

AMERICAN STUDIES 300-06

Introduction to American Popular Culture

Spring 2019

Tuesday and Thursday, 10:00-11:15, UH-250

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Course Description

In this course, we will analyze the historical development of American popular culture from the folk culture of early America to the digital culture of today. Concentrating on the relationship among producers, audiences, and critics, we will explore how pop culture has both shaped and been shaped by wider historical developments. Moving chronologically, we will explore how popular entertainments—including spectator sports, circuses, novels, music, film, comic books, television, video games and other digital sources—have transformed America and its peoples. To guide our analysis of such sources, we will consider several larger questions: Why is popular culture important? How does it shape larger people, values, and institutions? Who controls the meaning of popular culture? How does it both unite and divide Americans?

General Education Learning Goals

WHAT GE REQUIREMENT DOES THIS CLASS FULFILL?

All CSUF students are assigned a “Catalog Year” that determines the requirements for their degree program, including requirements in their major(s) and in General Education. You can find your catalog year on your TDA. For more information please visit http://www.fullerton.edu/undergraduate/general_education/catalog-rights.php

For students with a Catalog year of Spring 2018 or earlier (e.g. Fall 2017), this course fulfills the following GE Requirement: GE AREA D.5

For students with a Catalog Year of Fall 2018 or Spring 2019, this course fulfills the following GE Requirement: GE AREA D.4

In line with CSUF's "Goals of General Education," this course will encourage students to:

- a. Examine problems, issues, and themes in the social sciences in greater depth; in a variety of cultural, historical, and geographical contexts; and from different disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives
- b. Analyze and critically evaluate the application of social science concepts and theories to particular historical, contemporary, and future problems or themes, such as economic and environmental sustainability, globalization, poverty, and social justice.
- c. Analyze and critically evaluate constructs of cultural differentiation, including ethnicity, gender, race, class, and sexual orientation, and their effects on the individual and society.
- d. Apply theories and concepts from the social sciences to address historical, contemporary and future problems confronting communities at different geographical scales, from local to global.

The GE writing requirement is met and assessed by multiple writing assignments that receive timely feedback so that students have a chance to improve their writing skills.

Required Texts

Readings and viewings should be completed by the date on which they appear on the syllabus. Please bring the day's readings to class on the day on which they will be discussed.

Books to Purchase:

Stephen Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*
L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*
Jill Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*
Frank Miller, *The Dark Knight Returns*

In addition to these sources, you are required to read numerous sources that can be found on TITANIUM either as a link or in the Folder for the day in which it is due. You don't need to read everything, but you should use the forums to figure out what is useful for your essays.

I also will occasionally send you links to readings that can be found online. Be sure to read documents before the class on the date listed on the folder.

In addition to the printed sources, you are also required to view five films and one TV episode for the course. These films will not be shown in class. All of the films are available over the internet and most are available via the course Titanium Site. The films are:

Crazy Rich Asians
The Jazz Singer
A Face in the Crowd
Saturday Night Fever
The Lego Movie
Cowboy Bebop, Episode 1 (Available on Hulu or Amazon (for 2.99))

Course Assignments

Assignment	Points
Analyzing Criticism	50
Essay 1	250
Essay 2	250
Final Exam	250
Engagement/Discussion	50
In Class Writing	50
Forum Responses (4)	100
Total	1000

