, and live performance traditions during the colonial, early national, and antebellum periods, this course will consider the cultural impact of new technologies such as steam power, the railroad, photography, recorded sound, celluloid, the electronic transmission of moving images (i.e. television), and the internet. Throughout the semester, we will stress the centrality of race, gender, and class in shaping the production and content of popular culture, modes of popular representation, the composition of popular audiences, types of reception, and the ways in which people have used pop cultural forms as a claim to citizenship.

Class Format: This is a discussion seminar, but each class will contain some sort of mini-lecture component—either you or I will take the stage in this capacity. I will present historical overviews of specific forms of popular culture, such as the rise of photography; additionally, I will also discuss pop cultural theorists, such as bell hooks, Antonio Gramsci, Raymond Williams, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Michel Foucault, and Lawrence Levine. These brief introductions to key theorists will help you understand the conceptual and the methodological tools people use to study popular cultural history.

Requirements: Mandatory attendance, active participation in the discussion—including responding to select discussion questions from your peers, completion of all reading and writing assignments; in-class presentation; and a take-home final essay examination.

Attendance Policy: If you are absent, you must tell me IN ADVANCE—either in person, by telephone, or via email. If you have THREE UNEXCUSED ABSENCES, your grade will be lowered by a full letter grade for each subsequent absence.

Grade Breakdown:

Discussion—Includes your class presentation: 25%
 Five sets of study questions during the semester (3-5 questions per set): 15%
 Paper Draft (5 pages for completion credit grade): 10%
 Revised Paper (5 pages for a letter grade): 15%
 Final Take-Home Essay (7-10 pages): 35%

Grading Scale: A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; B+: 87-89; B: 83-86; B-: 80-82; C+: 77-79; C: 73-76; C-: 70-72; D+: 67-69; D: 63-66; D-: 60-62; F: 0-59

Discussion Format: Be prepared to discuss and analyze the historical significance of the reading assignment for each class. Occasionally, we will break into smaller groups to analyze specific cultural objects in relation to the reading assignments, lectures, and larger course themes. For example, we will study actual copies of *Ms. Magazine* when we discuss specific chapters of Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*. You will also engage in periodic free-write sessions in small groups that you will share with your classmates as part of the discussion. In all discussions, please be prepared to make historical connections across assignments and across historical periods.

Study Questions Format: 3-5 questions per reading assignment of your choice, due at the beginning of the class date on which the reading is assigned. Please note that you may write only twice on the same author. Here are some suggested guidelines to use in forming your questions: 1) What sources does the author use to make her/his analysis? 2) How is the work organized—chronologically and/or thematically? What historical themes does s/he explore? 3) Does the author appear to have any political bias or specific political agenda in writing this work? 4) What is the author's argument? 5) What types of historical and/or thematic connections can you make between this work and other reading assignments? In all cases, if you quote from an assignment, please provide a page number after your quoted material in parenthesis. The final day to submit your last set of study questions is in class on December 4.

Class Presentation Format: During the semester, you will make a short (5-10 minute) presentation on a topic of your choosing related to "Pop Culture in the News." In your presentation, you should provide a brief overview of your news item, and then you should offer some historical analysis tying your news item to other events and/or themes in the history of American popular culture. Alternatively, you can discuss the historical relevance of your news item to the week's reading assignment. We will set up a presentation schedule on the first day of class. Typically, two students will present each week. Therefore, I urge you to speak to each other in advance, so that you do not replicate each other's presentation topic.

Five-page Paper Structure and Format: You will write a five-page analytic essay on a pop cultural object of your choice. This might be a song, doll, sermon, poem, poster, album cover, Suffragette pin, painting, corset, movie, cartoon, swimsuit, iconic and/or watershed episode of a TV show, piece of AstroTurf, viral YouTube video, fad, meme, etc. You must, however, receive my permission in advance for the object you choose. Your pop cultural object can be from the present day; however, your paper **MUST** contain some historical component. In other words, even if you choose a contemporary object, you must situate its significance in history. For example, if you were to analyze the extraordinarily popular YouTube video "Charlie Bit My Finger—Again!" (clocking in, as of this writing, 475,267,940, unique views) you might think about the video's resonances with other children's pop cultural performances, such as P.T. Barnum's baby contests; the historical invention of modern childhood in the nineteenth and early twentieth century; or, the place of imitation in pop cultural history (mash-ups of the original "Charlie" video abound, including several Auto-tuned versions).

Overall, your essay must be logically organized and supported by at least **five** sources. Only one of your sources can be a website, although scholarly articles downloaded from a research database or an online academic journal are exempt from this rule. You must use the notes and bibliography style that is standard practice in Humanities disciplines. Please see the Chicago Manual of Style format for your citations, which will include either footnotes or endnotes: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

The essay must be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins, twelve-point font, and numbered pages. You should organize the essay in the following manner: 1) An INTRODUCTION, or an overview of your topic, including a thesis statement, which tells your

reader how will interpret the significance of the subject matter of your essay 3) A BODY, comprised of evidence to support your thesis statement 4) A CONCLUSION, which summarizes the body of the paper, reiterating (with different wording) and substantiating the thesis statement. 5) A BIBLIOGRAPHY of your sources that follows page five. In crafting your thesis statement, as well as the body of your analysis, please consider the following questions: 1) What is the historical significance of this object? 2) Why is this object important to the study of popular culture in terms of producers and/or popular audiences? 3) Does this object appeal to a specific market segment? If so, to whom does it appeal? Why?

