

American Studies 01:050:259
Contemporary U.S. Popular Culture
001 RAB
Tu/ Th 2:15-3:35
Spring 2006

Professor Nicole Fleetwood

Office Location: 017A RAB

Office Hours: Office Hours: Tu: 3:45-4:30,
Th: 12:30-2, and by appt

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Course Overview

This course offers an introduction to some key themes in the study of popular media and culture. The course is designed to equip students 1) to “read” popular culture in terms of representation, power, and audience; and 2) to recognize, interpret, and evaluate ways in which various media and cultural messages construct images of the United States, citizenship, patriotism, and “Americanness.” We will look at a range of popular cultural forms, including film, television, advertising, and the Internet. Uncovering the role that media messages play in our lives will be a central focus of this course, with the intention of increasing skills as critical and discriminating consumers of media texts. Theories of production, technology, audience, and representation will be explored in relation to a variety of media forms and social relations. Students will demonstrate their comprehension and understanding of course material in the form of quizzes, exams, a written essay, and class participation.

Required Readings

Beatty, Paul. *White Boy Shuffle*. New York: Picador USA, 1996.

Dines, Gail and Jean M. Humez, eds. *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Text-Reader*. 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2003.

Online sources

Handouts

Readings should be completed in advance of the class day for which they are scheduled. Some of the readings are more rigorous than others, but please bring questions and comments about them to class. Students must use the Internet, the class listserv, and email for this class. There are a number of computers on campus where you can access the Internet. If you have problems accessing the appropriate online source, please let one of us know before class.

Course Requirements

Students are expected to complete all readings for each class, to arrive ready to engage with the written and visual materials assigned, and to prepare thoughtful responses to course materials. I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus as the semester progresses. It is your responsibility to stay abreast of changes to the course schedule by attending class, checking email regularly, and contacting me for updated information.

Plagiarism of any sort will not be tolerated. Plagiarism includes copying classmates' answers and improper citation of any text in the course or otherwise. Ignorance of university policy is not an excuse.

Grading Breakdown

Participation (attendance and discussion moderation): 10%

Quizzes : 30%

Midterm Exam: 20%

Paper (4-6 pages): 20%

Final Exam: 20%

Class Preparation/Participation

Students are expected to attend all lectures. Students must report to me at the beginning of class to make sure that their names are checked off. I expect everyone to contribute to our understanding, application, and evaluation of the reading assignments and visual materials analyzed in class. This course requires that you participate as an active reader of U.S. culture. At times, you will be asked to bring in short news articles, magazine features, and advertisements that contribute to our discussion of the role of visual images in constructing our understanding of nation, citizenship and identity.

As a component of your participation grade, each student will work in small groups to help facilitate discussion during one class. Students will sign up for discussion moderation duties at the beginning of the semester. Students will be expected to have prepared, typed questions to be turned in to me.

Quizzes

Students will be given quizzes throughout the course. You will not be able to make up quizzes, unless you have a documented emergency or serious illness. Quizzes will cover course readings as well as lectures. Questions will consist of analyzing visual images using course material, providing definitions of key concepts, and constructing short essay responses.

Analytical Paper

Students are required to write one analytical paper that critically engages with issues raised in the course. The essay topic will require students to apply the concepts and theories of the course to Paul Beatty's novel, *White Boy Shuffle*. More details will be provided closer to the assignment's due date.

Midterm Exam

The midterm exam will cover all materials through March 9, 2006. The exam will consist of multiple-choice, true-false, and short response questions

Final Exam

The final exam will be cumulative. A firm grasp of the material covered throughout the semester will be vital to your success. The exam will consist of multiple-choice, true-false, and short response questions.

Course Policies

All assignments must be completed in order to pass the class. **Late assignments will be penalized one letter grade per day late.** All papers must be double-spaced, typeset with Times or Times New Roman 12pt font, and have page numbers and one-inch margins. Format of papers should adhere to a recognized style manual (such as MLA, APA and Chicago).

Course Schedule

17 JAN: INTRODUCTION/COURSE OVERVIEW

19 JAN: SYMBOLS OF AMERICA, AMERICANA, & U.S. CITIZENSHIP

“Part I: A Cultural Studies Approach to Gender, Race, and Class in Media,” pp. 1-7

Kellner: “Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, and Media Culture,” pp. 9-20

24 JAN: KEY WORDS AND PARADIGMS FOR ANALYZING POPULAR CULTURE

Sturken, Marita and Lisa Cartwright. “Chapter One. Practices of Looking: Images, Power, and Politics.” [ELECTRONIC RESERVES]

Section: TELEVISION AND MASS MEDIA

26 JAN: Television Codes and Genres

Lull. “Hegemony,” pp. 61-66

Fiske, John. “The Codes of Television” [ELECTRONIC RESERVES]

CLIPS: *All My Children, Survivor, Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?, Friends*

QUIZ

31 JAN: DAYTIME TV

Fiske, John. “Gendered Television: Femininity,” pp. 469-476

Lee and Cho. “Women Watching Together: An Ethnographic Study of Korean Soap Opera Fans in the United States,” pp. 482-487

Hayward. “Consuming Pleasures: Active Audiences and Soap Opera,” pp. 507-521

CLIPS: various morning shows & soap operas

2 FEB: DAYTIME TV (CONT.)

Moorti. “Cathartic Confessions or Emancipatory Texts?: Rape Narratives on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*,” pp. 522-533

