

AMERICAN STUDIES 300

Introduction to American Popular Culture

AMST 300-14 #21634
California State University, Fullerton
Spring 2018
M/W 1:00-2:15 • UH-250

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Office Hours: Mondays 2:30-3:30, Wednesdays 11:30-12:30, and by appointment

Course Description

This course explores the historical development of U.S. popular culture, from the 19th century to the present. We will focus our attention on the production and reception of popular culture, studying how marketers and audiences have ascribed meanings to various leisure activities and mass amusements. Throughout the course, we will consider how the ideological content and public reception of popular culture can be shaped by region, race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, age, and technology. One of our central aims is to understand how the traditions and techniques of 19th and 20th century entertainment forms evolved over time and influence the modern age of mass and digital media in which we currently live. Subjects for study include music, dance, sports, film, amusement parks, comic books, television, monsters, and fandom. American Studies 300 meets the General Education "Explorations in Social Sciences" requirement (D.5).

Required Books

Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*

Gena Caponi-Tabery, *Jump for Joy: Jazz, Basketball, and Black Culture in 1930s America*

Jill Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*

James Tynion IV, *Memetic*

Daniel Cavicchi, *Tramps Like Us: Music and Meaning Among Springsteen Fans*

All books are available for purchase at Little Professor bookstore, 725 N. Placentia Ave (near the corner of Nutwood and Placentia).

Required Film (available for streaming via Titanium):

Them! (dir. Gordon Douglas, 1954)

American Studies Learning Goals

Develop a rigorous concept of culture and cultural process as well as an interdisciplinary sensibility, becoming aware of connections among the social sciences and the humanities.

- Develop an interdisciplinary interpretive framework for studying American culture, cultural diversity, and cultural

processes in ways that will enable students to solve practical and theoretical problems

Gain a thorough understanding of cultural diversity by examining the creative tension between unity and multiplicity in American experiences.

- Identify a variety of examples of cultural diversity and commonality in America's past and present, demonstrating an awareness of the similarities, differences, and relationships among the multitude of American groups
- Explain how categories of difference—including race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality—are culturally constructed and vary according to historical, regional, and social contexts
- Understand and demonstrate how cultural beliefs and practices have played a role in both the exercise of and resistance to power throughout American history

Understand and interpret the ways in which culture creates meaning and guides behavior.

- Critically analyze and interpret a spectrum of cultural documents and expressive forms, ranging from popular to folk to elite expressions, from mass media to material culture
- Employ both historical and contemporary perspectives in order to situate these documents in relevant individual and social as well as local, national, and global contexts

Learn research, writing, and expressive skills to see connections among complex materials and to clearly communicate an understanding of the underlying meanings and causes of cultural/historical events.

- Design and carry out an original interdisciplinary research project on American culture
- Discover primary and secondary sources (hard copy as well as digital) using the library's resources
- Analyze and synthesize material from primary and secondary sources in order to create a coherent argument based on evidence
- Develop an original thesis and support that thesis through the thoughtful use of a variety of properly cited sources
- Communicate their research findings through clear, well-organized written and oral presentations
- Develop critical thinking, writing, and interpretive skills

Become informed and engaged American citizens, able to situate current political and social issues within their historical and cultural contexts.

- Understand the historical origins and cultural significance of current movements for social change.
- Situate the historical and contemporary study of American culture in a global context, demonstrating an understanding of the ways American culture has been shaped by diaspora, colonialism, and globalization

Course Assignments and Grading Standards

There are four required paper assignments for this course. Additional guidelines and grading criteria will be available on Titanium. You will turn in a hard copy of each paper in class and also submit it electronically to TurnItIn via our Titanium site (with the exception of paper #2, which is only due online).

Paper #1 Studying Leisure in the Past

You will write a paper in which you compare and contrast the leisure habits of the working class New York women described in *Cheap Amusements* with the leisure habits of middle class Muncie, Indiana residents described in an excerpt from the sociological study *Middletown* (1929) by Robert and Helen Lynd (available on Titanium).

