
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF CONTINUING STUDIES
SPRING 2014
TIME AND LOCATION: THURSDAYS, 5:20PM-7:50 PM, C117

BLHV -200: AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE

Overview

What is popular? How does it become so? In this course students examine themes and topics central to American popular culture through various media and selected readings in history, the social sciences, and American literature. The course unfolds historically—often highlighting important technological changes that have led to shifts in popular culture. The role of nostalgia and recursive popular culture is examined closely. Students will explore the cultural significance of popular American literature, art, music, film, food, amusement, commentary, fashion, and communications. Case studies cover a broad range of developments including the rise of amusement parks, burlesque and vaudeville, tabloid journalism, the evolution of the sitcom, the role of refrigeration and the microwave in American home cuisine, and the emerging influence of online social networks and gaming. Analyses of trends are made sociologically and critically.

Faculty

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Learning Objectives

After completing this course a student should be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of a society's popular culture on national culture, political and social discourse, and its economic system
- Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of American popular culture on other national cultures through globalization
- Explain the democratizing effect of popular culture and how it has been a common path for social groups facing discrimination and persecution to overcome these obstacles
- Define the importance of popular culture for the concepts of "American Exceptionalism" and "The American Dream"
- Demonstrate an understanding of how technology and youth are an engine of change for popular culture; how it evolves and revolves over time.
- Provide a contemporary case study of how 21st century new media and the internet have transformed the previously corporate-driven American popular culture of the late 20th century
- Explain the "costs" of American popular cultural to society using a neo-Marxist or postmodern approach
- Explain the "benefits" of American popular culture to society using a functionalist or social construction approach
- Demonstrate and understanding of the dynamics of American celebrity and its growing dominance in contemporary media and journalism

Textbooks (required)

1) *With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture since 1830*

LeRoy Ashby

The University Press of Kentucky; Reprint edition (September 13, 2012)

ISBN-10: 0813141079

ISBN-13: 978-0813141077

2) *Globalization and American Popular Culture*

Lane Crothers

Rowman & Littlefield Publishers; Third Edition edition (July 30, 2012)

ISBN-10: 1442214961

ISBN-13: 978-1442214965

3) *Starstruck: The Business of Celebrity*

Elizabeth Currid-Halkett

Faber & Faber (October 25, 2011)

ISBN-10: 0865478600

ISBN-13: 978-0865478602

Grading

The final grade will be determined as follows:

- 93% to 100% = A, 90% to 92% = A-
- 87% to 89% = B+, 83% to 86% = B, 80% to 82% = B-
- 77% to 79% = C+, 73% to 76% = C, 70% to 72% = C-
- 67% to 69% = D+, 60% to 66% = D, Below 60% = F

Grades for this course will be based on your performance on an exam and a final project as well as assignments and in-class participation.

Class assignments represent **20%** of your overall grade. One exam will be given during the semester gauging your grasp of the material. This is **25%** of your grade. The examination is open-book and open-note. The centerpiece of the course is a popular culture case study. The specific topic will be of the student's choosing (to be approved by the instructor). In addition to documenting and exploring the significance of the aspect of popular culture chosen, the paper should engage the readings of the course and place itself within the broader discussion of popular culture. Throughout the semester we will be discussing and developing these projects together as a class. Results will be presented at the end of the semester in an informal presentation session. In-class participation will account for **15%** of your grade. Following the last class each project will be summarized in a final research paper (including any feedback or changes derived from in-class discussion). The paper should consist of a minimum of 3,000 words.¹ The written case study is worth **40%** of your grade.

Plagiarism & the Georgetown Honor System

The sources for all information and ideas in your papers must be documented using the style followed by the American Psychological Association (APA). In addition, all quotations must be identified as quotations, using quotation marks and documentation of the source of the quotation. Anything less than these standards is plagiarism and will be treated as such. Plagiarized work will

¹ The paper should use a 12-point Times New Roman font and be double spaced with standard margins (1" top and bottom and 1.25" left and right). With these parameters a 3,000 word paper will be approximately 10 pages in length.

be reported to Georgetown's Honor Council (see below). If the council finds that the work has been plagiarized, the work will receive an F for a first offense; a second plagiarism will earn an F for the course.

All students are expected to follow Georgetown's honor code unconditionally. We assume you have read the honor code material located at www.georgetown.edu/honor, and in particular have read the following documents: Honor Council Pamphlet, "What is Plagiarism?", "Sanctioning Guidelines", and "Expedited Sanctioning Process." Papers in this course will be electronically checked for plagiarism. Submitting material in fulfillment of the requirements of this course means that you have abided by the Georgetown honor pledge:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.

Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability who requires accommodations or if you think you may have a disability and want to inquire about accommodations, please contact the Academic Resource Center at 202-687-8354 or arc@georgetown.edu.

Attendance, snow and other emergencies

During inclement weather or other emergencies, check <http://preparedness.georgetown.edu> or call (202) 687-7669 for information on whether the university is open.

