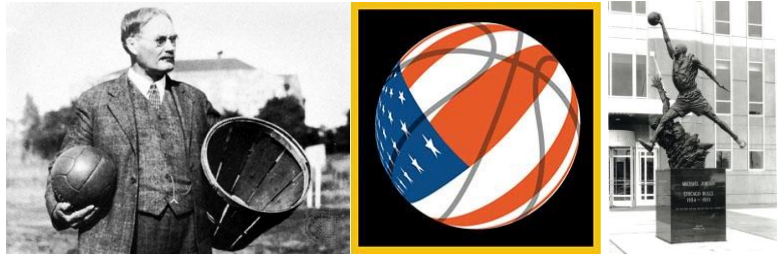


AM 103W, Introduction to American Studies

Professor Daniel A. Nathan
TLC 304, TTH 2:10-3:30 PM
Office: TLC 300, 580-5023
Office Hours: TTH, 3:30-5:00, W, 10:00-11:45, & by appointment
E-mail: dnathan@skidmore.edu

“Sport is no sanctuary from the real world because sport is part of the real world.”

—Robert Lipsyte, 1983



“The Constitution, jazz, and basketball are all creatures of the idea of freedom that drew people here—the freedom once denied those people whose journey here was far from voluntary. A republic, if we can keep it. Music, if we can hear it. A game, if we can play it.”

—Charles P. Pierce, 1999

Course Description & Objectives

This course introduces students to different forms of cultural criticism and examines some recurrent American cultural values and themes, such as the tension between community and individualism, and the disparity between American ideals and social realities. It also emphasizes reading critically, thinking historically, practicing interdisciplinarity, acknowledging diversity, and making connections. Students will analyze and synthesize many kinds of texts in order to better appreciate the complexity of American life and culture. The course employs an interdisciplinary approach that melds history, sociology, journalism, autobiography, fiction, poetry, art, film (feature and documentary), and other forms of knowledge and expression—and uses basketball as its focal point.

Yes, basketball, a game invented in 1891 by a Canadian of Scottish parentage now played by more than 450 million people worldwide. Why basketball? Because it provides us with rich opportunities to consider the politics of race, class, and gender formation, identity, and relations. Because it is a site where meaningful, complicated cultural exchange takes place—on playgrounds, in schools, on television, and on-line. Because its popularity, commercial success, and metaphoric possibilities should not be ignored. No previous knowledge of or experience playing basketball is required for this course. A word of warning: this is not a class *about* basketball; rather, it is a class that *uses* basketball to think critically about American culture and utilizes an interdisciplinary sensibility to study it.

Of course, even a cursory glance at the reading schedule reveals significant omissions. Students are encouraged to view them as opportunities for their own research and study.

A second word of warning: this course will heavily stress class discussion, centering upon considerations of the assigned readings (texts should be brought to class). Discussions are collective endeavors which demand everyone's preparation, attendance, and participation. Learning to participate in a discussion involves social and intellectual skills that are an essential part of one's education. These include: listening to others and learning to absorb and synthesize their remarks; learning to respond constructively and analytically to others' ideas; learning to develop and articulate positions of one's own; responding to criticism; and learning to modify or discard an argument as one comes to see another, more satisfactory one. Students are expected to come to class eager to share their ideas about the topics under consideration and to question our readings and one another.

At the end of the course, I expect that we will have learned some critical skills and interdisciplinary techniques, that we will have noted connections among the past, the present, and the future, and that we will have gained a better understanding of American culture and ourselves. I also expect that we will become better writers.

Books

Jeffrey Lane, *Under the Boards: The Cultural Revolution in Basketball*

James Naismith, *Basketball: Its Origin and Development*

John Updike, *Rabbit, Run*

Note: In addition to these books, there are numerous other readings, which will be distributed in class and/or as PDFs.

Films

David Anspaugh, *Hoosiers*

Steve James, *Hoop Dreams*

George Roy and Steve Stern, *City Dump: The Story of the 1951 CCNY Basketball Scandal*

Ward Serrill, *The Heart of the Game*

James D. Stern and Adam Del Deo, *The Year of the Yao*

Requirements

Course requirements include three papers (the first two will be 4-5 pages, the third will be 6-8 pages), a group presentation, active class participation, and quizzes/in-class writing assignments. You must complete all assignments in order to pass this course. The breakdown of grades is as follows:

In-class Writing Assignments & Quizzes	10%	
Class Participation	10%	
Group Presentation	15%	
First Paper	10%	(due February 24)
Second Paper	15%	(due March 5)
Third Paper	20%	(due April 26)
Final Exam	20%	(May 10, 9 AM)

Attendance & Participation

Because the success of the course depends upon your participation, attendance is mandatory. Three or more absences will adversely affect your final grade; six or more absences will result in failure. Active participation requires that you attend class regularly, that you come to class prepared (i.e., having carefully read and thought about the assigned material), and that you share your perspectives, ideas, and questions.