Graded Exercises

- **Analyzing Criticism Assignment:** In this assignment, you will find a piece of pop culture criticism (online usually) of something you enjoy, that makes you look at the object of criticism differently. Choose something you enjoy in popular culture, find some criticism of it, and answer the questions about the piece in a Forum post on Titanium. Be sure to provide others with the link. Due at the end of Week 2.
- **Essays:** You have two essays to write for this course, one after Part II and another after Part III. While there is no minimum or maximum length requirement, these typically require between four and five double-spaced pages to answer the question satisfactorily.
- **Final Exam:** Your Final Exam will consist of three parts of which you are required to do TWO. In Part I you can answer 5 questions about the readings/films/lectures in no more than one paragraph per question. In Part II, you can write an essay that answers a broad cumulative question about pop culture and its role in American culture after World War 2. In Part III you can apply what you have learned all semester to analyzing a pop culture topic of your choice. If you plan on taking the final option, you should come speak to me.
- **Forum Responses:** Beginning in Week 3 each of you will have to participate in 4 forums administered through TITANIum. In Week 2, I will assign you to a small group (numbered 1-5). Remember your group number because that determines which forums you are required to participate in. Sierra will post a series of questions in each forum about the readings/films for the next week. BEFORE THE START OF CLASS, you are required to post a response to those questions that will be graded for the depth of the engagement with the source. Your post should be a full paragraph (5-6 sentences should do it) that draws directly on the text and gives page citations when applicable. If your post is late or does not show much engagement with the source, the grade may be cut by 50% or result in a 0. Note that each group has 5+ opportunities but you only have to do four. Doing an additional forum post will not result in extra credit but may make up for a low grade in an earlier forum.
- **Engagement/Discussion:** This grade measures your effort to engage with course materials both inside and outside of class. While participating in discussions is the best way to show your engagement, regularly attending class (and paying attention) and demonstrating engagement in group discussions, online forums, or office hours will be sufficient. You also

should be sure to look at the comments I give you on your papers as that is the clearest way to show me that you are trying to improve your skills.

- **In-Class Writing:** While I will not take attendance every day, I will periodically have writing and group activities that I will collect at the end of class. These are typically centered around key sources and are designed to stimulate conversation. I will usually tell you about major examples of these the previous class .

Points/Grade Breakdown

925-1000	A	725-774	C
895-924	A-	695-724	C-
875-894	B+	675-694	D+
825-874	B	625-674	D
795-824	B-	595-624	D-
775-794	C+	594↓	F

Obviously, this course uses a +/- system. No extra credit will be offered.

Late Assignments, Missed Classes, and Rewrites

It is crucial for your performance that you complete assignments on time. Accordingly, late papers will be accepted at my discretion and may result in a penalty. It is your responsibility to contact me if you must miss a class or turn in a paper late. Be sure to notify me as soon as possible if you must turn in an assignment late so that proper accommodations can be made.

Because they are designed to facilitate discussion, LATE FORUM POSTS WILL BE ASSESSED A 50% PENALTY. You can attempt to make up that grade by completing a later set of questions.

In accordance with General Education writing requirements, you will have the opportunity to rewrite and resubmit either your first or second essay for a better grade. You may NOT rewrite the assignment if it was turned in late or was failed because of plagiarism.

Expectations

To be successful in this class, you must work hard and come to class each day prepared to concentrate and participate. In the classroom, you should feel free to ask questions and fully participate. Because participation is critical to this class, we must work together to establish an atmosphere of tolerance and respect. While we are free to disagree, we should not deride or condemn each other. Additionally, you should avoid all distracting, disrespectful, or disruptive behavior that may inhibit other individuals' performance in the class. In particular, you must not engage in private conversations, texting, and so forth. All electronic devices, except those used for note taking, should be turned off during class.

American Studies at Fullerton

I am always happy to talk with students about the possibility of majoring, double majoring, or minoring in American Studies. Please drop by my office hours or to schedule an appointment if you would like to learn more about the department or the discipline. For more information on the American Studies Department, visit our website: <http://amst.fullerton.edu>.

Student Accommodations

CSUF complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act by providing a process for disclosing disabilities and arranging for reasonable accommodations. On the CSUF campus, the Office of Disability Support Services has been delegated the authority to certify disabilities and to prescribe specific accommodations for students with documented disabilities. DSS provides support services for students with mobility limitations, learning disabilities, hearing or visual impairments, and other disabilities. Counselors are available to help students plan a CSUF experience to meet their individual needs. Prior to receiving this assistance, documentation from a qualified professional source must be submitted to DSS. For more information, please contact DSS in UH 101; phone 657-278-3117; website: <http://www.fullerton.edu/dss/>.