We have only 14 meetings together. Attendance is very important. If you are going to be missing a class please let the instructor know ahead of time. You are responsible for obtaining course material missed during any absence. Consistent with the policies of the Liberal Studies program, having two or more absences may result in failure of the course.

Course Schedule

Class and topic

- **Jan. 8:** Introduction to the class and each other. What is Culture?
- **Jan. 15:** Defining and Modeling Popular Culture—Trends and Nostalgic Feedback. The Importance Technology and Pop Culture as Liberator of the Marginalized.
- **Jan. 22:** Pre-Mass Media: Early American Popular Culture. The Evolution of American Art: the tension between high- and pop-cultures in the art of Edward Hopper and Norman Rockwell
- **Jan. 29:** Culture in Print: from the Comics to "The Great American Novel" and the American Dream. Film Clips from *The Great Gatsby*.

Readings *=short story provided by instructor

-Crothers, Ch. 1 American Popular Culture and Globalization
-Ashby, Prologue Popular Culture on the Brink
-Currid-Halkett, Ch. 1 Celebrity Today
*Irving's 'Rip Van Winkle'
Assignment: Rip Van Winkle Future Culture Essay
-Ashby, Ch. 1-2 Blackface, Barnum, and Newspaper Ballyhoo & Taming Rough Amusements
*Hemingway's 'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place' and Fitzgerald's 'An Alcoholic Case'
-Ashby, Ch. 3-5 Building an Entertainment Industry, The Billion Dollar Smile, The 'Leisure Problem' at the Turn of the Century
-Currid-Halkett, Ch. 2 The Celebrity Residual

- **Feb. 5:** The Birth of Broadcasting. What is American Music? Evolution of Music through Radio, Television, & the Internet. Film clips from *A Song is Born*.
 - **Feb. 12:** Amusement in “Bad Times.” The Modern American Presidency and Popular Politics. Political Commentary in Pop Culture. Film clips from *The Wizard of Oz*.
 - **Feb. 19:** Globalization: The Export of American Culture. From Superpower to Supermedia: Consumption and culture clashes. Comparative Culture.
 - **Feb. 26:** Star and Studio Are Born. Content analysis of themes from AFI’s top 100. Film clips from *Citizen Kane*.
 - **Mar. 5:** Transforming the American Kitchen and Farm. Popular Consumer Culture. Film clips from *The Corporation* and *Food, Inc.*
 - **Mar. 19:** Great Migrations and Growing Suburbia: film clips from *The Apartment* and *Pleasantville*. The American Dream
 - **Mar. 26:** American Popular Counter-Cultures. Film clips from *The Graduate* and *Planet of the Apes*. Emerging Counter-Cultures: The Greening of America
 - **Apr. 9:** The Postmodern Celebrity: Something famous for nothing? From tabloid to mainstream news. Selected clips of news coverage.
 - **Apr. 16:** The Virtual American Popular Culture: Social Networks and Gaming. Marxist and Post-modern critiques of Pop Culture. Violence and Popular Culture. Clips from *Life 2.0*.
 - **Apr. 23:** Presentations
 - **TBA:** Final Exam meeting
- Crothers, Ch. 2 American popular Culture in Movies, Music, and Television
 -Ashby, Ch. 6 Popular Culture and Middle Class Respectability in the Early Twentieth Century
 -Currid-Halkett, Ch. 3 The Relative Celebrity
 -Crothers, Ch. 3 The Global Scope of American Movies, Music, and Television
Assignment: Film Criticism Essay
 -Ashby, Ch. 7 Battling the Great Depression
 -Currid-Halkett, Ch. 4 Inside the Star Machine
 *Clemens’ Cannibalism in the Cars
- Crothers, Chs. 4-5 The American Global Cultural Brand and Global Trade and Fear of American Popular Culture
- Ashby, Ch. 8 Building a Wartime Consensus in the 1940s and 1950s
 -Currid-Halkett, Ch. 5 How to become a Star
- Ashby, Ch. 9 Counterpoints to Consensus
 -Currid-Halkett, Ch. 6 Whatever you do, Don’t Go to Vegas
Assignment: History of a Meal Essay
 -Ashby, Ch. 10-11 Popular Culture and 1960s Ferment & Up for Grabs: Leaving the 1960s
 -Currid-Halkett, Ch. 7 the Economics of Celebrity Residual
- Ashby, Ch. 12 A Pop Culture Society
 -Currid-Halkett, Ch. 8 The Democratic Celebrity
 *Faulkner’s ‘That Evening Sun’ and O’Connor’s ‘A Late Encounter with the Enemy’
- Crothers, American Popular Culture and the Future of Globalization
Assignment: Recipe for Celebrity Essay
- Ashby, Epilogue Pop Culture in a Post 9-11 world
 -Currid-Halkett, Ch. 9 The Future of Celebrity
- Presentations. Papers due May 9**
 (electronic submissions suggested)
- During scheduled time of finals week

