

American Studies 502T
Theoretical Approaches to Studying Popular Culture

AMST 502T-02, #21192
 California State University, Fullerton
 Spring 2014
 Mondays, 7:00-9:45 PM
 UH-319

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Office Hours: Mondays 5:30-6:30; Wednesdays 12:00-2:00, and by appointment

Course Description

This seminar introduces graduate students to a number of different theories and methods in the study of U.S. popular culture. We will survey different approaches to analyzing the production, reception, content, and context of various popular expressive forms, including music, television, advertising, literature, sport, spectacle, dance, fashion, and film. Our reading will include models of interdisciplinary American Studies scholarship that emphasize the relationship between popular culture and the society that creates and consumes it. Class time will be spent discussing various approaches and applying the theories and methods we are learning to analysis of diverse sources. The overarching goal of this course is to enhance students' ability to research, write, and think critically about popular culture.

Required Texts

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1*

Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph But the Struggle: The 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete*

Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*

Janet Davis, *The Circus Age: Culture & Society Under the American Big Top*

David Reynolds, *Mightier Than the Sword: Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Battle for America*

Matthew Delmont, *The Nicest Kids in Town: American Bandstand, Rock 'n' Roll, and the Struggle for Civil Rights in 1950s Philadelphia*

Katherine J. Parkin, *Food is Love: Advertising and Gender Roles in Modern America*

There will be additional assigned readings available as PDF documents for download on the course Titanium site.

American Studies Department 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.
- Gain a thorough understanding of cultural diversity by examining the creative tension between unity and multiplicity in American experiences.
- Understand and interpret the ways in which culture creates meaning and guides behavior.
- 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.

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

Course Assignments and Grading Standards

Applied Practice Papers (2)

Twice in the course of the semester you will turn in a paper in which you apply an approach we have read about it to a popular culture artifact or phenomenon of your choice. Your paper should 1) briefly summarize the popular culture artifact or phenomenon you have chosen; 2) briefly summarize the approach you are using AND explain why you think it is helpful or relevant for analyzing your chosen artifact or phenomenon; 3) offer an analysis of the popular culture artifact or phenomenon.

For example, you could use Amy Bass's work on the construction of the black athlete to frame an analysis of the controversy surrounding NFL player Richard Sherman's recent post-game interview. Or you could use Foucault's theory of power and knowledge to analyze popular discourse about "why women can't have it all." Or you could apply Sarah Thornton's theories of subcultural capital to an analysis of some aspect of youth culture.

The approach you choose is up to you. However, your practice paper must be turned in one week (or the next class meeting if there is a holiday/break) after we discuss the particular author of the approach you choose. For example, if discuss Foucault and you want to write a paper using Foucault, your paper will be due the following class meeting. Length: 3-5 pages, double-spaced.

Research Proposal

Your 4-5-page research proposal should...

- 1) frame a question that you want to answer in your research paper and explain what interests you about this topic
- 2) identify a primary source or sources that you want to analyze and explain the connection between the source(s) and your question
- 3) speculate on the context that would be relevant to your analysis
- 4) speculate about theories and/or approaches that may be helpful in thinking through your question and analyzing your sources
- 5) list at least five existing secondary sources (peer-reviewed academic articles OR scholarly books; NOT newspaper or magazine articles) that you plan to read that relate to your research. You should make it clear that you have an emerging sense of what scholarship has already been written about your topic.

Your proposal should also include an initial timeline (not included in the page count) that delineates when you plan to accomplish the various stages of your research. I encourage you to meet with me before the proposal is due to talk over your topic.

Presentation

You are required to present your research-in-progress to the class. Your presentation should run between 15 and 20 minutes and it must include a visual or audio aid. You may use PowerPoint, but

it cannot include bullet points that match exactly what you say to us in the presentation. I encourage you to think of this as an opportunity to teach us about your topic in a creative and engaging manner.

Research Paper

Your 20-page research paper should offer a critical, contextualized analysis of a primary source (or sources) in U.S. popular culture. Your paper must include a review of relevant secondary scholarship; an analysis of a primary source or sources that situates the interpretation in a larger context; and an overarching, well-developed argument. Your bibliography should include at least 15 secondary sources (scholarly books and/or academic articles). The choice of citation style is up to you—MLA, Chicago, or APA; just be consistent throughout the paper.

Participation

Required attendance and class participation make up 10% of your final grade. Graduate seminars work best when students are actively engaged with the classroom community, concepts, and coursework. Please come to every class prepared to 1) describe the central argument or theme of the assigned reading; 2) assess the reading for its relative strengths and limitations; 3) raise questions about the reading; 4) connect the course readings to one another; 5) connect the reading to your broader understanding of contemporary and historical issues in American culture; 6) relate the reading to your own experience and/or areas of expertise.

Applied Practice #1	10%
Applied Practice #2	10%
Research Proposal	10%
Research Presentation	10%
Research Paper	50%
Participation	10%

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

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 657-278-3117.

