

California State University, Long Beach
American Studies 200 (Schedule Number 8990)
American Cultural History
Dr. Brett Mizelle

Spring Semester 2006
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30 – 10:45am
Room LA2-102

Office: Room FO2-109
Office Hours: 4:00 – 6:00 p.m. Wednesdays & Thursdays, and by appointment
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Course Description:

This course examines the broad terrain of American popular culture from multiple disciplinary perspectives, interrogating both the form and content of cultural production and reception in the American past and the present. Readings, lectures, and discussions, many involving different media, will ask whether popular culture is the art of democracy, explore how popular culture has been the target of criticism by elites, demonstrate how popular culture has served as a gateway for marginalized outsiders, and analyze how popular culture is an important site for the construction and contestation of ideas about race, gender, class, and nation.

Required Course Texts:

The following books are required for this course and may be purchased at the University Bookstore:

Jim Cullen, ed., Popular Culture in American History (Blackwell, 2001).
Kirse Granat May, Golden State, Golden Youth: The California Image in Popular Culture, 1955-1966 (UNC, 2002).

Additional readings may be distributed in class or electronically. Some required course materials are external websites that are listed in the course schedule. I will also post these links on BeachBoard under "External Links."

Because you will be primarily assessed through written papers, I have placed an order with our bookstore for copies of Mary Lynn Rampola, A Pocket Guide to Writing in History, 4th ed. (Bedford / St. Martin's, 2004), which provides guidance on appropriate citation form and instruction in historical research and writing. All students should also possess both a quality dictionary and a style manual.

Course Assignments & Grading:

1. Three short papers, due dates below (10% of course grade each)
2. Weekly reading journal (30% of course grade)
3. Final Project (25% of course grade)
4. Final Presentation (5% of course grade)
5. Attendance, participation and miscellaneous assignments (10% of course grade)

Additional information about these assignments will be distributed electronically and discussed in class. Grades will be given in ten percentage increments, with students in the top 10% of the course receiving an A, the next 10% receiving a B, and so on. There will be opportunity for extra credit through short reaction papers on History and American Studies guest lectures and museum exhibitions related to the course.

Course Policies:

Attendance: Because we cover a great deal of material in this course, prompt and regular attendance is a necessity. Students who miss classes run the risk of receiving a failing grade or receiving a lower grade than the student might have secured with regular attendance. Excused absences must be documented by a doctor's note, a note from the Dean, or advance notice from the Athletic Director. Absences for religious observances are excused; please let me know of dates in advance. I allow two unexcused absences during the semester; thereafter each subsequent unexcused absence will result in the subtraction of points from your participation grade.

Classroom Environment: Feel free to ask questions and express opinions in this course, approaching readings and ideas actively and critically. As you do so, however, please strive to be courteous to your fellow students. To create a respectful and productive environment please avoid unnecessary distractions (such as ringing cell phones, beeping pagers, and conspicuous consumption of snacks) during class meetings.

Course Readings: You are expected to have completed the day's readings prior to coming to class and to be prepared to participate in discussions. Always bring the texts we will be discussing to class.

Reading Journals: All students in American Studies 200 will keep a weekly journal of their reactions to our course readings and their relationship to contemporary cultural debates and events. Guidelines for this assignment will be distributed and discussed in class.

Papers: All work written outside the classroom must be typed or word-processed in a standard 10 or 12 point font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. Your papers should, at a minimum, both present and critically analyze the main theoretical and historical arguments in your reading. All quotations must be cited by using parenthetical references, footnotes, or endnotes. If you are unsure about how or what to cite, please ask me. All papers should have your name, the course title and number, the due date, and an appropriate title or label for the assignment at the top. I strongly recommend that you keep copies of all your work, either on paper or on disk, for your protection.

Your papers will be evaluated for earnest effort and thoughtful, coherent content. Remember to clearly state your thesis and support your arguments with examples. Usage and grammar are not major concerns of grading, but a minimum mechanical competence to insure the "readability" of these papers is expected. I also expect that you will proofread your papers before handing them in. All assignments are due at the beginning of class. Electronic submission of papers is not allowed. If you know you are going to miss an assignment due date you must be proactive and request an extension in advance. Late assignments will lose points for each calendar day late and will not be accepted more than one week past their due date without a previously agreed to extension.

