

HIS 524 Topics in Twentieth Century History: American Popular Culture

Dr. Kathleen Franz
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Office Hours: Wed 10-1
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Class Meeting
MW 2:00-3:15
Mclver 226

Course Description:

This course will explore the origins and cultural meanings of American popular culture in the 20th century, and in particular the rise of mass media as a form of communication and community formation between 1890 and the present. Course readings will introduce students to the cultural history of circuses, film, radio, and television as commodities and as expressions of identity and community in a diverse nation. We will pay close attention to how popular culture embodies ideas about gender, race, class and nation in the twentieth century and how American popular forms have been used and recreated by audiences. The course will require intensive reading in history and cultural studies and active class participation.

Learning Goals:

- * Articulate the cultural and historical importance of popular culture in the Twentieth century.
- * Understand the current methodological approaches to studying popular culture.
- * Understand how popular culture has acted as an arena of conflict and in particular how it has shaped lasting representations and expectations of gender and national identity in the United States.

Books:

- Janet Davis, *The Circus Age: Culture and Society Under the American Big Top*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America A Cultural History of American Movies*. New York: Random House, 1975. (Or the newer, Vintage edition in the bookstore.)
- Marguerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001.
- Rolland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.
- Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media*. New York: Random House, 1995.
- Andrew Lainsbury, *Once Upon An American Dream: The Story of Euro Disney*, Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2003.

Grading:

Class Participation 25%

Class participation includes attendance and active discussion. Missing more than four classes will lower your grade by ten points.

Reader's Response Journal (due for each book) 25%

One-page response to questions posted on Blackboard.

Two Short Research Essays (6-8 pages each, 25% each) 50%

Paper topics will be handed out in class. Choose two out of four assignments.

Research Paper (15-20 pages) 50%

*This option for Graduate Students Only. Guidelines will be handed out in class.

Course Schedule

Introduction

Monday August 16

Discussion of syllabus, assignments, and Blackboard.

Wednesday August 18

Lecture: Why Study Popular Culture?

Reading: John Storey, "Popular Culture: The "Other" of High Culture," in John Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture*, London: Blackwell, 2003, 32-47.

(E-Reserves.)

Monday August 23

Reading: George Lipsitz, "Popular Culture: This Ain't No Sideshow," in George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990, pp. 3-20. **(E-Reserves)**

John Storey, "Popular Culture as the 'Roots' and 'Routes' of Cultural Identities," in John Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture*, London: Blackwell, 2003, pp. 78-91. **(E-Reserves)**

Journal Entry 1 Due on Blackboard: Choose a popular culture "text" that is important to you. Write a one-page explanation of why this particular example of popular culture is meaningful. Refer to the readings if possible. (Do the writing in your on-line journal.) And then bring the example to class for discussion.

The Circus

Wednesday August 25

Discussion: Janet Davis, *The Circus Age*

Journal Entry 2 Due on Blackboard.

Monday August 30

Discussion: Janet Davis, *The Circus Age*

Wednesday September 1

A Closer Look: Race and Representation in Popular Culture
Documentary Film -- Marlon Riggs, "Ethnic Notions."

→ **Graduates:** Deadline for choosing long or short research papers.

Monday September 6 – Labor Day Holiday

Vacations

Wednesday September 8

Lecture: Getting Away from It All—The Pleasures of Travel

Monday September 13

Discussion: Marguerite Shaffer, *See America First*
Journal Entry 4 Due on Blackboard

Wednesday September 15

Discussion: Marguerite Shaffer, *See America First*

Monday September 20

A Closer Look: Photography and the Visual Culture of Travel

Reading: Ellen Strain, "The Filtering Eye of the Tourist" in Ellen Strain, *Public Places, Private Journeys: Ethnography, Entertainment, and the Tourist Gaze*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003, pp. 1-14. **(E-Reserves)**

→ *Graduates: Paper Proposals Due!*

→ *Undergraduates: Paper 1 Handed Out in Class.*

Movies

Wednesday September 22

Lecture: Early Films and New Ways of Seeing

Monday September 27

Discussion: Robert Sklar, *Movie Made America*
Journal Entry 4 Due on Blackboard.

Wednesday September 29

Discussion: Robert Sklar, *Movie Made America*

Monday October 4

A Closer Look: Films from the Golden Age of the 1930s

Wednesday October 6 – **Reading Day/ Class Cancelled**

Monday October 11 – **Fall Break/ Class Cancelled**

Advertising

Wednesday October 13

Discussion: Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*
Journal Entry 5 Due on Blackboard.

Monday October 18

Discussion: Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*

→ *Graduates: Research Reports Due + Bibliographies.*

→ *Undergraduates: Paper Assignment 2 Handed out in Class*

Radio

Wednesday October 20

Lecture: Radio and the Origins of Commercial Broadcasting

Reading: Michele Hilmes, "Radiating Culture," and "Under Cover of Daytime," in Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997, pp: 1-33, 151-182. **(E-Reserves)**

Monday October 25

Listen Closely: Soap Operas

Television

Wednesday October 27

Discussion: Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV*

Monday November 1

Discussion: Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV*

Wednesday November 3

A Closer Look: Sitcoms of the 1950s and 1960s

→ *Undergrads: Paper Assignment 3 Handed Out in Class*

Monday November 8

Discussion: Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*
Journal Entry 6 Due on Blackboard.

Wednesday November 10

Discussion: Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*

→ *Graduates: Draft of Introductions Due.*

Going Global: Exporting American Popular Culture

Monday November 15

Discussion: John Storey, "Popular Culture as Global Culture," in John Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture*, London: Blackwell Publishing, 2003, pp. 107-120.
(E-Reserves)

Wednesday November 17

Lecture: Disney's Powerful Dream

Reading: Yi-Fu Tuan with Steven D. Hoelscher, "Disneyland: It's Place in World Culture," and Greil Marcus, "Forty Years of Overstatement: Criticism and the Disney Theme Parks," in Karal Ann Marling, ed., *Designing Disney's Theme Parks: The Architecture of Reassurance*, New York: Flammarion, 1997, pp.191-208. **(E-Reserves)**

→ *Undergrads. Paper Assignment 4. Handed Out in Class.*

Monday November 22 – Holiday/ Class Cancelled

Wednesday November 24 – Thanksgiving Holiday

Monday November 29

Discussion: Lainsbury, *Once Upon An American Dream*

Wednesday December 1

Discussion: Lainsbury, *Once Upon An American Dream*
Journal Entry 7 Due On Blackboard.

Monday December 6 – Course Conclusion

→ *Graduates. Final Papers Due.*