

American Popular Culture

HI 345.001

Spring 2019

TTh 11:45-1

Withers 115

NC State University



COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

This semester, you will become acquainted with the history and evolution of American popular culture, one of the most powerful influences in human history. American popular culture has changed the world. It has been the United States' greatest export, tied intimately to the growth of American democracy, capitalism, and imperialism. It represents to the rest of the world and to Americans as well what the United States represents. A least since the mid-nineteenth century, it has represented consumption. How we got here and why it matters is the heart of this course.

Students' objectives in this course are to: 1) interpret and evaluate the forms of American popular entertainment in the 18th through 20th centuries; 2) identify ways in which popular culture reflected trends in society and ways in which popular culture shaped society; 3) interpret primary and secondary sources relating to the history of popular culture; 4) define major political, social, and economic changes in American history and explain their influences on popular culture; and 5) research, write, and present on a theme within popular culture, demonstrating understanding of content and historical analysis.

Popular culture as reflection of, as well as contributor to, American historical trends. Changes in forms of entertainment (music, books, popular art, theater, film, television, etc.), from the artisanal culture of the late 18th century through the rise of 19th- and early 20th-century commercial culture to the evolution of mass media culture in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

Professor Craig Thompson Friend

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REQUIRED BOOKS

-  Ashby, LeRoy. *With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture since 1830*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006.
-  Cullen, Jim, ed. *Popular Culture in American History*. London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

THE SAC METHOD

For every reading that you do in this course you should be able to summarize, assess, and critique—SAC! You should prepare for each class AS IF YOU WILL BE LEADING DISCUSSION! You may be called on to do so. For all readings, you should be able to SAC!

Summarize: What is the reading about? What is the story that the author is presenting? What is the argument?

Assess: Why is the story written in such a manner? How is the argument supported? What is the conclusion?

Critique: How effective is the story? How convincing is the argument? How does it contribute to the larger historiography?

By being able to summarize, assess, and critique individual readings, you will develop the skills to see broader historiographical landscapes and situate your own work and perspective.

PARTICIPATION. The seminar is taught in the Socratic method, meaning that there will be asking and answering of questions to stimulate critical thinking and to draw out ideas and underlying presumptions. Questions will be followed up with more questions in order to advance the discussion. You will be graded both on the frequency and the quality of your participation; attendance is clearly important for participation. Attendance alone is not sufficient for full participation credit. Students must actively engage.

- A: Student is well prepared, attentive, always responds when called upon and volunteers often with pertinent answers or questions.
- B: Student is usually prepared, responds when called on and volunteers on occasion.
- C: Student shows evidence of being unprepared on occasion, has trouble when called on and does not volunteer often.
- D: Student is unprepared, inattentive, never volunteers, or habitually comes to class late.
- F: Student exhibits a lack of concern for the class, sleeps in class, or disturbs the class.

Quizzes. On four occasions throughout the semester, the professor will “pop” a quiz on the class based on the reading for that day. The quiz will be one question, and you will need to answer in no more than one sheet of paper. NO MAKE-UPS for quizzes except for excused absences as defined under “Policies.”

Iconic American Folk Hero Tournament. In 1782, J. Hector St. John Crevecoeur, as he traveled the United States, asked “What then is the *American*, this *new man*?” Americans (and observers of the

ASSIGNMENTS

Participation	15%
Pop Quizzes (4 x 5%)	15%
Tournament	10%
Music Analysis	15%
Film Critique	15%
TV Analysis	15%
Final Examination	15%

GRADING SCALE

$98 \leq A+ \leq 100$
$94 \leq A < 98$
$90 \leq A- < 93$
$88 \leq B+ < 90$
$84 \leq B < 88$
$80 \leq B- < 83$
$78 \leq C+ \leq 80$
$74 \leq C < 78$
$70 \leq C- < 73$
$68 \leq D+ < 70$
$74 \leq D < 78$
$70 \leq D- < 73$
$0 \leq F < 70$

United States) have been trying to answer this question ever since. Often, we embody our ideas of Americanness in our folk heroes—real or fictional, but always with some mythological qualities—endowing them with the sole purpose of representing something particularly *American* about all of us. They became part of the American consciousness, largely through its popular culture. We have a bracket of 64 folk heroes about whom you will have to research and debate until we have narrowed it down to the most important folk hero icon in American pop culture. Description of and assignments for this project will be distributed on the first day of class.

Music Analysis. You must compare two different songs as popular culture. One must be dated from 1850 to 1920; the other must be dated from 1920 to 1990. Your analysis must examine what the items tell us about popular culture and the nature of cultural exchange at the times they became popular. Try to pick pieces that resonated with large audiences and assess why they were so popular. Ultimately, you will be using the songs as windows through which we can view the past. This is a poster assignment, however you wish to define that. You will be graded on your analytic skills as well as the quality of the presentation. You will also be graded on how well you incorporate materials that we have read.

