

# **AM260I: Popular Culture**

Fall 2008

Tisch Learning Center 302

W/F 8:40-10:00am

Prof. B.V. Hollenbeck

In this course we will explore the popular culture of the United States of America in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. We will consider both the makers and receivers of popular culture, and we will analyze the influences behind, as well as the influences of, popular culture. Our subjects will include popular genre literature, comics, toys, community events, radio, film, comedy, and television. As we focus on episodes of cultural crisis (such as economic depression, war, real and imagined foreign threats, assassination, social disruption, corruption, and environmental disasters), we will look at, read, listen to, and watch the ways in which Americans processed, dealt with, and responded to the threats, dislocations, and promises of these times, in order to more fully understand this culture and its popular manifestations.

## **Course Requirements:**

Student work in this course will include:

**Class Participation (20%):** This includes class attendance (see below); reading (or watching) assignments carefully and fully, and being prepared to discuss them in class; contributing consistently, thoughtfully, and respectfully in class; speaking about work you did for a paper assignment; participating in discussions on Blackboard; and participating in frequent “go and finds,” where you will be asked to bring examples of popular culture to class.

**Annotated Bibliography (15%)**

**Response Paper (10%)**

**Oral History Paper (15%)**

**Group Project & Presentation (20%)**

**Final Exam (20%)**

## **Goals:**

The goals of this course are that you:

1. Gain a fuller and more nuanced understanding of the United States and American culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.
2. Gain an appreciation of the creation, place, and influence of popular culture in the U.S.
3. Gain greater competence in reading/watching, contextualizing, and analyzing primary sources.
4. Expand your speaking, research, and writing skills.

## **Attendance:**

More than three absences will have a negative impact on your final grade. Absences for observing religious holidays do not count, but all other absences, for whatever reason, do count. This three-absence leeway is intended to accommodate sickness and real emergencies – they are not free passes to be used in addition to sick days or days when

**Students should familiarize themselves with the Skidmore Honor Code and Student Handbooks.**

**Finding Me:**

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Office Hours: T/TH 1-3pm, W/F 10:30am-12pm

If you are unable to see me during my office hours, please speak with me to arrange another time. I am normally on campus Monday through Friday.

## **Schedule:**

Wednesday, 9/3

### **Introduction to the Course and to Popular Culture**

## ***Part I: The Great Depression***

Friday, 9/5

### **Hard Times**

READ:

- a. Frederick Lewis Allen, *Since Yesterday: The 1930s in America - I* (1939). Blackboard.
- b. John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). Blackboard.
- c. Depression era songs. Blackboard.

Wednesday, 9/10

### **The Phenomena of Escapism**

READ:

- a. Frederick Lewis Allen, *Since Yesterday: The 1930s in America - II* (1939). Blackboard.
- b. "Snow White and Escape from Reality," *The Christian Century* (July 20, 1938), pp. 886-887. Blackboard.
- c. "Reply to Mrs. Banning," *The Saturday Review of Literature* (August 21, 1937), p. 9. Blackboard.
- d. *The Saturday Evening Post*, Covers. Blackboard.
- e. *Official Guide Book of the New York World's Fair* (1939). Blackboard.

VIEW:

- f. *The Middleton Family at the New York World's Fair* (54m), online at: [http://www.archive.org/details/middleton\\_family\\_worlds\\_fair\\_1939](http://www.archive.org/details/middleton_family_worlds_fair_1939)
- g. *Brining Up Baby*. Clips on Blackboard, or DVD on reserve in the library. Watch scenes 2-8 (from beginning, until the leopard follows Cary Grant down the street – about 27 minutes).

**~~~Wednesday, 9/10 at 7pm – Viewing of *A Night at the Opera*~~~**

Friday, 9/12

### **The Marx Brothers**

READ:

- a. "The Marx Brothers," *Woman's Home Companion* (September 1936). Blackboard.
- b. "The Marx Brothers Abroad," *The Living Age* (December 1932), pp. 371-372. Blackboard.
- c. Otis Ferguson, "The Marxian Epileptic," *The New Republic* (December 11, 1935), p. 130. Blackboard.

VIEW:

- d. *A Night at the Opera*. DVD is on reserve at the library.

Wednesday, 9/17

### **The Gangster and the G-Man**

READ:

- a. Frederick Lewis Allen, *Since Yesterday: The 1930s in America* -III (1939). Blackboard.
- b. Ray Tucker, "Hist! Who's That?" *Collier's* (August 19, 1933). Blackboard.
- c. "Hoover: The One Who Is In the Department of Justice," *Newsweek* (August 12, 1933).
- d. J. Edgar Hoover, "The Real Public Enemy No. 1," *American Magazine* (April 1936). Blackboard.
- e. J. Edgar Hoover, "\$200,000 Rat Trap," *American Magazine* (August 1936). Blackboard.
- f. Alexander, "Why All This G-Man Publicity?" *The Reader's Digest* (December 1937), pp. 42-45. Blackboard.

