

California State University, Long Beach
History 577b (Schedule Number 3170)
American Cultural History
Dr. Brett Mizelle

Spring Semester 2006
Wednesdays, 6:30 - 9:15 p.m.
Room TBA

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

This interdisciplinary course explores selected cultural currents in American society from the emergence of the Wild West Show in the late nineteenth-century to the hegemony of hip hop in early 21st century popular culture. Our readings and discussions will engage American cultural history broadly, viewing culture in all three of its major senses: as the way of life of a people or group, a process of intellectual and aesthetic development, and works and practices of intellectual and artistic activity. Throughout the semester we will also address key questions in the study of popular culture, examining how it both reflects and shapes broader social forces in American life. In doing so we will analyze the work of key American cultural historians and engage in the debates over the origins of popular or mass culture, the interplay between production and consumption, and the ongoing contestation over and between culture(s) in American life.

Required Course Texts:

The following books are required for this course and may be purchased at the University Bookstore, even though you can probably find them elsewhere at a lower price (hint, hint):

- Jim Cullen, The Art of Democracy: A Concise History of Popular Culture in the United States, 2nd ed. (2002).
Michael Denning, The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century (1996).
Erika Doss, Twentieth-Century American Art (2002).
Susan J. Douglass, Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media (1995).
Joy Kasson, Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory and Popular History (2000).
George Lipsitz, Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture (2001).
Eithne Quinn, Nuthin' but a "G" Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap (2004).
Warren Susman, Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century (1984, 2003).

Additional readings are available electronically via J-Stor, Project Muse and E-Reserve. Students are responsible for downloading and reading these materials. All students should also possess both a quality dictionary and a style manual.

This course assumes a basic understanding of American history from the Civil War to the present. Those of you who feel you lack sufficient background can either drop the course or, preferably, consult one of the many U.S. history textbooks that are available. You may also wish to read through the outlines of U.S.

history provided by the U.S. Information Agency from 1954 to 1994 that are available online at <http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/H/index.htm>.

Course Assignments & Grading:

1. Two papers, topics and due dates to be decided (20% of course grade each).
2. Historiographic essay on research in twentieth-century cultural history on a subject to be chosen in consultation with the instructor, due May 17th (20% of course grade).
3. Weekly reading journal (30% of course grade).
4. Attendance and participation (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 one unexcused absence 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 History 577b 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. If you know you are going to miss an assignment due date you must be proactive and

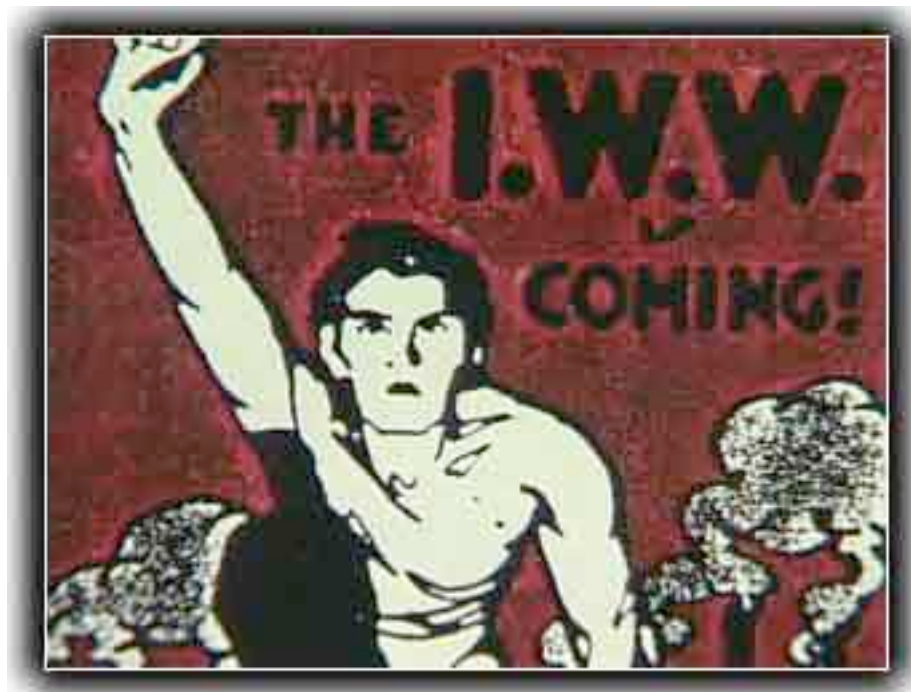
request an extension in advance. Late assignments will lose points for each calendar day late and will not be accepted more than one week past their due date without a previously agreed to extension.

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. 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. I also will require electronic submission of the paper to facilitate running the paper through plagiarism-detecting databases. 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.



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. You are responsible for knowing about any changes.