Peck. “The Mediated Talking Cure: Therapeutic Framing of Autobiography in TV Talk Shows,” pp. 534-547

CLIPS: various soap operas

7 FEB: TELEVISION AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

Hall. “The White of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media,” pp. 89-93

SCREENING: *Representation and the Media*

9 FEB: TELEVISION AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

Coleman. “Black Sitcom Portrayals,” pp. 79-88

SCREENING: *Color Adjustment*

14 FEB: CASE STUDY: THE AMERICAN FAMILY

“Ralph, Fred, Archie, and Homer: Why Television Keeps Re-Creating the White Male Working-Class Buffoon” pp. 575-585

Hart. “Representing Gay Men on American Television” pp. 597-607

CLIPS: *The Sopranos, The Cosby Show, George Lopez Show, Growing up Gotti*

QUIZ

SECTION: CINEMA

16 FEB: FILM HISTORY AND GENRE

Thompson, Kristen and Bordwell. “American Cinema in the Postwar Era, 1945-1960.”

[**ELECTRONIC RESERVES**]

CLIPS: *Sunset Boulevard, LA Confidential, Some Like it Hot, Pretty Woman*

21 FEB: FILM INDUSTRY AND ENTERTAINMENT ECONOMY

Thompson, Kristen and Bordwell. “American Cinema and the Entertainment Economy: The 1980s and After.” [**ELECTRONIC RESERVES**]

23 FEB: FEMINIST THEORY AND HOLLYWOOD

Laura Mulvey. “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” [**ELECTRONIC RESERVES**]

CLIPS: *Alfred Hitchcock, American Beauty*

28 FEB: CASE STUDY: THE AMERICAN FAMILY

Kipnis, Laura. “Film and Changing Technologies.” *World Cinema: Critical Approaches*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000: 211-220. [**ELECTRONIC RESERVES**]

QUIZ

2 MAR: SUBCULTURE THEORY

Rose. “Hidden Politics: Discursive and Institutional Policing of Rap Music.”

Hebdige, Dick. “Subculture.” [**ELECTRONIC RESERVES**]

7 MAR: SUBCULTURE THEORY

Halberstam, Judith. “Drag Kings: Masculinity and Performance” [**ELECTRONIC RESERVES**]

CLIPS: *Paris is Burning*

9 MAR: MIDTERM EXAM

SPRING BREAK: MAR 12-MAR 20

21 MAR: POPULAR CULTURE AND THE LITERARY NOVEL

Beatty. *White Boy Shuffle*.

23 MAR: POPULAR CULTURE AND THE LITERARY NOVEL

Beatty. *White Boy Shuffle*.

QUIZ

28 MAR: POPULAR CULTURE AND THE LITERARY NOVEL

Beatty. *White Boy Shuffle*.

30 MAR: POPULAR CULTURE AND THE LITERARY NOVEL

Beatty. *White Boy Shuffle*.

4 APR: ADVERTISING & CELEBRITY CULTURE

Lipsitz. "The Greatest Story Ever Sold: Marketing and the O.J. Simpson Trial" pp. 176-182
Michael Eric Dyson, "Be Like Mike? Michael Jordan and the Pedagogy" [ELECTRONIC RESERVES]

Barrera, Magdalena. "Hottentot 2000: Jennifer Lopez and Her Butt" [ELECTRONIC RESERVES]
PAPER DUE

6 APR: ADVERTISING AND COMMODITY CULTURE

Jhally. "Image-Based Culture: Advertising and Popular Culture." pp. 249-257
Ghosh. "'Con-fusing' Exotica: Producing India in U.S. Advertising" pp. 274-282

11 APR: ADVERTISING AND COMMODITY CULTURE

Crane. "Gender and Hegemony in Fashion Magazines: Women's Interpretations of Fashion Photographs." pp. 314-332
Sender. "Selling Sexual Subjectivities: Audiences Respond to Gay Window Advertising" pp. 302-313

13 APR: ADVERTISING AND COMMODITY CULTURE

Katz. "Advertising and the Construction of Violent White Masculinity: From Eminem to Clinique for Men" pp. 349-358
Kilbourne. "'The More You Subtract, the More You Add': Cutting Girls Down to Size" pp. 258-267

QUIZ

18 APR: VIDEO GAMES

Lancaster, Kurt. "Lara Croft: The Ultimate Young Adventure Girl" [ELECTRONIC RESERVES]
Grossman, Lev. "Busjacking for Grownups: Grand Theft Auto III is a National Obsession" [ELECTRONIC RESERVES]

20 APR: INTERNET AND DIGITAL CULTURE

McChesney. "The *Titanic* Sails On: Why the Internet Won't Sink the Media Giants" pp. 677-683
Seiter. "Television and the Internet" pp. 688-695

25 APR: INTERNET AND DIGITAL CULTURE

Clark. "Dating on the Net: Teens and the Rise of 'Pure' Relationships" pp. 696-707
<http://thesims.ea.com/>

QUIZ

27 APR: WRAP UP/REVIEW

FINAL EXAM SCHEDULED FOR TUESDAY, MAY 9 FROM 8AM UNTIL 11AM!!!