

AMST 1610Z: American Popular Culture

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Office Hours: Wednesdays, 1-3 and by appointment

Popular culture is a part of our everyday lives, but also an important site at which to examine how American identities are shaped and reflected through film, television, music, performance, and fashion. We will trace the history of American popular culture from the nineteenth century to the present, looking at the production and reception of popular culture, as well as the cultural texts themselves. Paying particular attention to the development of different media and looking at case studies including world's fairs, the zoot suit, sitcoms, and disco, we will consider how Americans have made meaning using popular culture.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- to understand the history of American popular culture from the mid nineteenth century to the present
- to consider how Americans have made meaning and created identities using and reacting to popular culture
- to recognize popular culture as a fluid form and to attend to the specificities and interests involved in the production, circulation, and reception of popular culture
- to learn to read cultural objects and texts from a variety of angles: paying attention to form, medium specificity, and historical context

ASSIGNMENTS:

☐ TWO 5-7 page papers (detailed assignments to be distributed in class) 30 % EACH

- First Paper (due October 19th): Close analysis—referring to materials from lecture and reading assignments, perform a close reading of a primary text
- Second Paper (due November 16th): Change over time—discuss either how one mode of popular culture OR the representation of one group has changed over time

☐ ONE final paper or take-home exam (about 10 pages) 30%

☐ CLASS PARTICIPATION 10%

- This includes section attendance and participation as well as regular posting to the course blog. Posts will not be graded, but are an opportunity for you to bring your own interests into the class and will be used as the basis of class discussion.

REQUIRED READING: (available for purchase at the Brown bookstore and on reserve at the Rock)

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

Alice Echols, *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture*

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

Kathy Peiss, *Zoot Suit: The Enigmatic Career of an Extreme Style*

Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916*

****All other reading and film assignments will be available on OCRA (password is "popular") or on Canvas**

CLASS SCHEDULE

September 5/7: Introductions

September 10/12/14

Lecture: What do we mean by popular culture? What are the historical roots of popular culture?

□, John Clarke, "Approaches to Interpreting Popular Culture," in Susan Smulyan and Kathleen Franz, *Major Problems in American Popular Culture*, (Wadsworth: 2011) 16-25, **OCRA**

□ Michael Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change in the 20th Century* (New York: Knopf, 1999), selections, **OCRA**

September 17/19/21: Print Culture, Vaudeville, and Minstrelsy

Lecture Topics: birth of mass culture, imagined communities, Uncle Tom's Cabin and moral suasion, emergence of vaudeville

□ David Roediger, "White Skins, Black Masks: Minstrelsy and White Working Class Formation before the Civil War," in *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (Verso: 1991) 115-132, **OCRA**

□ Robin Bernstein, "Everybody is Impressed: Slavery as Tender Embrace from Uncle Tom's Cabin to Uncle Remus' Cabin," in *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights*, (New York University Press, 2011), 92-145, **OCRA**

□ Robert Toll, "Minstrels and African-Americans in the Nineteenth Century," in Smulyan and Franz, 36-45, **OCRA**

□ James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel," (1949) **OCRA**

September 24/26/28: World's Fairs and Public Amusement

Lecture Topics: Industrialization and its changes: American imperialism in the 19thc, the birth of the "spectacle," consumer culture

□ Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (University of Chicago Press, 1984), selections

□ Richard Slotkin, "Buffalo Bill's 'Wild West' and the Mythologization of American Empire," in Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease, *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Duke University Press, 1993), 165-184, **OCRA**

October 1/3/5: Early Cinema

WATCH: *Broken Blossoms*

Lecture Topics: American immigration, Orientalism, early film and Griffith (Birth of a Nation)

□ Miriam Hansen, "The Emergence of Spectatorship" in *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Harvard University Press, 1991), selections, **OCRA**

□ Robert G. Lee, "Inner Dikes and Barred Zones," in *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture*, (Temple University Press, 1999) **OCRA**

October (8)/10/12 Advertising and Radio

Lecture Topics: branding, birth and consolidation of advertising industry, radio and advertising

□ Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940*

(University of California Press, 1985), selections, **OCRA**

❑ Susan Smulyan, "Paying for Radio by Selling Time," in Smulyan and Franz, 277-285, **OCRA**

October 15/17/19 Fashion

Lecture Topics: popular culture and changes during WWII, adaptation of American fashion abroad—case studies on t-shirts, "jazz ambassadors"

❑ Kathy Peiss, *Zoot Suit: The Enigmatic Career of an Extreme Style* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011)

FIRST PAPER DUE: OCTOBER 19TH

October 22/24/26 – Television

WATCH: COLOR ADJUSTMENT

Lecture Topics: Introduction of television and television culture, "vast wasteland," television and civil rights, case study: the domestic sitcom

❑ Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), 36-73, 99-181 **ebook available on Josiah and linked on Canvas**

❑ Mary Desjardins, "Lucy and Desi: Sexuality, Ethnicity, and TV's First Family" in Lauren Rabinowitz and Mary Beth Haralovich, *Television, History, and American Culture: Feminist Critical Essays* (Duke University Press, 1999), 56-74, **OCRA**

October 29/31/November 2—Popular Music

Lecture Topics: 1960s and youth culture, New Left and women's liberation, rock n roll music

❑ George Lipsitz, "Against the Wind: Dialogical Aspects of Rock N Roll" in *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 99-132, **OCRA**

❑ Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (Three Rivers Press, 1994), selections

November 5/7/9—Counterculture and Subculture

Lecture Topics: 1960s counterculture and consumerism, studying subculture, birth of punk culture in New York

❑ Philip J. Deloria, "Countercultural Indians and the New Age" in *Playing Indian* (Yale University Press, 1999), 154-180, **OCRA**

❑ David McBride, "Death City Radicals: The Counterculture in Los Angeles," in *The New Left Revisited*, eds. John McMillian and Paul Buhle (Temple University Press, 2003), 110-136, **OCRA**

❑ Aniko Bodroghkozy, "Reel Revolutionaries: An Examination of Hollywood's Cycle of 1960s Youth Rebellion Films" *Cinema Journal* 41.3 (Spring 2002): 38-58, **OCRA**

November 12/14/16 –Cinema Changing

WATCH: SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER

Lecture Topics: America in the 1970s, New Hollywood Cinema and the influence of the counterculture on film in the 70s and 80s, disco: from subculture to mainstream and backlash

❑ Alice Echols, *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture* (W.W. Norton, 2010)

SECOND PAPER DUE: NOVEMBER 16TH

November 19/21/23: THANKSGIVING

IN CLASS SCREENING AND DISCUSSION: TBA

November 26/28/30 –Globalization and Television

Lecture Topics: market segmentation and television production, American popular culture abroad, shifting contexts and meanings, culture jamming

□ Lisa Parks and Shanti Kumar, *Planet TV: A Global Television Reader* (New York University Press, 2003), selections, **OCRA**

December 3/5/7—The Digital

Lecture Topics: convergence, popular culture in the digital era, fandom, participation, and remixing

□ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York University Press, 2006)

FINAL PAPER/EXAM DUE: