

AMS 370 (31165)

Spring 2019

The Beats and American Culture, 1945-90

Instructor: Jeffrey Meikle

Class: Wed. 6:30-9:30 pm, Burdine 436A

Office hours: Wed. 2:30-4:30, or by appt., Burdine 424

Contact info: meikle@mail.utexas.edu, 512-232-2166

Flags: Independent Inquiry; Writing

Historians and literary critics have long debated the significance—both literary and cultural—of such Beat Generation writers as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William Burroughs. Their novels and poems revealed the underside of a post-World War II generation that rewarded conformity and careerism. The Beats were not so much in protest against the status quo as oblivious to it. However, their writings served as a subversive call to the cultural and political radicals of the counterculture and the New Left during the 1960s and later. This seminar addresses the impact and significance of the Beat literary movement by examining several classics of Beat writing and tracing their influence on popular art and culture from the 1960s through the 1980s. First we will examine the social and political background from which a Beat subculture emerged during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Next we will assess several key texts both as literary works and as documents of social and cultural history from the 1940s through the early 1960s. Then, using an interdisciplinary approach, we will ask whether a Beat aesthetic spread from literature to other areas of cultural production. Finally, we will examine survivals, influences, and appropriations of Beat or neo-Beat modes of expression in popular arts from the 1960s through the 1980s. This course has a significant writing component, including a final paper on a single Beat or neo-Beat figure or phenomenon. In a sense, the course is an exploration of alternative cultures during the last half of the 20th century.

The instructor will present a brief historical overview of the period and offer a series of themes for discussion but for the most part will serve as a moderator of discussion. Students are encouraged to act as cultural observers and critics.

Because a successful seminar depends on lively, informed discussions, students are expected to complete assigned readings before class meetings, to attend regularly, and to participate actively in class. Written work includes four 2-page essays (10% of final grade each), a long essay of at least 10 pages (30%), and an in-class essay (15%). Each student is responsible for attendance and frequent class participation (15%). Daily quizzes will contribute to the class participation grade. Attendance is especially important because we meet only once a week. Thus one absence is the equivalent of missing three sessions of a class that meets MWF. Three unexcused absences will lead to a reduction of the earned course grade by one full letter; four or more unexcused absences will lead to automatic failure of the course, no matter what one's earned average might be. Overall evaluation is based on originality and clarity of thought and expression, both written and oral. The plus and minus grading system is in effect. The course is flagged for writing and independent inquiry.

This course requires considerable reading. If that worries you, then it may not be for you. Required reading includes the following ten books and a course pack of articles available from the Texas Union Copy Center, UNB 2.214, 512-475-6675. Be sure to bring physical copies of assigned readings to each meeting. We will be referring to specific pages and you will be expected to follow along.

Required books:

Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*
 Allen Ginsberg, *Howl*
 Jack Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler*
 Joyce Johnson, *Minor Characters*
 William Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*
 Bob Dylan, *Chronicles, Volume 1*
 Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*
 Allen Ginsberg, *The Fall of America*
 Hunter Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*
 Gary Snyder, *Turtle Island*

If you will miss a class for religious observance, please notify the instructor at least a week in advance.

You are expected to abide by the University Code of Conduct and the Student Honor Code, which are both stated here:

"The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community."

"As a student of The University of Texas at Austin, I shall abide by the core values of the University and uphold academic integrity."

If you have any uncertainty as to what constitutes intellectual dishonesty, please see the official eleven-point definition at <http://catalog.utexas.edu/general-information/appendices/appendix-c/student-discipline-and-conduct/>. Intellectual dishonesty will not be tolerated and is grounds for course failure.

Upon request the University provides appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact the Office of the Dean of Students at 471-6259, 471-6441 TTY. If you know you will be requesting an accommodation, please submit your letter during the first two weeks of the semester.

Please attend to the following statement from the Office of Campus Safety and Security regarding emergencies: "Occupants of buildings on the UT campus are required to evacuate buildings when a fire alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside. Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building. Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class. In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors."

Schedule

(Note: an asterisk * indicates a book is available at the Co-op; other readings are in the course pack.)