Film Critique. You must review a popular film from the 20th century as a film critic. The review should include a brief description that doesn't give too much away, your subjective assessment of the film's artistic merits, and also situate it within the cultural context of the period in which it was created. For an example, see the [review of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* \(1939\)](#) in *The New York Times*, and the [review of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*](#) in *Variety* magazine. (And yes, you may now not use *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington!*). An A-level paper will do all this and also draw a conclusion about the movie's cultural message. For example, either of those reviews of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* would be better if they discussed how the movie reflected Americans' fading confidence in their government and corporations towards the end of the 1930s. So, some research may be helpful in identifying the film's significance. You will be graded on your analytic skills as well as the quality of the prose. You will also be graded on how well you incorporate materials that we have read. The analysis should be no more than four pages. No title page or bibliography required; but if you quote from the film or you use ideas from other sources that inspired you to think about the topic in a certain way, you must provide footnotes.

Television Analysis. For this assignment you must compare and contrast two television programs, one from the era 1970-2000, and the other from the era 2001-present. They must be the same genre: for example, sitcoms, late night talk shows, police dramas, etc. Watch at least two episodes of each show. In analyzing the episodes, think about the differences between the two and what might account for those differences. How do the shows try to reach their audiences? Are their stylistic differences? Writing styles differences? Acting differences? You should also consider the networks on which the programs aired and other technological interventions that might contribute to the differences. You will work as a team: each of you will write a 1-page description of the television program, and then together write a two-page analysis of their differences and why those differences existed. You will be graded on your analytic skills as well as the quality of the prose. You will also be graded on how well you incorporate materials that we have read. No title page or bibliography required; but if you quote from the film or you use ideas from other sources that inspired you to think about the topic in a certain way, you must provide footnotes.

Final Examination. Yes, you only have one exam in this class, and it is comprehensive. But it is not tricky. The exam will consist of four parts: identification, short answer, and two essays. You are allowed to bring an 8x11" "cheat sheet" to class with anything you want written on one side.

COURSE SCHEDULE

January 8th	<p>What Is Popular Culture?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter Burke, Stephen Yeo, et al. "What is the History of Popular Culture?" <i>History Today</i> 35 (December 1985): 39-45. • Leroy Ashby, "The Rising of Popular Culture: A Historiographical Sketch," <i>OAH Magazine of History</i> (April 2010): 11-14 • John Rockwell, "Pop Culture: The New Colossus: American Culture as Power Export," <i>New York Times</i> 30 January 1994. • Ashby, <i>With Amusement for All</i>, 1-10 • Cullen, <i>Popular Culture</i>, 1-9
January 10th	<p>Toward a National Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christopher Geist, "The Emergence of Popular Culture in Colonial America," <i>CW Journal</i> (spring 2008) • Eva Kornfield, <i>Creating an American Culture</i>, 3-53 (pdf)
January 15th	<p>Contesting the Emerging Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eva Kornfield, <i>Creating an American Culture</i>, 54-80 (pdf) • Royall Tyler, The Contrast (1787): read the content titled "Royall Tyler" and "Prologue" and "Act I"
January 17th	<p>Popular Culture and the Art of Democracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bryan F. LeBeau, "Art in the Parlor: Consumer Culture and Currier and Ives," <i>Journal of American Culture</i> 30 (March 2007): 18-37 • J. B. Hare, "A Visit from St. Nicholas' by Clement C. Moore" (2007) • Charles Wilson Peale, George Washington and the Battle of Princeton (1781) • Gilbert Stuart, The Lansdowne portrait of George Washington (1797) • John Vanderlyn, The Death of Jane McCrea (1804) • Charles Wimer, The Abduction of Daniel Boone's Daughter by the Indians (1853) • Clement C. Moore, "A Visit from St. Nicholas" (1823)
January 22nd	<p>P. T. Barnum and a Nation of Fools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ashby, <i>With Amusement for All</i>, 11-40
January 24th	<p>A New Print Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cullen, <i>Popular Culture</i>, 11-35
January 29th	<p>Reforming Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ashby, <i>With Amusement for All</i>, 41-72
January 31st	<p>The Theater as Low-Brow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cullen, <i>Popular Culture</i>, 37-66

