

# Popular Culture

## American Studies 259 – 01:050:259:H1

July 9 – August 15, Summer 2007

MTWTh, 10:00 – 11:50 A.M.

Campbell Hall – A5

College Avenue Campus

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Office Hours: By Appointment

### Course Description/Goals:

We live it, breathe it, ignore it and take it for granted, yet it holds a tremendous amount of influence over all our lives. It's true - popular culture affects everyone in ways that we don't even realize. It shapes what we do, what we buy, and even how we view ourselves as members of society. By applying social science research techniques to the study of pop culture relics (such as music, movies, television and advertising), this course will help students to become critical consumers of popular culture, and better understand the many (often covert) ways in which pop culture influences us. Each of us, myself included, will be working very hard this semester. As such, I will try to make the material I present as painless (and get this, even FUN) as possible. If we work together, we can produce great things!

### Course requirements:

This course meets four times per week. As discussions and presentations are integral to everyone's understanding of the course material, attendance and timeliness are **mandatory**. ALL students are responsible for any and all announcements made during class. Unless otherwise stated, I expect each of you to complete the readings BEFORE the class during which they will be discussed (i.e. start reading on the day the piece is assigned, and have it finished for the following class). Due dates for all projects and exams are listed in the syllabus. In general, I do not offer make-up exams, barring a **documented** emergency. Please remember that college courses are as much about professional socialization as they are about conveying discipline-specific information. As such, I expect each of you to behave like the young professionals that you are working to become.

All written work done for this course should be submitted via Sakai (<http://sakai.rutgers.edu>), a web interface hosted by Rutgers University. In order to submit your assignments, go to the Sakai site, and log in using your Rutgers user ID. Once logged in, you should see a tab with the course number (01:050:259:H1) near the top of the screen. Click on this tab. A number of resources will be available to you via Sakai, and use of the site is required for the course. Sakai discussion boards offer an excellent opportunity for students to continue class discussions, and your use of this feature is encouraged. Sakai can also help facilitate cooperation for presentations (where applicable). If you have any questions as to how to use Sakai, feel free to contact someone from Rutgers computing, or see me after class.

As some professors might, I will not provide a lengthy diatribe on academic dishonesty. I expect nothing but your best, ORIGINAL work. Severe disciplinary action will be taken against any

student that does not adhere to the university's academic honesty guidelines. For specifics, please consult the university's policy on academic integrity, available online (<http://teachx.rutgers.edu/integrity/policy.html>).

If anyone has questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via email or arrange an appointment with me. I will do my best to get back to you in a timely manner. However, please refrain from waiting until the last minute to email me with questions. I will always try to get back to you in the most timely manner possible, but please allow me at least two days turnaround time for any email correspondence you send.

I sincerely hope that we can all have a fun, challenging and productive semester. It may seem intimidating at first, but I can promise you that by the end of this course, you will not only have learned something new, but you will have learned about a new way to understand the world around you. Now let's get to work! ☺

### **Grading breakdown:**

Exams – 40% (2 exams at 20% each)  
Paper – 30%  
Group Work – 20%  
Attendance and Participation – 10%

### **Major Deadlines:**

**Tuesday, July 24-** Midterm exam  
**Thursday, August 9** – Final exam  
**Wednesday, August 15** – Paper due via Sakai

### **Required Text:**

The following text is available for purchase at New Jersey Books (108 Somerset St). You may also order them online. A copy of the book will be placed on reserve at Alexander Library.

Guins, Raiford and Omayra Zaragoza Cruz. 2005. Popular Culture: A Reader. Sage Publishing. London. **ISBN: 0-7619-7472-5**

### **Reserve Readings:**

Reserve readings are **REQUIRED**, and have been set aside in electronic format within the university's library system. Reserve readings in the syllabus will be marked as such (R), and can be accessed via the RU library's website (<http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/> and clicking on the "find reserves" link). The reserve readings are either entire articles, or **excerpts** taken from the following:

Rogers, Mary. 1999. Barbie Culture. Sage Publishing. London.

Schutt, Russell K. 2004. Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Social Research. Pine Forge Press. Thousand Oaks, CA.

**NOTE:** I may, at varying points during the course, suggest additional readings. The syllabus is meant to serve as a guideline that can (i.e. WILL) be bolstered, to your benefit, as I see fit. But don't take this as a "threat." I will only assign "extra" readings if I feel they are necessary for added clarity.

