

Senior Seminar Topic Proposals

Fall 2016

Claire Cook: *America Runs on Coffee: Coffee as Fuel for Socialization, the Military, and the Workforce*

Dating back to the American Revolution, coffee drinking has been an essential mechanism for socialization and utility in the United States. While the patterns of its consumption have shifted over time, the majority of Americans remain dependent on the beverage to function and connect. In my paper, I focus on coffee's history, how its rise in consumption began as a political act, the multifaceted role of the coffeehouse for socialization, its use in the military as fuel and comfort, the "coffee break," and the current third wave coffee movement. I examine the ways in which coffee, a foreign commodity, has been advertised and consumed as an American item, and what that appropriation has meant for American identity in a global context.

Dustin Foote: *Party in the Parking Lot: Tailgating as a Connection between University and Alumni*

My seminar paper deals with the phenomenon of tailgate parties at college football games, specifically with the ways in which tailgating acts as community engager between the university and its alumni. I employ a case study method, using interviews with tailgaters at a Penn State University football game to understand how alumni react to these specialized gatherings with reference to sports, fandom, and memory. I ask such questions as: why do alumni tailgaters return to school? Is tailgating correlated with alumni engagement? Does tailgating act as an extension of the college experience for alumni? How are communities formed and sustained during the tailgate? What do alumni remember about their college experience, is tailgating a prominent part of that memory? Do alumni consider tailgating as involvement? Is tailgating for everyone? I argue that for alumni, the party in the parking lot is not just another party. Instead, it serves as a community engager to the university, creating a space in which alums can re-live memories and gather with like-minded fans around a common group experience.

Benjamin Kim: *Silence Over Freedom: The Story of American Comic Book Censorship*

The Comic Code Authority--an industry-imposed, self-policed form of censorship--was introduced in the 1950s by comic book publishers as a way of avoiding government regulation. The strict regulations that it imposed almost killed creativity among artists and writers and severely restricted experimentation in the industry. An underground "comix" movement emerged in response, centered on The Amazing Spider-man comics which challenged the authority of the CCA. My paper considers how these challenges were conducted by publishers like Stan Lee and why they succeeded in bringing down the censorship codes. I also evaluate the influence these underground comix had on the return of creativity to the industry.

Krista Lamoreaux: *Fighting for Playing Time*

Thanks to Title IX, women have been playing sports competitively for decades, and the number of women working in sports broadcasting has increased proportionally. Title IX supports women by making athletics more accessible in a male-dominated society, yet that society is still highly gendered. Many sports analysts are former players, yet even male commentators who were non-professional athletes are presented as more qualified than women athletes. While ESPN, Fox Sports, and other sports broadcasting companies have presented more opportunities for women, fans are not as accepting of a female presence in the booth or on the sidelines. Using interviews and testimonials from women in the sports entertainment business, I assess the current state of discrimination against women in the industry and seek to provide alternatives for those, like myself, who hope to have a greater presence in the field.

Gabriela Pérez: *The Value of Social Protest*

My seminar paper deals with the symbolic protest, particularly its effectiveness, limitations, and function in the larger scope of civil rights protest. Specifically, I examine NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick's decision to kneel during the National Anthem to protest systematic racial injustice in America and to raise consciousness about the state of race relations in the United States. His act is seen by many to be disrespectful, self-serving and ineffective. I will argue that while this symbolic protest alone may not lead to significant changes, it is an effective strategy for creating a platform for national discourse on the intersections of race, patriotism, and protest. I focus on the controversial Black Lives Matter movement (which seeks to remedy the symptoms of racism through methods such as die-ins and street protesting); the role of activist athletes in recent and past politically charged eras; and the complex dynamics between the symbolism of the American flag, patriotism, and militarism. I ask whether, despite the obvious evidence that Kaepernick's explicit actions have had an impact, Americans are understanding its implicit message. Is his message about racial injustice being critically disseminated by the media? Are replications of the quarterback's actions effective in expanding the cause or do they trivialize it in ways that further obscure its meaning?

Andrew Uebelein: *“South Park City Limits: Not ‘Getting’ the Joke and the Boundaries of Televisual Satire”*

Since its inception in 1996, Comedy Central's animated sitcom South Park has remained one of the network's highest-rated shows. The show's claim to fame is its pension for offensive humor that takes an edgy, “equal opportunity offending” approach to satirizing the real-life referents it parodies. Primary and secondary sources reveal South Park's creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker are maverick provocateurs and socio-politically critical voices. However, popular discourses also suggest that a significant demographic of South Park viewers is not “in on” Stone and Parker's intended satirical joke. These “uninformed” viewers laugh merely at the offensiveness of jokes. In my paper I use South Park as a case study for revealing and examining the dissonance between the authorial intention of satirists and how audiences receive it. Ultimately, I argue that South Park's critical effectiveness as socio-political satire falls short to the extent that it is misinterpreted, misappropriated, and repackaged.