American Cultural History
COURSE GUIDE

History 327          Spring 2007
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Scope of the Course

This course explores the development of American popular culture from the nineteenth century through the post World War II era. We will strive to understand the many layers upon which American culture has been built, exploring the cultural worlds of ordinary Americans as well as of elites. You will be studying a wide variety of artifacts of American culture including literature, paintings, popular drama, and music.

Cultural history is an interdisciplinary field of historical inquiry. This means that cultural historians borrow ideas and methods from other kinds of scholars—art historians, anthropologists, folklorists, and geographers, to name a few. This course will introduce you to the ways historians have employed some of these materials and methods. Our emphasis will be on mastery of course content through analytical application rather than rote memorization.

Keep in mind as we explore our cultural roots the opening lines of L. P. Hartley's novel The Go-Between: "The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there." Try to understand as you visit these foreign Americas how the inhabitants were different from as well as similar to yourself.
Learning Objectives

Students should be able to:

• Identify and explain the distinctive characteristics of key periods in the history of American popular culture.
• Explain complexities of the relationship between the history of American popular culture and American democracy.
• Assess the influence of factors such as race, class, gender, region, ethnicity, technology, ideas and beliefs on the formation of American culture.
• Use a variety of visual and documentary sources as historical evidence, including paintings, literature, objects, landscapes, music, photographs, and films.
• Compare and contrast varying scholars’ interpretations and explain how they differ.
• Evaluate newspapers and popular magazines as sources of popular culture history.

Required Readings

Books: (available at UNCG Bookstore)

Evaluation

Participation 10%
Midterms 60%
Research Exercise 30%

Participation (10%)
This assessment will be based on three criteria:

1. Consistent attendance--This is not a traditional lecture course. We will be critically evaluating the content of the readings and practicing the application of analytical skills during each class period. You will not be able to make up for your absences by copying someone else's notes. For this reason, consistent attendance is essential to your learning in this course. See above for an explanation of the course attendance policy which has an impact on your overall grade in the course beyond its importance for evaluating your participation.

2. Thorough preparation for class--readings must be completed before class and assignments must be turned in on time.

3. Regular contributions to class discussions--the success of this course for your learning depends on active intellectual engagement with your peers. Discussions will take place during every class meeting in both small group exercises and as a whole class. In order to create a good climate for everyone to participate, please follow these discussion guidelines:
   • Be ready to share and explain your opinions. Feel free to disagree with others, but be specific in your own assertions and back them up with evidence.
   • Listen carefully and respond to other members of the group. Be willing to change your mind when someone demonstrates an error in your logic and use of facts.
   • Do not hesitate to ask for clarification of any point or term you do not understand.
   • Make your point succinctly, avoid repetition, and stick to the subject.
Ten percent may seem like a small amount in the overall grade, but it can make a significant difference in the final grade. Here’s an example of how the participation grade is calculated: a student attended class 87% of the time, asked or answered several questions during the semester, actively participated in research workshops and group discussions, but turned in at least one graded assignment late. Though attendance and participation might suggest a B+ for this student, the late assignment means that this student cannot make higher than a B and could even be in the C-range depending on how late the assignment was. Skipping classes and turning in assignments late can have a snowball effect for the final participation grade.

**Midterms (30% each; 60% total)**
You will complete two take-home, open-book midterm exams. The format will be essay and short answer. Questions will focus on the content of assigned reading, lectures, films, and class discussions.
Due Dates:
7 February, Midterm 1
30 April, Midterm 2

**Research Exercise (30%)**
You will complete one research exercise using primary sources to explore themes and issues raised in the assigned readings. You will sign up for one of the following options:

**Option 1:** compare and contrast popular entertainments and consumer patterns advertised in a North Carolina town newspaper from the turn of the twentieth century to the *New York Times* from the same month and year to compare urban and regional patterns of consumption. Due 30 March.

**Option 2:** compare and contrast two different issues of a popular magazine from the 1920s and the 1950s to evaluate changes in mid-twentieth-century American popular culture. Due 20 April.

For both options, you will complete your analysis using a set of questions distributed well in advance of the due dates. This is not a formal research paper, but I estimate that a successful product for each research assignment will consist of 5-7 typed, double-spaced pages.