- Jan. 23 Organization and introduction
- Jan. 30 Defining the Beat experience
Postwar malaise: organization man, lonely crowd, and feminine mystique
- Ann Charters, "What Was the Beat Generation?" *Beat Down to Your Soul* (2001)
Anatole Broyard, "A Portrait of the Hipster," *Partisan Review* (1948)
John Clellon Holmes, "This Is the Beat Generation," *New York Times* (November 1952)
Jack Kerouac, "On the Origins of a Generation," *Playboy* (June 1959)
- Feb. 6 In search of America
- *Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (1957)
Gilbert Millstein, review of *On the Road*, *New York Times*, September 5, 1957
John Clellon Holmes, "The Great Rememberer" (1966), from *Representative Men* (1988)
Jack Kerouac, *On the Road: The Original Scroll* (1951; pub. 2007), brief selection
FIRST 2-PAGE ESSAY DUE BEFORE CLASS
- Feb. 13 The problematic of race: the Beats and Black America
Crosscurrents: Jazz, Abstract Expressionism, and Beat aesthetics
- Jack Kerouac, "The Beginning of Bop," *Escapade* (April 1959)
Norman Podhoretz, "The Know-Nothing Bohemians," *Partisan Review* (Spring 1958)
Norman Mailer, "The White Negro," *Dissent* (Spring 1957)
- Feb. 20 Allen Ginsberg's poetics of the hydrogen jukebox
Kerouac's spontaneous bop prosody
- *Allen Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems* (1956)
*Jack Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler* (1960)
Jack Kerouac, "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose," *Black Mountain Review* (Autumn 1957)
Jack Kerouac, "Belief & Technique for Modern Prose," *Evergreen Review* (Spring 1959)
SECOND 2-PAGE ESSAY DUE BEFORE CLASS

- Feb. 27 Girls who wore black: women and the Beats
- * Joyce Johnson, *Minor Characters*
 "Panel Discussion with Women Writers of the Beat Generation"
 (1996), in *Beat Down to Your Soul*, ed. Ann Charters (2001)
- March 6 Beat cinema
 Emergence of a "Beat Generation": from subculture to pop culture
- Paul O'Neil, "The Only Rebellion Around," *Life* (November 30, 1959)
 THIRD 2-PAGE ESSAY DUE BEFORE CLASS
- March 13 William Burroughs and the old weird America
- *William Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (1959)
 Ann Douglas, "'Punching a Hole in the Big Lie': The Achievement of
 William S. Burroughs," introduction to *Word Virus: The William
 Burroughs Reader* (1998)
 William Burroughs, from *Junky* (1953)
- SPRING BREAK
- March 27 Out on Highway 61: Bob Dylan as latter-day Beat
- *Bob Dylan, *Chronicles: Volume One* (2004)
- April 3 Further along the road: Ken Kesey and the psychedelic experience
- *Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968)
 FOURTH 2-PAGE ESSAY DUE BEFORE CLASS
- April 10 Ginsberg's road from Beat poet to antiwar activist
 The road movie...a Beat genre?
- *Allen Ginsberg, *The Fall of America* (1972)
- April 17 Gonzo journalism and the end of the road
- *Hunter Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971)
- April 24 Some of the Dharma: Beats and eco-consciousness
- *Gary Snyder, *Turtle Island* (1974)
 Jack Kerouac, from *Some of the Dharma* (written 1954-55)
 Jack Kerouac, from *Dharma Bums* (1958)

- May 1 Tom Waits, Jim Jarmusch, Laurie Anderson, and neo-Beat romanticism
- Jay Jacobs, from *Wild Years* (2000)
Mark Roland, "Tom Waits Is Flying Upside Down (On Purpose)," *Musician* (October 1987)
Jim Jarmusch, "Tom Waits Meets Jim Jarmusch," *Straight No Chaser*
John Leland, "Do Geeks Dream of HTML Sheep?" *Hip: The History* (2004)
FINAL PAPER DUE BEFORE CLASS
- May 8 IN-CLASS ESSAY