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/>]

Campus Emergency Procedures

In case of an earthquake, zombie apocalypse, or other misadventure, students should be familiar with campus **emergency procedures**:

http://www.fullerton.edu/emergencypreparedness/ep_students.html.

Course Schedule (subject to revision)

Date	Topic	Due
M, Jan. 20	<i>No Class: MLK Day</i>	
M, Jan. 27	Popular Culture as Consciousness: Mirror, Memory, Metacognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lawrence Levine, “The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and its Audiences” • George Lipsitz, excerpt from <i>Time Passages</i> (in-class handout) • Jane Tompkins, excerpt from <i>Sensational Designs</i> (in-class handout)
M, Feb. 3	Popular Culture as Contested Terrain: Resistance, Inversion, Refusal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stuart Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing “The Popular”” • Peter Stallybrass & Allon White, excerpt from <i>The Politics and Poetics of Transgression</i> • Dick Hebdige, excerpt from <i>Subculture: The Meaning of Style</i>
M, Feb. 10	Popular Culture as Knowledge: Power, Pleasure, Silences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Michel Foucault, <i>The History of Sexuality: An Introduction. Volume 1</i>
M, Feb. 17	<i>No Class: Presidents Day</i>	
M, Feb. 24	Sports, Nationalism, and Racial Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amy Bass, <i>Not the Triumph But the Struggle</i>
M, March 3	Music, “Cool,” and Subcultural Capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sarah Thornton, <i>Club Cultures</i>
M, March 10	Freaks, Carnival, and the Transnational Spectacle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Janet Davis, <i>The Circus Age</i>
M, March 17	Fandom: Ways of Reading the Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Janice Radway, “Interpretive Communities: The Functions of Romance Reading”

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Henry Jenkins, “Star Trek Rerun, Reread, Rewritten: Fan Writing as Textual Poaching” • Daniel Cavicchi, “We Will Interpret Us” • Research proposal due
M, Mar. 24	The Cultural Work of an Antebellum Bestseller	• David Reynolds, <i>Mightier Than the Sword</i>
	<i>Spring Recess</i>	
M, Apr. 7	Television, Teenagers, and Mass Culture	• Matthew Delmont, <i>The Nicest Kids in Town</i>
M, Apr 14	Selling Food, Consuming Gender	• Katherine Parkin, <i>Food is Love</i>
M, Apr 21	Workshop: Theory into Practice	
M, Apr. 28	Research Presentations	
M, May 5	Research Presentations	
F, May 16		Final Paper Due in UH-313 by 4 PM

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Ten Tips for Reading in Graduate School

1. *Read the whole book.* If you are pressed for time one week, then at minimum read the introduction, the first chapter, a middle chapter, and the conclusion, AND have a basic idea of what the chapters that you didn't read were about. Do this only on rare occasions. Get in the habit of pacing yourself, finishing whole books, and rewarding yourself for doing so. *Always* read assigned articles—make time.
2. *Read the footnotes.* Know what sources the author has consulted. Take note of any archives and/or collections the author has visited. How convincing do you find the evidence to be in supporting the author's argument? Do you agree with the author's interpretation of the evidence? How does the author make use of secondary sources in the footnotes?
3. *Understand the scholarly context.* How does this book fit into a larger scholarly conversation about this topic? What has already been said about this topic? How does the author fit his/her own work into this larger dialogue?
4. *Write a précis.* Write up a concise summary of the book, in your own words. Be able to explain in your own words what the book is about.
5. *Talk about the book.* Talk to other people about what you're reading. Practice engaging in dialogue about the book even before you come to class.
6. *Observe the writing style.* Pay attention to how authors organize and present their arguments, how they transition between paragraphs and chapters, how they integrate quotations and evidence and theory. Reading helps you become a better writer. Think about the prose as much as the content.
7. *Have something to say.* Always come to class prepared to ask at least one question about the reading AND offer at least one connection to previous concepts/readings in the course. If you want to offer an opinion about the book, avoid simply saying, "I liked it," or "I didn't like it because the writing was bad," or "It was boring." Be specific. Talk in concrete terms about argument, organization, evidence, use of theory, style, and so on.
8. *Apply the framework.* As you read, ask yourself how you could apply this author's questions, methods, and/or theories to another topic. "How could I do a similar study of ___?" or "What if I applied this framework to an analysis of ___?" Along similar lines, ask yourself if there are alternative ways to get at the topic explored in this book. What other approaches might work?
9. *Make a timeline.* Keep a running timeline of U.S. history on your computer. Add people, events, inventions, publications, etc. as you read various books. This helps you get a sense of chronology and change over time and can help you see patterns in U.S. cultural history. For example, if you're reading about circuses at the turn of the 20th century, you may want to add dates for things like P.T. Barnum, Buffalo Bill's Wild West, and the Spanish American War.
10. *Think like a teacher.* If you were going to teach this book to a class of undergraduates, how would you teach it? How would you engage students with this material? What kind of class would you assign it for? Even if you don't plan on going into teaching as a career, it is helpful to learn how to present material to a group of people in an engaging and creative manner. In fact, it can help you learn the material better—you need to know something in order to teach it to others.