

AMERICAN STUDIES 370 / HISTORY 350R/WGS 340  
 American Popular Culture: 1682-Present  
 FALL 2010  
 Unique #s: 29625; 39309; 47080  
 T, Th 11:00-12:15  
 BUR 228

Instructor: Dr. Janet M. Davis  
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 Office Hours: Wednesdays, 11:45-2:45

*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 occasional classes will be devoted primarily to lecturing—hence the “Lecture” designation on the class schedule. In addition, virtually all classes will contain a small presentational component—either you or I will take the stage in this capacity.

**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, you will FAIL the course.

**Grade Breakdown:**

Discussion: 20%

Six weekly study questions (3-5 questions per assignment): 10%

Class Presentation (10 minutes in length): 10%

Five-page Paper: 15%

Revised Short Paper (5 pages): 10%

Final Take-Home Essay (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, due at the beginning of the class in which we discuss the reading you have chosen to analyze. 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 **November 30**.

**Class Presentation Format:** On Tuesday, August 31, you will choose a specific article from Durham and Kellner that will be the basis for your 10-minute in-class presentation. The articles—each of which grapples with pop cultural theory—are listed under each reading assignment on the class schedule. Please include the following in your presentation: 1) A short summary of the article you have read, highlighting the author’s definition of popular culture 2) A short biography of the author, including any details that have shaped h/her views about popular culture 3) Identify the author’s scholarly field and how it shapes h/her ideas about popular culture. 4) Show the class a pop cultural object of your own choosing and apply your theoretical insights from the article to this specific object.

**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, etc. You must, however, receive my permission in advance for the object you choose. 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. Please see the following website for discipline-specific citation methods:

<http://www.aresearchguide.com/>

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 you 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 26**. Your revised version of the paper will be due in class on **November 11**.

**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. Please see “A Research Guide for Students” at: <http://www.researchguide.com/> for more citation information.

**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:**

Luis Alvarez, The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance during World War II

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

Durham and Kellner, editors, Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords (NOTE: All student presentation selections are in this volume)

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

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 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 during lecture, 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/](http://www.utexas.edu/depts/dos/sjs/)**

**\*\*\*\*\*CLASS SCHEDULE\*\*\*\*\***

**Th 8/26** INTRODUCTION TO COURSE AND SYLLABUS: WHAT IS POPULAR CULTURE? Start reading Rowlandson (in Derounian-Stodola)

**T 8/31** LECTURE: RELIGION, RACE, AND COLONIAL PRINT CULTURES, PART ONE  
Rowlandson

**Th 9/2** RELIGION, RACE, AND COLONIAL PRINT CULTURES, PART TWO  
Finish Rowlandson, Start Cook

**T 9/7** LECTURE: EXHIBITIONS AND CURIOSITIES DURING THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND EARLY REPUBLIC

Keep reading Cook

Student Presentation: Marx and Engels, "The Ruling Class and the Ruling Ideas"

**Th 9/9** MUSEUMS AND PUBLIC CULTURE

Cook, Introduction (skim), Chapters 1-2

Student Presentation: Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article"

**T 9/14** RACE, POPULAR PERFORMANCE, AND THE SECTIONAL CRISIS

Cook, Chapter 3

Student Presentation: Gramsci, "(i) History of the Subaltern Classes; (ii) The Concept of 'Ideology'; (iii) Cultural Themes: Ideological Material"

**Th 9/16 LECTURE: DOCUMENTING THE CIVIL WAR: PHOTOGRAPHY**

Keep reading Cook

Student Presentation: Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"**T 9/21 MAGIC, ILLUSION, AND THE AGE OF FRAUD**

Cook, Chapters 4-5, Epilogue; Start reading Kline (including Davis, Introduction)

Student Presentation: Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory"**Th 9/23 LECTURE: THE CIRCUS, THE WILD WEST SHOW, THE RAILROAD, AND THE MAKING OF MODERN AMERICA**

Keep reading Kline

Student Presentation: Debord, "The Commodity as Spectacle"**T 9/28 ENCOUNTERING POP CULTURAL ARTIFACTS: FIELD TRIP TO THE JOE WARD CIRCUS COLLECTION AT THE HARRY RANSOM CENTER—MEET AT THE HRC (More details TBA)**

Keep reading Kline

**Th 9/30 THE BIRTH OF MODERN MASS CULTURE: THE CASE OF TINY KLINE**

Finish Kline, Start reading Angela Davis

Student Presentation: Horkheimer and Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception"**T 10/5 LECTURE: THE BIRTH OF THE MOVIES AND THE DAWNING OF CELEBRITY CULTURE**