- Jan 25: Introduction
- Feb 01: The History of American Popular Culture
Reading: Jim Cullen, The Art of Democracy: A Concise History of Popular Culture in the United States; Michael Kammen, "Coming to Terms with Defining Terms," "Consumerism, Americanism, and the Phasing of Popular Culture," "Popular Culture in Transition—and in its Prime," "The Gradual Emergence of Mass Culture and its Critics," and "Mass Culture in More Recent Times: Passive and/or Participatory?" from American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change and the Twentieth Century [TBA]
- Feb 08: The Wild West Show
Reading: Joy Kasson, Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History, Introduction and Part 1; Richard Slotkin, "'Buffalo Bill's Wild West' and the Mythologization of the American Empire," from Cultures of United States Imperialism (1993) [E-Reserve]; Henry Nash Smith, "The Western Hero in the Dime Novel," from Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (1950) [E-Reserve]
- Feb 15: Indians, Historical Memory and Modernism
Reading: Kasson, Buffalo Bill's Wild West, Part 2; Erika Doss, Twentieth-Century American Art, chapter 1, "The Gilded Age" and chapter 2, "Early American Modernism: The Art of Everyday Life"; Daniel J. Czitrom, "American Motion Pictures and the New Popular Culture, 1893-1918," from Media and the Modern Mind: From Morse to McLuhan [E-Reserve]; Philip J. Deloria, "Natural Indians and Identities of Modernity," in Playing Indian [E-Reserve]
- Feb 22: Gender and Sexuality in the Early Twentieth Century
Reading: Doss, chapter 3, "Avant-Garde Art and Experimentation" and chapter 4, "Modernism and the Interwar Years"; Kathy Peiss, "Charity Girls and City Pleasures: Historical Notes on Working-Class Sexuality, 1880-1920," from Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality [E-Reserve]; George Chauncey, "Lots of Friends at the YMCA: Rooming Houses, Cafeterias, and Other Gay Social Centers," from Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World [E-Reserve]; Jennifer Scanlon, "Advertising Women: The J. Walter Thompson Company Women's Editorial Department," from Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies' Home Journal, Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture [E-Reserve]; Hazel Carby, "It Jus Be's Dat Way Sometime: The Sexual Politics of Women's Blues," from The Jazz Cadence in American Culture [TBA]
- Mar 01: Cultural Historians 1: The Work of Warren Susman
Reading: Warren Susman, Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century
- Mar 08: Cultural Historians 2: The Work of Michael Denning
Reading: Michael Denning, The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century, Parts 1 & 2; Doss, chapter 5, "A New Deal for the Arts"
- Mar 15: Social Movements and Cultural Activity

Reading: Denning, The Cultural Front, Part 3 and Conclusion

Mar 22: No Class (ACLA, Princeton)

Mar 29: Postwar Southern California Culture
 Reading: Doss, chapter 6, "Abstract Expressionism"; Sarah Schrank, "The Art of the City: Modernism, Censorship, and the Emergence of Los Angeles's Postwar Art Scene" [Project Muse]; Eric Schlosser, "The Founding Fathers," in Fast Food Nation [E-Reserve]; David Fine, "Down and Out in Los Angeles: From Bunker Hill to the Barrio," in Imagining Los Angeles: A City in Fiction [E-Reserve]; Norman Klein, "L.A. Noir and Forgetting," in The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory [E-Reserve]; Eric Avila, "Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Film Noir, Disneyland, and the Cold War (Sub)Urban Imaginary" [TBA]; George Lipsitz, "The Making of Disneyland," from True Stories from the American Past [TBA]; Josh Sides, "Straight Into Compton: American Dreams, Urban Nightmares, and the Metamorphosis of a Black Suburb" [Project Muse]

Apr 05: Gender and the Media
 Reading: Susan Douglas, Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media; Lizabeth Cohen, "From Town Center to Shopping Center: The Reconfiguration of Community Marketplaces in Postwar America" [J-Stor]

Spring Break

Apr 19: No Class (WSSA, Phoenix)

Apr 26: Cultural Historians 3: The Work of George Lipsitz
 Reading: George Lipsitz, Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture; Anthony Macias, "Bringing Music to the People: Race, Urban Culture, and Municipal Politics in Postwar Los Angeles" [Project Muse]; Victor Hugo Viesca, "The Battle of Los Angeles: The Cultural Politics of Chicana/o Music in the Greater Eastside" [Project Muse]

May 03: Contemporary Arts
 Reading: Doss, chapter 7, "Neo-Dada and Pop Art," chapter 8, "Minimalism and Conceptual Art," chapter 9, "Feminist Art and Black Art," chapter 10, "Culture Wars" and chapter 11, "Contemporary Art"; Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino, "Space, Power and Youth Culture: Mexican American Graffiti and Chicano Murals in East Los Angeles, 1972-1978," in Looking High and Low: Art and Cultural Identity [E-Reserve]

May 10: Hip Hop Nation
 Reading: Eithne Quinn, Nuthin' but a "G" Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap; Josh Kun, "What is an MC if He Can't Rap to Banda? Making Music in Nuevo L.A." [Project Muse]

May 17: End of Seminar Get-Together, Limerick's Pub
Collected Reading Journal entries and Final Paper due

"The history of America as a country is quite different from that of America as a State."
 Randolph Bourne, War and the Intellectuals: Collected Essays, 1915-1919

Reading Journals

All students in History 577b 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
577bs06 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. To provide you with a bit of flexibility, however, over the course of our shortened 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 search for market segments, the significance of market sites, the function of market practices, and the creative fusions made from market pleasures all encode commercial culture with the imperatives of commerce. They teach us to take pleasure in our own inscription as consumers. They naturalize materialism and artifice, and encourage us to aspire to the identities that fit the categories most convenient for marketers. Most important, they give us identities as consumers that cut us off from the responsibilities and opportunities of citizenship by dividing us into separate market segments, by elevating consumer time over historical time, and by colonizing our imaginations to make us more malleable as consumers. Yet the very need for novelty and the global appetites of consumer culture also make other fused identities and practices possible.

George Lipsitz, "In the Sweet Buy and Buy: Consumer Culture and American Studies," from American Studies in a Moment of Danger (2001).