LENGTH: 3-5 pages, 12-point font, double-spaced, one-inch margins

Paper #2 Analyzing Expressive Forms, Then and Now

For this paper, you will choose one sports example (Joe Louis, Jesse Owens, OR basketball) **and** one music or dance example (Lindy Hop OR jazz) analyzed in *Jump for Joy*. First, you will describe the example in detail (what or who is it?) and summarize Gena Caponi's analysis of these examples.

According to Caponi, what is the cultural significance of these pop culture phenomena? THEN, you will offer your own analysis of a contemporary sports phenomenon (a game, or player, or event) **OR** a contemporary music or dance phenomenon (a performer, or genre, or dance style). Describe the phenomenon first (what or who is it?), then analyze it. What is the cultural significance of this pop culture phenomenon? What does it mean? What does it tell us about American culture today? For the first part of the paper, you must refer to *Jump for Joy* and include relevant quotations to back up your points. For the second part of the paper, no additional outside research is necessary; just offer your own opinion and make a convincing case.

LENGTH: 3-5 pages, 12-point font, double-spaced, one-inch margins

Paper #3 Making Connections: Text and Context

This paper challenges you to locate and analyze popular culture in context. There are two parts to this assignment. In the first part of your paper, you should discuss two ways in which the Wonder Woman character and comic was shaped by history. You should draw on Jill Lepore's book and your two examples should be as specific as possible (don't just say, for instance, that Wonder Woman was shaped the women's suffrage movement—be more specific than that). THEN, in the second part of your paper, you should analyze the graphic novel *Memetic* in context and discuss how the story relates to our contemporary cultural moment. How does this story connect to our larger culture? What context or contexts help us understand the ideas and issues explored in this graphic novel? What does it tell us about our culture?

LENGTH: 3-5 pages, 12-point font, double-spaced, one-inch margins

Paper #4 Interpreting Audience: An Ethnography of Fandom

Using *Tramps Like Us* as a model, you will write your own fandom study. You will develop a questionnaire and interview three fans of the same cultural phenomenon. Then you will write a paper in which you describe and analyze the meaning of fandom for those individuals.

LENGTH: 6-8 pages, 12-point font, double-spaced, one-inch margins

Paper #1:	20%
Paper #2:	20%
Paper #3:	30%
Paper #4:	30%

For this course, +/- grading will be used. No extra credit will be offered. Keep all graded work so that any discrepancies can be easily and fairly straightened out.

An assignment is considered late if it is not turned in at the beginning of the class session in which it is due. Late assignments will be lowered one mark **per day** (NOT per class meeting) after the due date (for example, C to C-). Extensions will be granted on a case-by-case basis for legitimate reasons and only when a student asks for an extension at least 24 hours before an assignment is due.

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

A+ 97-100; A 93-96; 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

Participation and Community Policies

I expect you to be actively engaged with the classroom community, the concepts, and the coursework. Class attendance is crucial to your participation and to your success on the assignments, which require you to synthesize material from readings, lectures, and discussions. Please come to class prepared to 1) explain the central topic, argument, and/or methodology of the assigned reading; 2) assess the assigned reading for its relative strengths and limitations; 3) raise questions about the reading; 4) connect the readings to one another; and 5) connect the readings to your broader understanding of contemporary and historical issues in American popular culture.

It is unacceptable to arrive late or to leave class early. If you must leave class early because of an appointment that cannot be missed, make sure that you tell me before class begins.

Cell phones must be on silent or off (not vibrate) and stowed away out of sight. Laptops may only be used for notetaking.

American Studies at Fullerton

I am always happy to talk with students about the possibility of majoring, double majoring, or minoring in American Studies. Feel free to 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 657-278-3112; www.fullerton.edu/dss/.

