

AMST 300

Introduction to American Popular Culture

AMST 300-02, #10134
California State University, Fullerton
Fall 2009
M/W 10-11:15
UH-250

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Course Description

This course explores the historical development of American popular culture as both a series of expressive forms and a set of business enterprises. We will focus our attention on the production and reception of popular culture, studying how marketers and audiences have ascribed meanings to various leisure activities and popular amusements. Throughout the course, we will consider how the ideological content and popular reception of mass culture can be shaped by race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, and nationalism. One of our central aims is to understand how the traditions and techniques of 19th century entertainment forms evolved over time and influenced the modern age of mass media in which we currently live. Subjects for study include stage entertainment, amusement parks, dance halls, sporting events, music, television, film, advertising, and fandom.

Required Texts

Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*
Gena Caponi-Tabery, *Jump for Joy: Jazz, Basketball, and Black Culture in 1930s America*
Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*
Daniel Cavicchi, *Tramps Like Us: Music and Meaning Among Springsteen Fans*

All books are available for purchase at Little Professor bookstore, 725 N. Placentia Ave (near the corner of Nutwood and Placentia).

General Education Learning Goals

American Studies 300 meets the General Education "Disciplinary Learning: Implications, Explorations, and Participatory Experience in the Social Sciences" requirement (III.C.2). In line with CSUF's "Goals of General Education," this course will encourage students to...

- a. Understand broad, unifying themes in the social sciences from cross- disciplinary perspectives.
- b. Solve complex problems that require social scientific reasoning.
- c. Relate the social sciences to significant social problems or to other related disciplines.
- d. Apply disciplinary concepts from the social sciences in a variety of settings

Course Assignments and Grading Standards

There are three required, graded assignments for this course. Specific guidelines for each assignment will be handed out separately in class.

Assignment #1

You will write a 3-5-page paper in which you compare and contrast the leisure habits of the working class New York women described in *Cheap Amusements* with the leisure habits of middle class Muncie, Indiana residents described in an excerpt from the sociological study *Middletown* (handout).

Assignment #2

You will write a 3-5-page paper in which you assess the different approaches to studying popular culture used by Gena Caponi-Tabery and Lynn Spigel in their respective books. How does each scholar look at popular culture? What are the strengths and weakness of each approach? Which approach do you think is more effective and why?

Assignment #3

Using *Tramps Like Us* as a model, you will develop a questionnaire and interview three fans (fans of either a musical artist or sports team) and write a 6-8-page paper in which you describe and analyze the meaning of fandom for those individuals.

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| Assignment #1: | 30% |
| Assignment #2 | 30% |
| Assignment #3 | 40% |

For this course, +/- grading will be used. No extra credit will be offered. Keep all graded work so that any discrepancies can be easily and fairly straightened out.

An assignment is considered late if it is not turned in at the beginning of the class session in which it is due. Late assignments will be lowered one mark **per day** (NOT per class meeting) after the due date (for example, C to C-). Extensions will be granted on a case-by-case basis for legitimate reasons and only when a student asks for an extension at least 24 hours before an assignment is due.

In accordance with General Education writing requirements, you will have the opportunity to rewrite and resubmit ONE of your first two assignments (either #1 or #2) for a better grade. You may NOT rewrite an assignment that was turned in late or was failed because of plagiarism.

A+ 97-99; A 94-96; A-90-93; B+ 87-89; B 84-86; B- 80-83; C+ 77-79; C 74-76; C- 70-73; D+ 67-69; D 64-66; D- 60-63; F 0-59

Participation

I expect you to be actively engaged with the classroom community, the concepts, and the coursework. Class attendance, while not required, is crucial to your participation and to your success on the assignments, which require you to synthesize material from readings, lectures, and discussions. Please come to class prepared to 1) explain the central argument and methodology of the assigned reading; 2) assess the assigned reading for its relative strengths and limitations; 3) raise questions about the reading; 4) connect the readings to one another; and 5) connect the readings to your broader understanding of contemporary and historical issues in American popular culture.

It is generally unacceptable to leave class early. If you must leave class early because of an appointment that cannot be missed, make sure that you tell me before class begins. Cell phones must be on silent (not vibrate). No text messaging during class. Surfing the Internet is not permitted in class.

American Studies at Fullerton

I am always happy to talk with students about the possibility of majoring, double majoring, or minoring in American Studies. Feel free to drop by my office hours or to schedule an appointment if you would like to learn more about the department or the discipline. For more information on the American Studies Department, visit our website: <http://hss.fullerton.edu/amst/>.

Student Accommodations

CSUF complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act by providing a process for disclosing disabilities and arranging for reasonable accommodations. On the CSUF campus, the Office of Disabled Student Services has been delegated the authority to certify disabilities and to prescribe specific accommodations for students with documented disabilities. DSS provides support services for students with mobility limitations, learning disabilities, hearing or visual impairments, and other disabilities. Counselors are available to help students plan a CSUF experience to meet their individual needs. Prior to receiving this assistance, documentation from a qualified professional source must be submitted to DSS. For more information, please contact DSS in UH 101; phone 657-278-3117.