**Course Schedule**

8 January Introductions

10 January What is Popular Culture?
Read: Cullen, Preface: About This Book -- Introduction: The Worldwide Web of Popular Culture

12 January Popular Reading in Early America
Read Cullen 1. In the Beginning. Chapbooks: Reconstructing the Popular Reading of Early America / Victor Neuberg. Consider the Source: Excerpts from Narrative of the Captivity of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson

15 January MLK Holiday

17 January Rioting Over Shakespeare!
Read Cullen 2. The World of the Stage. William Shakespeare in America / Lawrence Levine. Consider the Source: Excerpt from Representative Men by Ralph Waldo Emerson
19 January      Race and Class in the Nineteenth-Century City  
Read Cullen 3. The Racy Appeal of the Minstrel. The Blackface Lore Cycle / W. T. Lhamon, Jr. Consider the Source: Excerpts from Nineteenth-Century Minstrel Shows  

22 January      film: Stephen Foster  
VH10003 c.1 Stephen Foster  

24 January      Visual Culture Workshop: Genre Paintings as Historical Evidence  

26 January      film: Wilderness and the West  
VH5690 c.1 WILDERNESS AND THE WEST  

29 January      Commercializing the West  
Read Cullen, 4. Literature for the Million. The Figure of the Dime Novel in American Culture / Michael Denning. Consider the Source: Excerpt from Last of the Great Scouts by Helen Cody Wetmore  

31 January      Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show  

2 February      Centennial Exposition, 1876  
Read: Schlereth, Prologue  

5 February      Review for Midterm.  

7 February      Midterm 1 due. No class.  

9 February      Meanings of the Dance Hall  
Read Cullen, 5. The Romance of the Dance Hall. Dance Madness / Kathy Peiss. Consider the Source: Excerpt from Elisabeth Marbury's introduction to Modern Dancing by Vernon Castle and Irene Castle  

12 February     Migration Patterns and Transportation Technology: Modernizing Time and Space  
Read: Schlereth, Moving  

14 February     film: Coney Island  
VH7832 c.1 Coney Island /directed by Ric Burns  

16 February     The Company Town and the Skyscraper; Redesigning Modern Work Spaces  
Read: Schlereth, Working  

19 February     film: America and Lewis Hine  
VH10690 c.1 AMERICA AND LEWIS HINE  

21 February     Visual Culture Workshop: Floorplans as Historical Evidence  
Read: Schlereth, Housing  

23 February     Visual Culture Workshop: Advertisements as Historical Evidence  
Read: Schlereth, Consuming  

26 February     American Popular Culture in an Age of Imperialism  
Read: Schlereth, World’s Columbian Exposition, 1893
28 February  Film as a New Popular Culture  
**Read:** Schlereth, Communicating  

2 March  film: Modern Times  
VH695 c.1 *Modern Times*

5 7 9 March  Spring Break

12 March  Highbrow, Middlebrow, Lowbrow: Cultural Hierarchies at the Turn of the Century  
**Read:** Schlereth, Playing and Striving

14 March  Research Workshop 1: Comparative Newspaper Analysis

16 March  From Victorian to Modern  
**Read:** Schlereth, Living and Dying, Panama-Pacific Exposition, 1915

19 March  Radio as Popular Culture  
**Read:** Cullen 7. Waves of Selling. Arguments over Broadcast Advertising / Susan Smulyan. Consider the Source: Excerpt from "Sponsoritis"

21 March  Visual Culture Workshop: Images of the Great Depression

23 March  film: Streamlines and Breadlines—1930s art  
VH5693 c.1 *STREAMLINES AND BREADLINES*

26 March  Research Workshop 2: Popular Magazines of the Twentieth Century

28 March  No Class.

30 March  No class. Research Exercise 1 due.

2 April  Newspaper Research Reports

4 April  Newspaper Research Reports

6 April  Holiday

9 April  Twentieth-Century Celebrity  
**Read:** Cullen, 8. The Firmament of Stardom. Fool's Paradise: Frank Sinatra and the American Dream / Jim Cullen. Consider the Source: "Why the Americans are so Restless in the Midst of their Prosperity," excerpt from Vol. II of Democracy in America by Alexis de Tocqueville

11 April  film: Wild Women Don’t Have the Blues  
VH5365 c.1 *Wild Women Don’t Have the Blues*

13 April  Post World War II American Culture

16 April  Visual Culture Workshop: As Seen on TV: Life in Mass Suburbia
18 April       Meanings of the Sitcom
Read: Cullen 9. The Age of Television. The Making of the Sitcom / David Marc. Consider the Source:
Excerpts from After All by Mary Tyler Moore

20 April       Research Exercise 2 due. No Class.

23 April       Popular Magazine Research Reports

25 April       Popular Magazine Research Reports

27 April       Review for Midterm

30 April       Midterm 2 due. No class.