

AMERICAN STUDIES 370  
 American Popular Culture: 1682-Present  
 FALL 2018  
 Unique #: 31245  
 T, TH: 12:30-1:45 PM  
 BUR 436A

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***This course fulfills a Writing Flag and the Cultural Diversity in the United States Flag.***

**Scope of the course:** In 1682, the first American bestseller was published. Audiences in the American colonies and in England devoured Mary Rowlandson's breathless account of her harrowing experiences as a captive of the Narragansett and Nipmunk Indians during King Philip's War in *The Narrative of the Captivity and the Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*. Taking a long, historical view, this course explores the evolution of American popular culture and its relationship to national consolidation (and at times, disunion) over the last 336 years. Starting with oral, religious, print, and live performance traditions during the colonial, early national, and antebellum periods, this course will consider the cultural impact of new technologies such as steam power, the railroad, photography, recorded sound, celluloid, the electronic transmission of moving images, and the internet. Throughout the semester, we will stress the centrality of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class in shaping the production and content of popular culture, modes of popular representation, the composition of popular audiences, types of reception, and the ways in which people have used pop cultural forms as a claim to citizenship.

**Class Format:** This is a discussion seminar, but occasionally, I will lecture in order to provide broader historical overviews of specific forms of popular culture, such as film and television; additionally, I will also discuss pop cultural theorists, such as bell hooks, Antonio Gramsci, Raymond Williams, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Michel Foucault, and Lawrence Levine. These brief introductions to key theorists will help you understand the conceptual and the methodological tools people use to study popular cultural history.

**Requirements:** Mandatory attendance, active participation in the discussion—including responding to select discussion questions from your peers, completion of all reading and writing assignments; in-class presentation; and a take-home final essay examination.

**Attendance Policy:** If you are absent, you must tell me IN ADVANCE—either in person, by telephone, or via email. If you have THREE UNEXCUSED ABSENCES, your grade will be lowered by a half of a letter grade for each subsequent absence.

**Religious Holy Days:** You will be automatically excused for missing class on religious holy days. However, you must let me know about your absence in advance so that we can make alternate assignment arrangements, if necessary. With prior notice, I will mark all religious holy days absences as "Excused."

**Grade Breakdown:**

Discussion—Includes your class presentation: 25%  
 Five sets of study questions during the semester (3-5 questions per set): 15%  
 Paper Draft (5-7 pages for completion credit grade): 10%  
 Revised Paper (5-7 pages for a letter grade): 20%  
 Final Take-Home Essay (7-10 pages): 30%

**Grading Scale:** A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; B+: 87-89; B: 83-86; B-: 80-82; C+: 77-79; C: 73-76; C-: 70-72; D+: 67-69; D: 63-66; D-: 60-62; F: 0-59

**Discussion Format:** Be prepared to discuss and analyze the historical significance of the reading assignment for each class. Occasionally, we will break into smaller groups to analyze specific cultural objects in relation to the reading assignments, lectures, and larger course themes. For example, we will study actual copies of Ms. Magazine when we discuss specific chapters of Susan Douglas, Where the Girls Are. You will also engage in periodic free-write sessions in small groups that you will share with your classmates as part of the discussion. In all discussions, please be prepared to make historical connections across assignments and across historical periods.

**Study Questions Format:** 3-5 questions per set, based on a reading assignment of your choice, due at the beginning of the class date on which the reading is assigned. Please note that you may write only twice on the same author during the semester. You are responsible for a TOTAL of five sets of questions. Here are some suggested guidelines to help you frame your questions analytically, rather than descriptively. Please note that you do NOT need to incorporate all of these guidelines into each question. Some will be more pertinent than others, depending on your approach to your questions:

1) What sources does the author use to make her/his analysis? 2) How is the work organized—chronologically and/or thematically? What historical themes does s/he explore? 3) Does the author appear to have any political bias or specific political agenda in writing this work? 4) What is the author's argument? 5) What types of historical and/or thematic connections can you make between this work and other reading assignments? In all cases, if you quote from an assignment, please provide a page number after your quoted material in parenthesis. The final day to submit your last set of study questions is in class on **December 6**.

**Class Presentation Format:** During the semester, you will make a short (5-7 minute) presentation on a topic of your choosing related to "Pop Culture in the News." In your presentation, you should provide a brief overview of your news item, and then you should offer some historical analysis tying your news item to other events and/or themes in the history of American popular culture. If you prefer, you can focus your discussion on the relationship of your news item to the week's reading assignment. We will set up a presentation schedule on the second day of class. Typically, one student will present in each class.