Your first draft of the five-page paper will be due in class on **October 23**. Your revised version of the paper will be due in class on **November 20**.

Final Take-Home Essay Exam Structure and Format:

You must answer 1 question (choice of 2) using relevant material from the reading assignments, lectures, discussion, and presentations to support your essay. This is an open-book test, in which you integrate the material from lecture, discussion, and the readings into your essay. This essay must not exceed ten pages. It must be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins and twelve-point font. Your essay must include an INTRODUCTION, including a THESIS STATEMENT; a BODY; and a CONCLUSION. The materials you discuss in your essay should support your thesis statement. Moreover, you will need to cite these sources properly with materials from the readings, lectures, and class discussions. Again, you must use the notes and bibliography style that is standard practice in Humanities disciplines. Please see the Chicago Manual of Style format for your citations, which will include either footnotes or endnotes: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

Lateness policy on final exam: Failure to hand in your take-home final exam on time will result in the following penalties without prior contact with me: for each hour that your exam is late, you will be deducted 1/2 a grade.

Required Reading:

James W. Cook, The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum

Angela Y. Davis, Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday

Janet M. Davis, editor, Tiny Kline, Circus Queen and Tinker Bell: The Life of Tiny Kline

Susan J. Douglas, Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media

John Dower, War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War

Henry Jenkins, Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide

Nhi Lieu, The American Dream in Vietnamese

Mary Rowlandson, "A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson," in Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola, editor, Women's Indian Captivity Narratives

All books are available for purchase at the University Co-op and through online vendors.

Civility Code: I expect everyone to be attentive, engaged, and polite to one another during class. All cell phones and hand-held electronic devices must be off during class. If you wish to text, read, browse the Internet, talk with your neighbor, sleep, or do anything else disruptive, then please go elsewhere. Moreover, please try to save bathroom visits for before or after class.

Academic Honesty is imperative: I will refer all cases of academic dishonesty (i.e. cheating) to the Dean of Student's Office. Please visit the Student Judicial Services website for additional information: www.utexas.edu/depts/dos/sjs/

*******CLASS SCHEDULE*******

T 9/4 INTRODUCTION TO COURSE AND SYLLABUS: WHAT IS POPULAR CULTURE?

T 9/11 RELIGION, RACE, AND COLONIAL PRINT CULTURES
Rowlandson, All

T 9/18 EXHIBITIONS, CURIOSITIES, MUSEUMS, AND PUBLIC CULTURE DURING THE
AMERICAN ENLIGHTENMENT
Cook, Chapters 1, 2

T 9/25 POPULAR PERFORMANCE, PHOTOGRAPHY, AND PAINTING IN BARNUM'S
AMERICA
Cook, Chapter 3, 4, 5, Epilogue

T 10/2 FROM THE CIRCUS TO THE CINEMA: THE BIRTH OF MODERN MASS CULTURE
Kline, All

T 10/9 POPULAR MUSIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE, PART ONE
Davis, Chapters 1-6

**T 10/16 NO CLASS: Dr. Davis will be lecturing at the Bard Graduate Center for the
Decorative Arts in New York City
Work on your research papers**

**T 10/23 POPULAR MUSIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE, PART TWO
Davis, Chapters 7-8
FIVE-PAGE PAPER DRAFTS DUE TODAY**

T 10/30 "WHY WE FIGHT": WORLD WAR II AS A POP CULTURAL WATERSHED, PART ONE
Dower, Preface, Chapters 1-7

T 11/6 "WHY WE FIGHT": WORLD WAR II AS A POP CULTURAL WATERSHED, PART TWO
Dower, Chapters 8-11

T 11/13 THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF DISNEY, POSTWAR TELEVISION, TEEN CULTURE,
SEXUALITY, MUSIC, AND THE MEDIA
Douglas, Introduction, Chapters 1-3

**T 11/20 MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN AND SOCIAL CHANGE: MISS AMERICA,
FEMINISM, AND THE "BACKLASH"
Douglas, Chapters 4-11
REVISED FIVE-PAGE PAPERS DUE TODAY**

T 11/27 POPULAR CULTURE AND MODERN COMMUNITY FORMATION
Lieu, All

**T 12/4 CONVERGENCE CULTURE AND THE MAKING OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICA;
AND...AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE: A HISTORICAL REAPPRAISAL
Jenkins, All
LAST DAY TO SUBMIT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

FINAL TAKE-HOME ESSAY EXAM: I will hand out the take-home on TUESDAY, December 4, in class. The exam is due in Burdine 437 on TUESDAY, December 11, NO LATER than 2:00 PM without prior approval from me. Please place your completed exam essay in the box labeled “Davis—Pop Culture.”

DISCLAIMER: THIS SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE DURING THE COURSE OF THE SEMESTER, IF NECESSARY.