Academic Integrity

Integrity is an essential component of all students' academic experience. Students who violate university standards of academic integrity are subject to disciplinary sanctions, including failure in the course and suspension from the university. Since dishonesty in any form harms the individual, other students, and the university, policies on academic integrity are strictly enforced. I expect that you will familiarize yourself with the academic integrity guidelines found in the current student handbook. [<http://www.fullerton.edu/handbook/>]. Cheating is defined as obtaining or attempting to obtain credit for work by the use of any dishonest, deceptive, fraudulent, or unauthorized means, or helping someone commit an act of academic dishonesty. (UPS 300.021). Examples include, but are not limited to:

Unacceptable examination behavior: communicating with fellow students, copying material from another student's exam or allowing another student to copy from an exam, possessing or using unauthorized materials, or any behavior that defeats the intent of an exam.

Plagiarism: taking the work of another and offering it as one's own without giving credit to that source, whether that material is paraphrased or copied in verbatim or near-verbatim form.

Unauthorized collaboration on a project, homework or other assignment where an instructor expressly forbids such collaboration.

Documentary falsification, including forgery, altering of campus documents or records, tampering with grading procedures, fabricating lab assignments, or altering medical excuses.

If you have any questions about Academic Integrity please consult the following CSUF websites:
<http://www.fullerton.edu/senate/documents/pdf/300/ups300-021.pdf>
<http://www.fullerton.edu/integrity/>

Campus Emergency Procedures

Students should be familiar with campus emergency procedures: <http://prepare.fullerton.edu/>

Course Schedule

This schedule may be subject to revision

Part I. Analyzing Pop Culture

Week 1 Analyzing Popular Culture

1/22 Course Introduction: Studying Pop Culture

1/24 Who Controls Meaning? Fans and Fan Culture

READ: Henry Jenkins on Fandom and Vox article on Fandoms

WATCH: Fan Films from Early Fan Culture (YouTube Links on TITANIUM)

Week 2 Analyzing Representation

1/29 Music, Power, and Identity

LISTEN: *To Pimp a Butterfly* by Kendrick Lamar and *Transgender Dysphoria Blues* by Against Me!

ACTIVITY: Music Analysis in Class

1/31 The Battle of Representation: Race, Class, and Identity in a Global Market

WATCH: *Crazy Rich Asians*

2/3 DUE SUNDAY AT 11:59 PM ON TITANIUM: ANALYZING CRITICISM

Part II. The Birth of Pop Culture

Week 3 Freedom and Control

2/5 The New Israel vs. the New Canaan: Fun and American Identity

READ: Thomas Morton and John Cotton on Fun in Puritan America

FORUM: GROUP 1

2/7 Capitalism, Christianity, and the Battle over Leisure

READ: Nissenbaum, Chapter 1

FORUM: GROUP 2

Week 4 The Pursuit of Order

2/12 The Battle for Order: Social Class and the Birth of American Pop Culture

READ: Nissenbaum, Chapter 2

FORUM: GROUP 3

2/14 **The Parlor and the Street: Gender and Class in Victorian America**
READ: Nissenbaum, Chapter 3
FORUM: GROUP 4

Week 5 **Selling Fun, Selling Mockery: Capitalism in Antebellum America**

2/19 **A Nation of Humbug: P.T. Barnum and American Capitalism**
READ: Nissenbaum, Chapter 4
FORUM: GROUP 5

2/21 **Sympathy, Envy, and Disdain: Race and the Displacement of Class**
READ: Nissenbaum, Chapter 7
FORUM: GROUP 1

Week 6 **A Sporting Nation**

2/26 **Baseball, Football, and the Transformation of Masculinity**
READ: Albert Spalding on Baseball; Walter Camp on Football
ACTIVITY: Group Activity With Sources
FORUM: GROUP 2

2/28 **The Freedom Machine: Sports and the New Woman**
ACTIVITY: Essay Preparation
FORUM: GROUP 3

3/3 **DUE SUNDAY AT 11:59 PM ON TITANIUM: ESSAY 1**

Part III. **The Power of Mass Culture**

Week 7 **Technology and the Mass Production of Fun**

3/5 **Canned Fun? Technology and the Rise of Mass Amusements**
READ: John Phillips Sousa on “Canned Music”
ACTIVITY: Group Analysis of the Menace of Mechanical Music
FORUM: GROUP 4