Keep reading Davis

Student Presentation: Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"**Th 10/7 POPULAR MUSIC AND THE "CULT OF TRUE WOMANHOOD"**

Davis, Introduction, Chapters 1-3

Student Presentation: Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses"**T 10/12 POPULAR MUSIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE, PART ONE**

Davis, Chapters 4-5

Student Presentation: hooks, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance"**Th 10/14 POPULAR MUSIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE, PART TWO**

Davis, Chapter 6

Student Presentation: Gilroy, "British Cultural Studies and the Pitfalls of Identity"**T 10/19 POPULAR MUSIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE, PART THREE**

Davis, Chapters 7-8; Start reading Alvarez

Student Presentation: McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message"**Th 10/21 LECTURE: WORLD WAR II AS A CULTURAL WATERSHED**

Keep reading Alvarez

Student Presentation: Schiller, "Not Yet the Post-Imperialist Era"

**T 10/26 YOUTH CULTURES AND POPULAR REPRESENTATIONS OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY**

Alvarez, Introduction, Chapters 1-2

**Student Presentation: Hebdige, “(i) From Culture to Hegemony; (ii) Subculture: The Unnatural Break”**

**\*\*\*FIVE-PAGE PAPER DRAFTS DUE TODAY\*\*\***

**Th 10/28 WARTIME MIGRATION AND COMMUNITY IDENTITY—MUSIC, FASHION, AND STYLE**

Alvarez, Chapters 3-4

**Student Presentation: Hall, “Encoding/Decoding”**

**T 11/2 CONTRABAND STYLE, CITIZENSHIP, AND CULTURAL CONFLAGRATION DURING WORLD WAR II: THE ZOOT SUIT RIOTS**

Alvarez, Chapters 5-6; Start reading Douglas

**Student Presentation: Canlini, “Hybrid Cultures, Oblique Powers”**

**Th 11/4 LECTURE: POSTWAR TELEVISION, CONSUMER CULTURE, AND THE WORLD OF WALT DISNEY**

Keep reading Douglas

**Student Presentation: Bourdieu, “On Television”**

**Student Presentation: Dorfman and Mattelart, “Introduction: Instructions on How to Become a General in the Disneyland Club”**

**T 11/9 POSTWAR TEEN CULTURES: BEAUTY, SEXUALITY, MUSIC, AND THE MEDIA**

Douglas, Introduction, Chapters 1-3

**Student Presentation: Ang, “On the Politics of Empirical Audience Research”**

**Th 11/11 THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE, MISS AMERICA, AND THE RISE OF THE SECOND WAVE OF FEMINISM**

Douglas, Chapters 4-7

**Student Presentation: Barthes, “(i) Operation Margarine; (ii) Myth Today”**

**\*\*\*REVISED FIVE-PAGE PAPERS DUE TODAY\*\*\***

**T 11/16 MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF FEMINISM AND “THE BACKLASH”**

Douglas, Chapters 8-9

**Student Presentation: Meehan, “Gendering the Commodity Audience: Critical Media Research, Feminism, and Political Economy”**

**Th 11/18 SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND POPULAR CULTURE AS A POLITICAL PLATFORM**

Douglas, Chapters 10-11; Start reading Jenkins

**Student Presentation: McRobbie, “Feminism, Postmodernism and the ‘Real Me’”**

**T 11/23 CONVERGENCE CULTURE: REALITY TV**

Jenkins, Introduction, Chapters 1-2

**Student Presentation: Poster, “Postmodern Virtualities”**

**Th 11/25 HAPPY THANKSGIVING!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**

Finish Jenkins over break

**T 11/30 CONVERGENCE CULTURE: POPULAR AUDIENCES AND THE POTENTIAL FOR PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY?**

**Jenkins, Chapters 3-6, Conclusion**

***\*\*\*LAST DAY TO SUBMIT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS\*\*\****

**Th 12/2 RETHINKING AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE: FROM THE CAPTIVITY NARRATIVE TO THE IPAD**

Be prepared to discuss reading assignments, lectures, and discussions from throughout the semester as a way to review and synthesize the material

**FINAL TAKE-HOME ESSAY EXAM: I will hand out the take-home on Thursday, December 2, in class. The exam is due in Burdine 437 on Thursday, December 9, NO LATER than 2:00 PM without prior approval from me.**