**5-7-page Paper Structure and Format:** You will write a 5-7-page analytic essay on a pop cultural object of your choice. Please note that this page length refers to the text portion of your essay. Your chosen pop cultural object might be a song, doll, sermon, poem, poster, album cover, Suffragette pin, painting, corset, movie, cartoon, swimsuit, iconic and/or watershed episode of a TV show, piece of Astroturf, viral YouTube video, fad, meme, etc. You must, however, receive my permission in advance for the object you choose. Your pop cultural object can be from the present day; however, your paper **MUST** contain some historical component. In other words, even if you choose a contemporary (or fairly recent) object, you must situate its significance historically. For example, if you were to analyze the extraordinarily popular YouTube video, "Gangnam Style" by Psy, (clocking in, as of this writing, with more than 3.2 billion unique views since it debuted in July 2012) you should think historically about the video. Here are some historically-situated threads of analysis for consideration: making connections between the video's satirical treatment of Seoul's posh Gangnam District, known as the "Beverly Hills of South Korea" and the growth of South Korea's booming consumer culture in the decades following the Korean War; exploring the rise of K-Pop in the USA and the proliferation of celebrity culture via reality TV and social media. Alternatively, you might focus your analysis on Psy's transnational fusion of musical and dance styles, all of which have long historical roots.

Overall, your essay must be logically organized and supported by **at least five** sources. Only one of your sources can be a website, although scholarly articles downloaded from a research database, such as a specific newspaper database on ProQuest, or an online academic journal are **exempt** from this rule. Please do NOT use Wikipedia as a sole source. It's fine to start exploring aspects of your topic with Wikipedia, but please use this site **only** as a way to find other sources, including primary material and secondary sources of record. Your paper must contain endnote citations following pages five to seven. Your endnotes must conform to standard citation format in Humanities disciplines. Please see the Chicago Manual of Style in order to format your endnote citations: [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html) Additionally, you can download electronic database sources from the UT Libraries site already formatted in Chicago Style. Thereafter, simply cut and paste downloaded citations into each respective endnote.

Your essay must be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins, twelve-point font, and numbered pages. You should organize the essay in the following manner: 1) An INTRODUCTION, or an overview of your topic, including a thesis statement, which tells your reader how you will interpret the significance of the subject matter of your essay 3) A BODY, comprised of concrete evidence to support your interpretive thesis statement 4) A CONCLUSION, which summarizes the body of the paper, reiterating (with different wording) and substantiating the thesis statement. 5) A BIBLIOGRAPHY of your sources that follows pages five to seven. In crafting your thesis statement, as well as the body of your analysis, please consider the following questions: 1) What is the historical significance of this object? 2) Why is this object important to the study of popular culture in terms of producers and/or popular audiences? 3) Does this object appeal to a specific market segment? If so, to whom does it appeal? Why?

Your first draft of the 5-7-page paper will be due in class on **October 23**. Your revised paper will be due in class on **November 20**.

### **Final Take-Home Essay Exam Structure and Format:**

You must answer 1 question (choice of 2) using relevant material from the reading assignments, lectures, discussion, and presentations to support your essay. This is an open-book test. This essay should be at least seven pages and must not exceed ten pages. It must be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins and twelve-point font. Your essay must include an INTRODUCTION, including an interpretive THESIS STATEMENT; a BODY; and a CONCLUSION. The materials you discuss in your essay should support your interpretive thesis statement. You may use parenthetical citations when quoting verbatim material for this take-home essay. Here are some examples: (Cook, p. 58); (Davis Lecture, "The Birth of the Movies and the Dawning of Celebrity Culture," 10/11/18).

*Lateness policy on final take-home exam:* Failure to hand in your take-home final exam on **December 11, by 2:00 PM**, will result in the following penalties without prior contact with me: for each hour that your exam is late, you will be deducted 1/2 a grade.

### **Required Reading:**

Peter Benchley, *Jaws*

James W. Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum*

Janet M. Davis, editor, *Tiny Kline, Circus Queen and Tinker Bell: The Life of Tiny Kline*

Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media*

Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*

Nhi Lieu, *The American Dream in Vietnamese*

Mary Rowlandson, "A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson," in

Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola, editor, *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives*

All books are available for purchase at the University Co-op and through online vendors.

**Civility Code:** I expect everyone to be attentive, engaged, and respectful to one another during class. All cell phones and hand-held electronic devices must be off during class. If you wish to text, read, browse the Internet, talk with your neighbor, sleep, or do anything else disruptive, then please go elsewhere. Moreover, please try to save bathroom visits for before or after class.

**Policy on Academic Integrity:** *From the Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students:* "Students who violate University rules on academic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on academic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, please visit the Student Conduct and Academic Integrity website at: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct>."

**Well-being in Learning Environments:** I am dedicated to promoting a sense of well-being in our classroom. If you have any questions regarding campus resources for well-being and mental health, please let me know. I can help you in finding any resources you'd like to explore.