Plagiarism & Academic Integrity: Students in this class will be held to a high standard of academic integrity, which is defined as "the pursuit of scholarly activity free from fraud and deception." Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating of information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. **ALL FORMAL PAPERS IN THIS COURSE WILL BE**

SUBMITTED IN HARD COPY FOR MY COMMENTS AND ELECTRONICALLY THROUGH THE TURN-IT-IN DATABASE ON BEACHBOARD. If I suspect all or part of an assignment may not be your own intellectual work I will ask to see your notes or drafts. If you have any questions about academic integrity, please talk with me. I can and will fail a student for major infractions.

Disability Accommodation: Any student who feels that he or she may need an accommodation for any sort of disability should make an appointment to see me during my office hours so we can make arrangements for you to complete the requirements of the class.

Student Services: If you need help with written assignments or require guidance on note-taking and critical reading, please take advantage of the Writer's Resource Lab (LAB-312; 985-4329) or the Learning Assistance Center (Library East 12; 985-5350).

Technology: The CSULB Technology Help Desk is now available for students. Help is available on a wide range of computer issues including: BeachBoard, Windows and Mac OS, CSULB Internet Accounts, Remote Connectivity, Microsoft Desktop Applications, Anti-Virus, Internet and Web related topics. Visit them on the web at <http://helpdesk.csulb.edu> or contact the THD by phone at 562-985-4959 or send Email to helpdesk@csulb.edu. All students should make sure that their CSULB e-mail accounts forward to their preferred e-mail accounts so that you will receive course assignments and announcements.



"In conditions of late modernization and the widespread crisis of cultural values the ways in which young people use, humanize, decorate and invest with meaning their common and immediate life spaces and social practices can be crucial to creation and sustenance of individual and group identities, even to cultural survival of identity itself. There is work, even desperate work, in their play."

Paul Willis

"Ideologies always work upon a ground: that ground is culture. To insist on this is also to insist on 'history'..."

Richard Johnson

Course Schedule:

Note: This syllabus is a work in progress and may be changed during the semester as necessary and appropriate. Changes will be announced in class and through e-mail.

- Jan 26 (Th): Introduction
- Jan 31 (Tu): What is Popular Culture Anyway?
Reading: PCAH-Introduction, "The Worldwide Web of Popular Culture"
- Feb 02 (Th): Popular Reading in Colonial British North America
Reading: PCAH-01, "In the Beginning"
- Feb 07 (Tu): Contesting the Theater
Reading: PCAH-02, "The World of the Stage"
- Feb 09 (Th): Early American Drama
On-Line: Royall Tyler, The Contrast (1787), Prologue & Act 3, Scene 2
[<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/>]
- Feb 14 (Tu): Race and Popular Culture
Reading: PCAH-03, "The Racy Appeal of the Minstrel"
- Feb 16 (Th): Spike Lee's Bamboozled
On-Line: American Experience: Stephen Foster, Special Feature: Blackface Minstrelsy
[http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/foster/sfeature/sf_minstrelsy.html]
- Feb 21 (Tu): Cheap Print
Reading: PCAH-04, "Literature for the Million"
- Feb 23 (Th): Dime Novels & Penny Dreadfuls
On-Line: Stanford's Dime Novel and Story Paper Collection
[<http://www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/dp/pennies/home.html>]
- Feb 28 (Tu): Class, Gender & Sexuality at the Dance
Reading: PCAH-05, "The Romance of the Dance Hall"
- Mar 02 (Th): Early Amusement Parks
On-Line: Coney Island History Website
[<http://naid.spsr.ucla.edu/coneyisland/>]
Paper 1 due at beginning of class
- Mar 07 (Tu): Early Film Culture
Reading: PCAH-06, "Moving Images"
- Mar 09 (Th): Can We Use Films as History?
On-Line: Tom Gunning, Making Sense of Film
[<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/film/>]
- Mar 14 (Tu): The Invention of Modern Radio
Reading: PCAH-07, "Waves of Selling"
- Mar 16 (Th): Listening to the Radio
On-Line: America in the 1930s
[<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~1930s/RADIO/radiofr.html>]
- Mar 21 (Tu): The Singer as Celebrity
Reading: PCAH-08, "The Firmament of Stardom"