Policy on Selling Lecture Notes

Per California Education Code Section 66450, it is illegal to reproduce course lectures—including your own hand-written or typed lecture notes—for commercial purposes. Thus, while you may occasionally loan another student your lecture notes when they have been absent, it is illegal to request money for those notes or to offer them for sale, online or in person. If you have any questions about this policy, or about what constitutes the legal and ethical sharing of class materials with another student, please contact your professor for guidance. Students who violate this standard are subject to disciplinary sanctions by the University, including failure in the course and suspension from the university. Any student who violates this code will be referred to the Dean of Students Office, Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action under the Student Conduct Code.

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.

Campus Emergency Procedures

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

Course Schedule (subject to revision)

Date	Topic	Due
M, Jan. 22	Introduction to Course	
W, Jan. 24	What is Popular Culture? Theory and Methods	
M, Jan. 29	19 th century Stage and Theater: Blackface Minstrelsy and the Astor Place Riot	
W, Jan. 31	Studying Leisure	<i>Cheap Amusements</i> , Introduction and Ch. 1
M, Feb. 5	Popular Culture and Empire: Buffalo Bill and Baseball on the World Stage	
W, Feb. 7	Putting on Style: Women's Work and Leisure at the Turn of the 20 th Century	<i>Cheap Amusements</i> , Chs. 2, 3
M, Feb. 12	Dance Halls and Amusement Parks	<i>Cheap Amusements</i> , Chs. 4, 5
W, Feb. 14	Movie Made America	<i>Cheap Amusements</i> , Ch. 6, Conclusion
M, Feb. 19	NO CLASS – Presidents' Day	
W, Feb. 21	Middletown vs. New York	Paper #1 due in class, hard copy <i>and</i> online via TurnItIn
M, Feb. 26	Race, Popular Culture, and Politics in the 1930s: The Desire to Jump	<i>Jump for Joy</i> , Preface and Chs. 1, 2, 3
W, Feb. 28	Interpreting the Lindy Hop	<i>Jump for Joy</i> , Chs. 4, 5
M, Mar. 5	Basketball, Jesse Owens, and Joe Louis	<i>Jump for Joy</i> , Chs. 6, 7
W, Mar. 7	The Theory of Cultural Permission	<i>Jump for Joy</i> , Chs. 8, 9
M, Mar. 12	Television and the American Dream	
W, Mar. 14	Rise of the Teenager	Paper #2 due online ONLY via TurnItIn

M, Mar. 19	Cold War Popular Culture	Watch <i>Them!</i> (1954)
W, Mar. 21	Comic Book Nation	<i>Wonder Woman</i> , Splash Page and Part One
M, 26 W, 28	NO CLASS – Spring Recess	
M, Apr. 2	Reading Wonder Woman	<i>Wonder Woman</i> , Part 2, Part 3, Epilogue
W, Apr. 4	Zombies in America	<i>Memetic</i>
M, April 9	<i>Memetic</i> and the Evil Internet	Paper #3 due in class, hard copy <i>and</i> online via TurnItIn
W, Apr. 11	Studying Fandom	<i>Tramps</i> , Preface, Intro, Appendix A
M, Apr. 16	Reading the Boss	<i>Tramps</i> , Chs. 1, 2
W, Apr. 18	Film Noir and its Legacies	
M, Apr. 23	Are you a REAL fan?: Degrees of Fandom	<i>Tramps</i> , Chs. 3, 4
W, Apr. 25	Cool as Cultural Aesthetic	
M, Apr. 30	Collecting and Commodity Fetishism	<i>Tramps</i> , Chs. 5, 6, 7, Conclusion, Postscript
W, May 2	In-class screening and discussion: <i>Trekies</i> (1997)	
M, May 7	Identity, Community, and Popular Culture	
W, May 9	Conclusion of Course	Paper #4 due in class, hard copy <i>and</i> online via TurnItIn