\*\*\*\*\*CLASS SCHEDULE\*\*\*\*\*

- TH 8/30 INTRODUCTION TO COURSE AND SYLLABUS: WHAT IS POPULAR CULTURE?  
Start reading Rowlandson (in Derounian-Stodola)
- T 9/4 LECTURE: RELIGION, RACE, GENDER, AND COLONIAL PRINT CULTURES, PART I
- TH 9/6 RELIGION, RACE, GENDER, AND COLONIAL PRINT CULTURES, PART II  
Rowlandson (All)
- T 9/11 LECTURE: EXHIBITIONS AND CURIOSITIES DURING THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND EARLY REPUBLIC
- TH 9/13 EXHIBITIONS, CURIOSITIES, MUSEUMS, AND PUBLIC CULTURE DURING THE AMERICAN ENLIGHTENMENT  
Cook, Chapters 1, 2
- T 9/18 RACE AND POPULAR PERFORMANCE DURING THE SECTIONAL CRISIS  
Cook, Chapter 3
- TH 9/20 NO CLASS: Dr. Davis will be lecturing at the New York Public Library  
Work on your research papers, finish Cook, and start reading Kline**
- T 9/25 LECTURE: DOCUMENTING THE CIVIL WAR: PHOTOGRAPHY
- TH 9/27 MAGIC, ILLUSION, AND THE AGE OF FRAUD  
Cook, Chapters 4-5, Epilogue
- T 10/2 GENDER, RACE/ETHNICITY, CLASS, AND LIVE PERFORMANCE AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY  
Kline (including Davis Introduction), pp. 1-142
- TH 10/4 NO CLASS: Dr. Davis will be lecturing in Portland, Oregon  
Finish Kline, work on your research paper**
- T 10/9 THE BIRTH OF MODERN MASS CULTURE: THE CASE OF TINY KLINE  
Kline, pp. 143-312
- TH 10/11 LECTURE: THE BIRTH OF THE MOVIES AND THE DAWNING OF CELEBRITY CULTURE
- T 10/16 LECTURE: THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE: CULTURE AND CIVIL RIGHTS
- TH 10/18 LECTURE: "WHY WE FIGHT": WORLD WAR II AS A CULTURAL WATERSHED, PART I
- T 10/23 LECTURE: "WHY WE FIGHT": WORLD WAR II AS A CULTURAL WATERSHED, PART II  
\*\*5-7-PAGE PAPER DRAFT DUE TODAY\*\***
- TH 10/25 POSTWAR TELEVISION, CONSUMER CULTURE, AND A MINI-LECTURE ON THE WORLD OF WALT DISNEY**  
**Douglas, Introduction, Chapter 1**  
**Evening Lecture, 7:30 PM, ART 1.102: Leslie Zemeckis will lecture and hold a Q&A on her new book, *Feuding Fan Dancers: Faith Bacon, Sally Rand, and the Golden Age of the Showgirl***

T 10/30 POSTWAR TEEN CULTURES: BEAUTY, SEXUALITY, MUSIC, AND THE MEDIA  
Douglas, Chapters 2-4

TH 11/1 THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE, MISS AMERICA, AND THE RISE OF THE SECOND WAVE  
OF FEMINISM  
Douglas, Chapters 5-7

T 11/6 MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF FEMINISM AND “THE BACKLASH”  
Douglas, Chapters 8-11

**TH 11/8 NO CLASS: Dr. Davis will be presenting at the American Studies Association Annual Meeting in Atlanta**  
**Use this time to continue revising your research paper and read Benchley**

T 11/13 POPULAR CULTURE DURING THE VIETNAM WAR ERA—JAWS AS A CASE STUDY, PART I  
Benchley, Part One

TH 11/15 POPULAR CULTURE DURING THE VIETNAM ERA—JAWS AS A CASE STUDY, PART II  
Benchley, Part Two

**T 11/20 LECTURE: “STAYIN’ ALIVE” IN THE 1970S AND 1980S: POPULAR CULTURE AND SOCIAL ANXIETY**  
**\*\*Revised 5-7 Page Research Papers DUE TODAY\*\***

**TH 11/22 NO CLASS: HAPPY THANKSGIVING!!**  
**Read Lieu over the break**

T 11/27 POPULAR CULTURE AND COMMUNITY FORMATION, PART I  
Lieu, Introduction-p.77

TH 11/29 POPULAR CULTURE AND COMMUNITY FORMATION, PART II  
Lieu, pp. 79-134

T 12/4 CONVERGENCE CULTURE: POPULAR AUDIENCES AND THE POTENTIAL FOR PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY?  
Jenkins, Chapters 1-3

**TH 12/6 RETHINKING AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE: FROM THE CAPTIVITY NARRATIVE TO SOCIAL MEDIA**  
**Jenkins, Chapters 4-6, Conclusion**  
***Last day to submit study questions***

**FINAL TAKE-HOME ESSAY EXAM:** I will hand out the take-home on **THURSDAY December 6**, in class. The exam is due in Burdine 437 on **TUESDAY, December 11, NO LATER than 2:00 PM without prior approval from me.** Please place your completed essay exam in the box labeled “Davis—Pop Culture.”

***DISCLAIMER: THIS SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE DURING THE COURSE OF THE SEMESTER, IF NECESSARY.***