3/7 **“Do the Figures as the Occur to You”: Ragtime, Jazz, and Expression in a Modern World**
LISTEN: Music Videos (on TITANIUM)
READ: Megan Pugh, *American Dancing: From the Cake-Walk to the Moon-Walk*, Chapter 1.
FORUM: GROUP 5

Week 8 **Film and the Meaning of Americanization**

3/12 **From Science to Pleasure to Art: The Victorian Transformation of Film**

WATCH: *Birth of a Nation* (30 Minute Selection)
READ: *The Atlantic* piece of Early Film Heroines
FORUM: GROUP 1

3/14 Embracing Pop Culture, Becoming American

WATCH: *The Jazz Singer*
FORUM: GROUP 2

Week 9 Identity in an Age of Mass Production and Consumption

3/19 The War over Desire: Anthony Comstock vs. L. Frank Baum

READ: L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*
FORUM: GROUP 3

3/21 The Leisurely Self: Fun and Identity in Mechanical World

READ: L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*
FORUM: GROUP 4

Week 10 The Triumph of Mass Culture

3/26 *The Birth of the Cool*: African Americans and the Politics of Fun

LISTEN: Miles Davis, *The Birth of the Cool* (full album)
READ: *Jump for Joy*, Chapter 1
FORUM: GROUP 5

3/28 Selling the TV, Controlling Audiences? The Power of Mass Media

WATCH: *A Face in the Crowd*
FORUM: GROUP 1

April 1-April 7: Spring Break

Week 11 The Wonder Woman

4/9 American Dreams, American Nightmares: Superheroes and Monsters

READ: Jill Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, Parts I and II
FORUM: GROUP 2

4/11 Swinging the Lasso of Truth: Wonder Woman and the Transformation of Feminism

READ: Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, Part III
FORUM: GROUP 3

4/14 DUE SUNDAY AT 11:59 PM ON TITANIUM: ESSAY 2

Part IV. Pop Culture World

Week 12 **The Authentic and the Unreal**

4/16 **Leaving Today, Entering Reality: The Wonderful, (White) World of Walt Disney**

READ: Articles on Disneyland

FORUM: GROUP 4

4/18 **The Battle of Authenticity: Rock and Soul in the 1960s**

LISTEN: Videos on Titanium

READ: Jack Hamilton, *Just Around Midnight* (selection)

FORUM: GROUP 5

Week 13 **Challenging Rock**

4/23 **“Your Squaw is on the Warpath”: The Feminist Challenge to “Cock Rock”**

READ: Susan Hiwatt, “Cock Rock”; Lepore, Epilogue and Afterword

PREPARE: Find 3 Revealing Quotations from Hiwatt’s Article

FORUM: GROUP 1

4/25 **“Disco Sucks!” Race, Gender, Sexuality, and the Battle over Urban Space**

WATCH: *Saturday Night Fever*

READ: Jefferson Cowie on Saturday Night Fever

FORUM: GROUP 2

Week 14 **Participatory Culture in the Global Age**

4/30 **The Player with a Thousand Faces: *Star Wars*, Video Games, and Narrative Empowerment**

READ: Articles on the Hero’s Journey and Origins of Video Games

WATCH: *Harmonquest* Episode 1

FORUM: GROUP 3

5/2 **“The United States of Smash:” Pacific Exchanges in a Multi-Cultural World**

WATCH: Cowboy Bebop, Episode 1 (Available on Hulu, and \$2.99 on Amazon)

FORUM: GROUP 4

Week 15 **Cultures of Trauma and Joy**

5/7 **Everything is Awful? Camp and Grimdark in American Culture**

READ: *The Dark Knight Returns*

FORUM: GROUP 5

5/9 **Everything is Awesome? Identity in a Pop Culture World**

WATCH *The Lego Movie*

FORUM: MAKE-UP (ANYONE)

Week 16 **Finals Week**

5/17

DUE FRIDAY AT 11:59 PM ON TITANIUM: FINAL EXAM