Special Needs

Anyone who has a disability which may require some modification of seating, testing, or other class requirements should see me after class or during my office hours so that we can make appropriate arrangements.

Reading Schedule

- 1/26: Introductions, goals, policies, reading/screening schedule
- 1/28: Terms, Concepts, and Presuppositions: culture, ideology, interdisciplinarity, et al
Burgett and Hendler, *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* excerpts
- 2/2: Cowan, "American Studies: An Overview"
Wise, "Some Elementary Axioms for an American Culture Studies"
- 2/4: McConnell, "The Gilded Age, Populism, and the Era of Incorporation"
Gorn, "Sports Through the Nineteenth Century"
- 2/9: Naismith, *Basketball*, v-99
- 2/11: Library tutorial (meet in Scribner Library, room 128)
- 2/16: Naismith, *Basketball*, 100-189
Gorn and Goldstein, *A Brief History of American Sport* excerpt
- 2/18: Basketball clinic (meet in the Sports and Recreation Center)
- 2/23: Mandelbaum, *The Meaning of Sports* excerpt
- 2/25: Levine, *Ellis Island to Ebbets Field* excerpts
Roy and Stern, *City Dump* (film)
- 3/2: Berenson, "The significance of basket ball for women"
Miller, "Half-court Basketball: Power and Sex"
Liberti, "Fostering Community Consciousness: The Role of Women's Basketball at Black Colleges and Universities, 1900-1950"
Lucas, "Courting Controversy: Gender and Power in Iowa Girls' Basketball"
- 3/4: Glenn and Hayes, *Taking Things Seriously* excerpts
Jackson, "Hoops"
Updike, "Ex-Basketball Player"
- 3/9: Updike, *Rabbit, Run*, 5-164
- 3/11: Updike, *Rabbit, Run*, 164-264
Boroff, "You Cannot Really Flee"
- 3/16: No Class—Spring Break
- 3/18: No Class—Spring Break
- 3/23: Halberstam, "The Basket-Case State"
Ansbaugh, *Hoosiers* (film)
Briley, "Basketball's Great White Hope and Ronald Reagan's America: *Hoosiers* (1986)"
- 3/25: Lane, *Under the Boards*, xi-xvii, 113-195
- 3/30: James, *Hoop Dreams* (film)
Ebert, "Hoop Dreams"
Vanderwerken, "Hoop Dreams: A Basketball Bildungsroman"
hooks, "Neo-Colonial Fantasies of Conquest"
- 4/1: Wise, "Looking Back at Broken Dreams: Film's Key Players Have Moved On"
Ebert, "The great American documentary"
May, "The Good and Bad of It All"

- 4/6: Kian, Vincent, and Mondello, "Masculine Hegemonic Hoops: An Analysis of Media Coverage of March Madness"
Price, "The Final Four as Final Judgment: The Cultural Significance of the NCAA Basketball Championship"
Sack, et al, "March Money Madness"
- 4/8: TBD
Group presentation
- 4/13: Serrill, *The Heart of the Game* (film)
Dargis, "'The Heart of the Game' Chronicles the Sweat of Girls' Basketball, the Roar of the Coach"
Ebert, "The Heart of the Game"
- 4/15: Wallace and Wallace, "She Got Game: Basketball and the Perfectly Developed Woman"
Baroffio-Bota and Banet-Weiser, "Women, Team Sports, and the WNBA: Playing Like a Girl"
Kelley, Starr, and Conant, "A Team Stands Tall"
Craggs, "The Next Big Thing"
Group presentation
- 4/20: Halberstam, "A Hero for the Wired World"
LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism* excerpts
Hartmann, "Bound by Blackness or Above it? Michael Jordan and the Paradoxes of post-civil rights American race relations"
- 4/22: Lane, *Under the Boards*, 1-66
Group presentation
- 4/27: Wolff, *Big Game, Small World* excerpts
Jozsa, *Sports Capitalism: The Foreign Business of American Professional Leagues* excerpt
Lane, *Under the Boards*, 197-235
- 4/29: Stern and Del Deo, *The Year of the Yao* (film)
Nathan, "Travelling: Notes on Basketball and Globalization"
Group presentation
- 5/4: Course evaluations and concluding comments
- 5/10: Final Exam, 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM, 304 TLC

Note: I reserve the right to make minor revisions in the reading schedule.

Screening Schedule

2/24:	Roy and Stern, <i>City Dump</i>	304 TLC	7:00 PM
3/22:	Anspaugh, <i>Hoosiers</i>	304 TLC	7:00 PM
3/29:	James, <i>Hoop Dreams</i>	304 TLC	7:00 PM
4/12:	Serrill, <i>The Heart of the Game</i>	304 TLC	7:00 PM
4/28:	Stern and Del Deo, <i>The Year of the Yao</i>	304 TLC	7:00 PM

Films will be shown at 7 PM. Note: You are *not* required to attend these screening sessions, but you are required to have watched the films in question before we discuss them in class.