February 5th	The Age of Freaks: Circuses, Wild West Shows, and Indians <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ashby, <i>With Amusement for All</i>, 73-106
February 7th	Minstrelsy and Race <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cullen, <i>Popular Culture</i>, 67-88
February 12th	From Burlesque to Vaudeville <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ashby, <i>With Amusement for All</i>, 107-42
February 14th	Fascinations with the Old West <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cullen, <i>Popular Culture</i>, 91-113
February 17th	Music Analysis Due! By 6 pm via email attachment.
February 19th	Mass Entertainments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ashby, <i>With Amusement for All</i>, 144-75
February 21st	Motion Pictures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cullen, <i>Popular Culture</i>, 115-38
February 26th	Popular Culture and Respectability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ashby, <i>With Amusement for All</i>, 176-218
February 28th	The Harlem Renaissance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maryemma Graham, “The New Negro Renaissance,” <i>African Age</i> “Harlem Renaissance”
March 5th	Flappers and Foxtrotters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ashby, <i>With Amusement for All</i>, 219-62
March 7th	Advertising of and as Popular Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cullen, <i>Popular Culture</i>, 139-81
March 12th–14th	Spring Break!
March 19th	WWII and Consensus Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ashby, <i>With Amusement for All</i>, 263-301
March 21st	Stars and Starlets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cullen, <i>Popular Culture</i>, 183-215
March 26th	Opposition to Consensus: The Counter-Pop Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ashby, <i>With Amusement for All</i>, 302-47
March 28th	Boomer Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “The Baby Boomer 60s Generation Tells What Happened” P. J. O’Roarke, “Popular Culture and the Baby Boomers,” <i>Weekly Standard</i>, 2 January 2012.
March 31st	Film Critique is due! By 6pm via email attachment.
April 2nd	Splintering the Popular Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ashby, <i>With Amusement for All</i>, 348-93

April 4th	TV Land <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cullen, <i>Popular Culture</i>, 217-39
April 9th	Leaving the 1960s Behind <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ashby, <i>With Amusement for All</i>, 394-440
April 11th	Multicultural Popular Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cullen, <i>Popular Culture</i>, 241-59 Russell Simmons, “Black Culture is Basis for American Pop Culture.” VLADTV
April 16th	A Pop Culture Society <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ashby, <i>With Amusement for All</i>, 441-494
April 18th	The Gayification of Popular Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “How TV Brought Gay People into Our Homes,” <i>All Things Considered</i>, 12 May 2012 (listen to the story and read the article) Andrew Sullivan, “The End of Gay Culture: Assimilation and Its Meaning.” <i>The New Republic</i>, 24 October 2005 Daniel Harris, “The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture.” <i>New York Times Books</i>, 1997
April 21st	TV Analysis is due! By 6 pm via email attachment.
April 23rd	Pop Culture in Post-9/11 America <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ashby, <i>With Amusement for All</i>, 495-517
April 25th	Too Much? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cullen, <i>Popular Culture</i>, 261-77
May 7th	8-11 am Final Examination

Q&A

What is the course policy on technology use in class?

We will be busy in every class session and we don't need any electronic distractions. Silence your cell phones before you enter the classroom and refrain from texting in class. You may bring a laptop, and sometimes laptops will be needed, but please confine your laptop use to taking notes or accessing relevant course materials during discussion. Any person discovered using the laptop for purposes other than classwork, including for the purposes of sending email or text messages or surfing social media sites, will be asked to leave and be marked absent for the day because, let's be honest, mentally you weren't present. NO ONE may record any class session without my permission.

Policies

What is the absence policy?

Attendance is expected. You may miss three classes without penalty. You must provide appropriate documentation within one week of any additional absence. Excusable absences fall into five categories:

- For representing the University in an OFFICIAL capacity. Do not assume that we are aware of these events: you must show proof of your participation.
- For military service: provide certified documentation.
- For court attendance: provide certified documentation from the Clerk of Court.
- For short-term illness or injury: provide a doctor's note that includes the date of your absence(s). I WILL call the doctor to verify.
- For death in family, funeral attendance, serious illness, and/or religious observance: take appropriate documentation to the Division of Academic and Student Affairs, 300 Clark Hall, 515-2963. The DASA will work with you to verify the absence and report to me.

Each unexcused absence will result in a two-increment deduction from your final grade (i.e., from A- to B). If you plan to make up a quiz as a result of a legitimately excused absence, you must do so within one week of your return to the classroom. Even with valid excuses, however, please recognize that sustained absences from the class will certainly result in reduced performance and lower grades. More information about the [University Attendance Regulation](#).

What if I need a disability accommodation?

If you have a documented disability (learning or otherwise), please consult with me at the outset of the course so that we can design a solution that will help you be successful. You MUST register with the [Disability Services Office](#), 919-515-7653. For more information on NC State's policy, please see [Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Regulation](#).

What is the policy regarding plagiarism and academic honesty?

Doing your own work is absolutely essential. In ALL work, you must cite the sources of any information, quotes, or ideas which are not your own, using standard Chicago Style citations. Let me be very clear: You cannot clip and paste text from the internet or copy from books and pass it off as your own work. Plagiarized work is an automatic zero on the assignment and may lead to failure in the course. When you sign a test or assignment, you are indicating that "I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this test or assignment." Students are required to comply with the university policy on academic integrity found in the [Code of Student Conduct](#) and the [History Department's policy](#).