VIEW:

- g. *G-Men*: Clips on Blackboard, or DVD on reserve in the library. Watch scenes.
- h. *Public Enemy*: Clips on Blackboard, or DVD on reserve in the library. Watch scenes beginning with 20, to the end. (12 minutes).

~~~Wednesday 9/17 at 7pm – Viewing of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*~~~

Friday, 9/19

## **The Everyday Hero**

READ:

- a. "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington," *Time* (October 23, 1939). Blackboard.
- b. "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington," *Newsweek* (October 23, 1939). Blackboard.
- c. Chapter 4 from *Homer Simpson Goes to Washington*. Blackboard.

SURF:

- d. The Jimmy Stewart Museum, at <http://www.jimmy.org/>.

VIEW:

- e. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*
- f. *Gone with the Wind*: Clips on Blackboard.

Wednesday, 9/24

## **DUE: Annotated Bibliographies (due in class)**

### **War of the Worlds**

READ:

- a. Frederick Lewis Allen, *Since Yesterday: The 1930s in America* (1939). Blackboard IV.
- b. "Boo!" *Time* (November 7, 1938), p. 40. Blackboard.

LISTEN:

- c. Broadcast, at:  
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~1930s/RADIO/WOTW/frames.html>

## ***Part II: World at War***

Friday, 9/26

## **Pearl Harbor and the Japanese**

READ:

- a. FDR, Fireside Chat, December 1942. Blackboard.
- b. Music about the Japanese, Lyrics. Blackboard.
- c. Articles from *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *Life*. Blackboard.

LISTEN:

- d. Music about the Japanese, online at:  
<http://www.authentichistory.com/ww2/music/PHattitudes.html>

WATCH:

- e. Popeye in *You're a Sap, Mr. Jap* – on You Tube
- f. *Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips* – on You Tube

Wednesday, 10/1

**On the Home Front: Rosie the Riveter and Gender**

READ:

- a. Walker, ed., *Women's Magazines 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press*. Part II, Chapter 1: World War II. Pp. 23-62.

LOOK:

- b. Images of women during the war. Blackboard.

~~~Wednesday 10/1 at 7pm – Viewing of *Since You Went Away*~~~

Friday, 10/3

**War at the Movies**

READ:

- a. "Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry," Office of War Information, 1942. Blackboard.
- b. Review of *Since You Went Away*, *Time* (July 17, 1944). Blackboard.

VIEW:

- c. *Since You Went Away*
- d. *Mrs. Miniver*. Clips on Blackboard. DVD also on reserve - watch the theatrical trailer (in special features) and scene 31 (Our War). (approximately 15 minutes)

Wednesday, 10/8

**Propaganda: From Disney to Dr. Seuss**

READ:

- a. Minear, *Dr. Seuss Goes to War* (1999).
- b. "The Rubber Band," Superman Comic, Fall 1944, from *Superman: The World's Finest Archives*. Blackboard.

LOOK AT:

- c. Comic book covers. Blackboard.

VIEW:

- d. *Disney on the Front Lines* (Clips and Reserve)

Friday, 10/10

**Genocide and the American Public**

READ:

- a. *America Views the Holocaust*. Blackboard.

SURF:

- b. World is Witness, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.  
<http://www.ushmm.org/>

### ***Part III: Cold Wars, Hot Wars, and Home Wars***

Wednesday, 10/15

#### **Atomic Culture**

READ:

- a. "Donald Duck's Atomic Bomb." Blackboard.
- b. Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy, *New York Times*, November 15, 1957. Blackboard.
- c. Robert McNamara, "Mutual Deterrence," 1962. Blackboard.
- d. *I.F. Stone's Weekly*, November 5, 1962. Blackboard.
- e. Terry Southern, *Memoir*. Blackboard.

LOOK AT:

- f. Images from atomic America. Blackboard.

VIEW:

- g. *Duck and Cover*. Online at You Tube.  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C0K\\_LZDXp0I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C0K_LZDXp0I)
- h. *Dr. Strangelove, Or How I Learned To Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. Clips on Blackboard. DVD on reserve.

Friday, 10/17

#### **Invasion USA: Communism**

READ:

- a. "This Godless Communism," *Treasure Chest*. Blackboard.
- b. Fried, "Springtime for Stalin in Mosinee," *The Russians Are Coming! Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold-War America*. Blackboard.

VIEW:

- c. *Invasion, USA*. Clips on Blackboard.
- d. *The Russians Are Coming! The Russians Are Coming!* Clips on Blackboard.

**~~~Monday 10/20 at 7pm – Viewing of *Manchurian Candidate*~~~**

Wednesday, 10/22

#### **DUE: RESPONSE PAPER**

##### **Infiltration**

VIEW:

- a. *Manchurian Candidate* (1962) (reserve)

READ:

- b. Reviews of *Manchurian Candidate*. Blackboard.