- Mar 23 (Th): *No Class Meeting* (ACLA, Princeton)
- Mar 28 (Tu): Inventing the Sitcom
Reading: PCAH-09, "The Age of Television"
- Mar 30 (Th): Independent Lens: Strange Fruit
On-Line: Without Sanctuary: Photographs and Postcards of Lynching in America
[<http://www.withoutsanctuary.org/main.html>]
- Apr 04 (Tu): American Culture as Black Culture
Reading: PCAH-10, "Hip-Hop Nation"
- Apr 06 (Th): The Pioneers
On-Line: Snippets of Hip-Hop History from the BBC
[<http://www.hiphop-network.com/archives/outsidevideos/bbc-historyofhiphop-1984/bbchiphophistory.asp>]
Paper 2 due at beginning of class
- Apr 18 (Tu): Southern California Disneyfication
Reading: May, Golden State, Golden Youth, through chapter 3
- Apr 20 (Th): *No Class Meeting* (WSSA, Phoenix)
- Apr 25 (Tu): Surf Culture
Reading: May, Golden State, Golden Youth, chapters 4-6
- Apr 27 (Th): Youth Gone Bad?
Reading: May, Golden State, Golden Youth, chapters 7-9
Paper 3 due at beginning of class
- May 02 (Tu): Final Project Workshop
- May 04 (Th): Student Presentations
- May 09 (Tu): Student Presentations
- May 11 (Th): Student Presentations
- May 18 (Th): 12:30-2:30 Final Exam Period
Collected Reading Journal entries and Final Project due

"Culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind."

Raymond Williams

..."culture is both the meanings and values which arise from amongst distinctive groups and classes, on the basis of their given historical conditions and relationships, though which they 'handle' and respond to the conditions of existence; and as the lived traditions and practices through which these 'understandings' are expressed an in which they are embodied."

Stuart Hall

"The conscious, chosen meaning in most people's lives comes much more from what they consume than what they produce."

Judith Williamson

Reading Journals

All students in American Studies 200 will keep a weekly reading journal. For each week of the course you will need to write down your reactions to our course readings. Sometimes I will ask you to speak about specific issues or will provide you with some questions to consider about the readings, but for the most part, I would like to see you "grapple with" the issues raised by our study of American cultural history.

Each entry in your reading journal should aim to display your own independent thinking about our texts. You can assume that we already know what's in the reading. That means you don't have to reproduce the content. Instead, shape a commentary on the reading or readings, starting from your own line of questioning. This can be a particular insight or an analysis of something interesting or unusual. You may also sketch a broader, more synthetic picture that makes a connection to other readings, other course material, or other historically- or culturally-relevant knowledge. You can choose any one of a number of strategies, as long as you show your own thinking.

I would prefer that these reading journals be typed and contain at least two to three paragraphs of analysis and reflection per week. Unlike your formal papers, these do not need to be double-spaced. They also will not be held to the high standards I expect from formal written assignments—they are journals, after all. Please limit your weekly reflection on our readings and cultural texts to no more than one single-spaced page, including the following heading:

Your Name
Amst 200s06 Reading Journal—Week ____
Date

Please make sure that you make it clear which readings you are reflecting upon in your journal, as most weeks you'll have several to choose from. You should complete your journal entry for a given week prior to coming to class so that we can use them to help structure our discussion. You will find that they also will help you organize your thoughts and develop topics for our formal papers.

I will collect these reading journals weekly to see what you are thinking about. Because this class meets twice per week, you can turn in your reading journal on either Tuesday or Thursday most weeks. Please note, though, that you will be expected to have completed the reading of our texts and websites for all class sessions. To provide you with a bit of flexibility, however, over the course of our semester, you may use two "get-out-of-the-journal-free" passes. This will mean that, at a minimum, you should have ten journal entries to re-submit at the end of the semester. Weekly journals will be assessed on a three-tiered system: √+ (excellent), √ (satisfactory), √- (unsatisfactory). I'll provide a standard letter grade for your journal as a whole at the end of the semester.

Don't hesitate to try out new thoughts or write about something you are still thinking through in these journal entries. I hope that you will find them to be an important part of how you learn—and a useful demonstration of how you think—by the end of the semester.

"The world itself seems filled with obviousness, full of natural meanings, which the media merely reflect. But we invest the world with its significance. It doesn't have to be the way it is, or to mean what it does."

Judith Williamson