Academic Integrity

Integrity is an essential component of all students' academic experience. Students who violate university standards of academic integrity are subject to disciplinary sanctions, including failure in the course and suspension from the university. Since dishonesty in any form harms the individual, other students, and the university, policies on academic integrity are strictly enforced. I expect that you will familiarize yourself with the academic integrity guidelines found in the current student handbook. [<http://www.fullerton.edu/handbook/>]. Cheating is defined as obtaining or attempting to obtain credit for work by the use of any dishonest, deceptive, fraudulent, or unauthorized means, or helping someone commit an act of academic dishonesty. (UPS 300.021). Examples include, but

are not limited to:

Unacceptable examination behavior: communicating with fellow students, copying material from another student's exam or allowing another student to copy from an exam, possessing or using unauthorized materials, or any behavior that defeats the intent of an exam.

Plagiarism: taking the work of another and offering it as one's own without giving credit to that source, whether that material is paraphrased or copied in verbatim or near-verbatim form.

Unauthorized collaboration on a project, homework or other assignment where an instructor expressly forbids such collaboration.

Documentary falsification, including forgery, altering of campus documents or records, tampering with grading procedures, fabricating lab assignments, or altering medical excuses.

Course Schedule (subject to revision)

[A note on furlough days: CSU faculty agreed to take furlough days this academic year in order to keep student fees from increasing any further and to prevent even more classes from being cut due to the State's budget crisis.]

| Date | Topic | Due |
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| M, Aug. 24 | Introduction to Course | |
| W, Aug. 26 | What is Popular Culture? | |
| M, Aug. 31 | Definitions and Key Terms | |
| W, Sep. 2 | Studying Leisure | |
| M, Sep. 7 | Labor Day – No Class | |
| W, Sep. 9 | 19 th Century Stage and Audiences: Blackface Minstrelsy and the Astor Place Riot | <i>Cheap Amusements</i> , Introduction and Ch. 1 |
| M, Sep. 14 | “Privacy in Public”: Women’s Work and Leisure at the Turn of the Century | <i>Cheap Amusements</i> , Chs. 2, 3 |
| W, Sep. 16 | Dance Halls and Amusement Parks | <i>Cheap Amusements</i> , Chs. 4, 5 |
| M, Sep. 21 | “Nickel Madness”: Film and Gender | <i>Cheap Amusements</i> , Ch. 6 and Conclusion |
| W, Sep. 23 | Race, Popular Culture, and Politics in the 1930s | <i>Jump for Joy</i> , Preface and Ch. 1 |
| M, Sep. 28 | Middletown vs. New York | Assignment #1 due |
| W, Sep. 30 | Furlough Day – No Class | <i>Jump for Joy</i> , Chs. 2, 3 |
| M, Oct. 5 | Interpreting the Lindy Hop | <i>Jump for Joy</i> , Chs. 4, 5 |

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| W, Oct. 7 | Studying Sports Culture | <i>Jump for Joy</i> , Chs. 6, 7 |
| M, Oct. 12 | The Theory of Cultural Permission | <i>Jump for Joy</i> , Chs. 8, 9, 10, Afterword |
| W, Oct. 14 | Advertising as Popular Culture | |
| M, Oct. 19 | Television and the Postwar American Dream | <i>Make Room for Television</i> , Introduction, Ch. 1 |
| W, Oct. 21 | Furlough Day – No Class | <i>Make Room for Television</i> , Ch. 2 |
| M, Oct. 26 | Screening Gender | <i>Make Room for Television</i> , Ch. 3 |
| W, Oct. 28 | Popular Storytelling: “We Are Family” | <i>Make Room for Television</i> , Ch. 4, Epilogue |
| M, Nov. 2 | Revisiting Methodology | Assignment #2 due |
| W, Nov. 4 | Popular Storytelling: Film Noir in the 1940s | |
| M, Nov. 9 | Popular Storytelling: The Teenpic in the 1950s | |
| W, Nov. 11 | Veterans Day: No Class | <i>Tramps Like Us</i> , Preface, Introduction |
| M, Nov. 16 | Studying Fandom | <i>Tramps Like Us</i> , Chs. 1, 2, Appendix A |
| W, Nov. 18 | Are you a REAL fan?: Degrees of Fandom | <i>Tramps Like Us</i> , Chs. 3, 4 |
| M, Nov. 23 W, Nov. 25 | Thanksgiving – No Class | |
| M, Nov. 30 | Collecting and Commodity Fetishism | <i>Tramps Like Us</i> , Chs. 5, 6, 7, Conclusion, Postscript |
| W, Dec. 2 | In-class screening and discussion: <i>Trekies</i> (1997) | |
| M, Dec. 7 | Identity, Community, and Popular Culture | |
| W, Dec. 9 | Conclusion of Course | Assignment #3 Due |