Friday, 10/24

**Study Day – No Class**

~~~Monday 10/27 at 7pm – Viewing of *JFK*~~~

Wednesday, 10/29

### **JFK and JFK**

READ:

- a. Stone and Sklar, *JFK: The Book of the Film*.

WATCH:

- b. Oliver Stone's *JFK*

Friday, 10/31

### **Gender and Feminism I**

READ:

- a. Walker, ed., *Women's Magazines 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press*. Chapter 2 (all), chapter 3 (all), and chapter 4 (documents #27, 30, 31, 33).
- b. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*. Blackboard.

VIEW:

- c. Donna Reed Show intro on YouTube:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ftKJe96N28&NR=1>
- d. Leave It To Beaver 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on Good Morning America  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cBWO1vWZXGY&feature=related>

**ASSIGNMENT: Bring an example of gender roles in popular culture to class (today and Wednesday 11/5).**

Wednesday, 11/5

### **Gender and Feminism II**

READ:

- a. Jerry L. Rodnitzky, one chapter from *Feminist Phoenix: The Rise and Fall of a Feminist Counterculture*. Blackboard.
- b. *Free to Be You and Me*. Blackboard.
- c. "Five Women Protest the 'Slavery' of Marriage," *New York Times* (September 24, 1969), p. 93. Blackboard.
- d. Peyton Bailey, "How Women's Lib Can Affect Your Marriage," *The Bride's Magazine* (June 1971), pp. 16 & 168.
- e. Donna Christiano, "Return to Gender?" *The Bride's Magazine* (June/July 1995), pp. 486-7 & 557.
- f. "Life as a Lightning Rod: Gloria Steinem on Feminism, Aging, and Why She Got Married," *Biography* (March 2002), pp. 74-77, 104.

~~~Thursday, 11/6 at 7pm – Viewing of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*~~~



Friday, 11/7

## **Racism and Civil Rights**

READ:

- a. Dr. Seuss, *The Sneetches*.

LISTEN:

- b. "Loving Decision: 40 Years of Legal Interracial Unions," at NPR.  
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=90201523>

VIEW:

- c. *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*

Wednesday, 11/12

## **Vietnam and the Counterculture**

READ:

- a. Public Opinion Poll, 1979. Blackboard.
- b. General Schwarzkopf, Vietnam's impact on the army. Blackboard.
- c. Nicholas Lemann, "The Post Vietnam Generation," 1978. Blackboard.
- d. Music of the Counterculture. Blackboard.
- e. Posters of the Vietnam Era. Blackboard.
- f. Reviews of *Green Berets* and other Vietnam movies. Blackboard.

VIEW:

- g. *The Green Berets* (reserve)
- h. *Apocalypse Now*. Clips on Blackboard. DVD on reserve.

~~~Wednesday 11/12 – Viewing of *All the President's Men*~~~

Friday, 11/14

## **Watergate**

READ:

- a. Tony Auth, *Philadelphia Enquirer* cartoons. Blackboard.
- b. "The Meaning of Deep Throat," *Newsweek* (June 5, 2005), pp. 5, 22-33.
- c. Toplin, "All the President's Men," in *History by Hollywood*. Blackboard.

VIEW:

- d. *All the President's Men*
- e. *Dick*

## **Part IV: Group Presentations**

Wednesday, 11/19

**GROUP PRESENTATIONS I** (group outline and bibliography due in class)

Friday, 11/21

**GROUP PRESENTATIONS II** (group outline and bibliography due in class)

## THANKSGIVING BREAK

**Wednesday 11/26 - No Class**

**Friday 11/28 – No Class**

Now's a good time to work on your oral history paper!

### *Part V: The Past and Present*

~~~Monday, 12/1 at 7pm - Viewing of *Sicko*. (123m)~~~

~~~Tuesday, 12/2 at 7pm – Viewing of *An Inconvenient Truth*. (96m)~~~

Wednesday, 12/3

#### **The Fashion of Current Crises**

READ:

- a. Reviews of Michael Moore. Blackboard.
- b. Al Gore at the 2007 Oscars. Blackboard. (and/or watch at:  
<http://thinkprogress.org/2007/02/25/al-gores-big-announcement/>)
- c. Satire and comedy:  
<http://www.borowitzreport.com/article.aspx?ID=6704>  
<http://www.borowitzreport.com/article.aspx?ID=5203>  
<http://www.borowitzreport.com/article.aspx?ID=5211>

VIEW:

- d. *Sicko* (reserve)
- e. *An Inconvenient Truth* (reserve)

**ASSIGNMENT:** Bring an example (copy or original, or description if you can't transport it) of a current debate, problem or crisis as portrayed in popular culture.

Friday, 12/5

#### **DUE: ORAL HISTORY PAPERS**

#### **New(s) Pop Culture**

READ:

- a. Peterson, *Strange Bedfellows*.

VIEW:

- b. A couple clips from The Daily Show and the Colbert Report, on  
[www.comedycentral.com](http://www.comedycentral.com), if you've never seen them.

Wednesday, 12/10

#### **Looking Back**

Be ready to discuss your oral history projects.

**FINAL EXAM:** Monday, December 15 – 9am to 12pm – TLC 302