## Course Calendar

### *Day/Date*

Topic/Focus:

*Assignment, to be completed before the following class meeting*

### **Section 1: The “what,” “why” and “how” of studying “popular culture”**

#### ***Monday, July 9***

Topic/Focus: Introduction, Syllabus/Rules

*Assignment: Intro and Chapters 1, 2, 4 and 5 in Guins and Zaragoza Cruz (GZ)*

#### ***Tuesday, July 10***

Topic/Focus: What is popular culture?

*Assignment: Chapters 6 & 7, GZ*

*Schutt, Selection #1 (R)*

#### ***Wednesday, July 11***

Topic/Focus: How can we study popular culture?

*Assignment: Schutt, Selection #2 (R)*

#### ***Thursday, July 12***

Topic/Focus: How to study popular culture, cont'd.

*Assignment: Intro to Part II, Chapters 8-10, GZ*

### **Section 2: Bringing Popular Culture “Home”**

#### ***Monday, July 16***

Topic/Focus: Consumption and Commodification

*Assignment: Cognitive Theories of Persuasion (R)*

*Fast Food Nation Excerpt (R)*

*Chapter 17, GZ*

#### ***Tuesday, July 17***

Topic/Focus: Advertising and Cognitive Theories of Persuasion

*Assignment: Intro to Part III, Chapters 14 – 16, GZ*

***Wednesday, July 18***

Topic/Focus: Marketing  
Assignment: *Reference Groups – T. Merton (R)*

***Thursday, July 19***

Topic/Focus: Reference Groups  
Assignment: *Review*

***Monday, July 23***

Topic/Focus: In-class Review  
Assignment: *Review*

***Tuesday, July 24***

Topic/Focus: **MIDTERM EXAM**  
Assignment: *Readings TBA*

**Section 3: Popular Culture and Identities**

***Wednesday, July 25***

Topic/Focus: Popular Culture and the Body  
Assignment: *Intro to Part IV, Chapters 20 and 34, GZ*

***Thursday, July 26***

Topic/Focus: Gender in Popular Culture  
Assignment: *Chapters 27, 28, 33, GZ*

***Monday, July 30***

Topic/Focus: Sexuality in Popular Culture  
Assignment: *Chapters 18, 19, 24, 25, GZ*

**Tuesday, July 31**

Topic/Focus: Race and Ethnicity in Popular Culture  
Assignment: Chapters 26 & 27, GZ

*“Failing Narratives, Initiating Technologies: Hurricane Katrina and the Production of a Weather Media Event,” Fleetwood (R)*

*“The Myth of the Latin Woman: I Just Met a Girl Named Maria,” Ortiz Cofer (R)*

*“Gladiators, Gazelles and Groupies: Basketball Love and Loathing,” Malveaux (R)*

**Wednesday, August 1**

Topic/Focus: Race and Ethnicity in Popular Culture, Cont’d  
Assignment: *Imus Readings 1-4 (R)*

**Section 4: From Classroom to Real Life – Analyzing and Understanding Contemporary Pop Culture Phenomena**

**Thursday, August 2**

Topic/Focus: Close to Home – The Don Imus Scandal  
Assignment: *Readings/viewings TBD*

*Find clips to share with class*

**Monday, August 6**

Topic/Focus: Life Imitating Art, or Art Imitating Life?: America’s Next Top Model  
Assignment: *Readings/viewings TBD*

*Find clips to share with class*

**Tuesday, August 7**

Topic/Focus: Reality TV  
Assignment: *Begin reviewing, focus on final paper*

**Wednesday, August 8**

Topic/Focus: In-class review  
Assignment: *Review, work on final paper*

***Thursday, August 9***

Topic/Focus: **FINAL EXAM**  
Assignment: *Work on final paper*

***Monday, August 13***

Topic/Focus: No “formal” class meeting – work on final papers  
Assignment: *Work on paper*

***Tuesday, August 14***

Topic/Focus: No “formal” class meeting – work on final papers  
Assignment: *Work on paper*

***Wednesday, July 15***

Topic/Focus: **FINAL PAPER DUE TODAY VIA SAKAI!!!**  
Assignment: Congratulations! You’ve made it through another course. I hope you enjoyed the class, and will continue to use this knowledge well into the future. Be well, and enjoy the remainder of your summer!