HIST 130 – History of American Popular Culture
American University, Spring 2013

Meeting times/ location: Mondays and Thursdays, 10:20 – 11:35 AM, Ward 6
Instructor: Dr. Monique Laney, laney@american.edu
Office hours/location: Thursdays, 12 – 2 PM, Batelle Tompkins, T01-T03, Cubicle F4
Teaching Assistant: Jason Weixelbaum, jason.weixelbaum@gmail.com

Description
This course explores the origins and cultural politics of American popular culture from the rise of commercial entertainment in the nineteenth century through the 1990s. Course readings introduce students to the cultural history of minstrelsy, circuses, film, radio, and television as commodities and as expressions of identity and community affiliation. We will pay close attention to key theoretical issues, including how popular culture has informed ideas about race, gender, class, and national identity over time, with consideration of how American popular forms have been increasingly created and deployed by corporations for commercial profit, but also used and often recreated by audiences. Finally, the course explores the global dimensions of American popular culture and questions of authenticity, imperialism, and globalization.

Course Objectives
- Study recent scholarship in the history of American popular culture (lectures and readings)
- Practice historical methods (research assignments and group work with primary sources)
- Explore history in the public sphere (written reflection on museum visit)
- Encourage reading as a regular habit (weekly online reading quizzes)
Learning Outcomes
At the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Articulate the cultural and social importance of popular culture in shaping twentieth-century American history and identities
- Identify and describe the contours of conversations among historians of American popular culture
- Analyze primary sources related to American popular culture using historical methods
- Identify major drivers, developments, and themes in the history of popular culture
- Explain how popular culture has acted as an arena of conflict and how it has shaped lasting representations and expectations of race, gender, class, sexuality, and national identity within and outside of the United States

Required Texts (readings are always due on Thursdays before class!)

All other readings are available via Blackboard. You will also be watching one of two movies outside of class, which will be on reserve at AU’s media services (lower level of AU library) from Apr 11-18.

Accessing primary sources for each chapter in *Major Problems*
You can find primary sources related to each chapter by following these steps:
- Go to [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com)
- Enter the 13-digit ISBN number from your book in the left search box at top of webpage
- Click the search button
- At bottom left on next webpage, click “Access” button
- Select the chapter you are looking for in from the dropdown menu
- Click “weblinks” in the box on the left
- You should see multiple links to websites with primary sources related to the chapter you chose

Weekly Format

**Monday - Lecture / Thursday - Discussion**
Mondays we will usually have an interactive lecture to provide additional content and/or context for your readings that are due the following Thursday. You need to bring the week’s readings to class on Thursdays, so you can reference them in discussion. Since our class is too large for everyone to be able to participate regularly, you will split into smaller groups of 5 on Thursdays to discuss the readings. You will rotate roles each week and we will form new groups after spring break. At the end of the class, you will have had each role at least twice.

**Discussion group roles:**
- **Researcher:** Reviews online primary sources before meeting and reports findings to group and in writing.
- **Facilitator/Timekeeper:** Moderates group’s discussion, keeping them focused on the task (topic) and ensuring that all members participate. Monitors time and moves group along to complete the tasks in the available time.
- **Elaborator:** Relates the discussion with prior concepts and knowledge
Skeptic: Helps the group to avoid coming to agreement too quickly, making sure all possibilities and alternatives are explored. Devil's advocate.

Recorder/Reporter/Summarizer: Keeps notes of discussion. When it is your turn for this role, you will report the results orally to the class and in writing (see “Summarize group discussion” for details).

Grades
We know how important grades are, and we will do our utmost to post them to Blackboard as soon as we can. You earn good grades by continuously submitting good work. You can earn an “A” for extraordinary efforts only. If you are concerned about your grades, come and see me in my office hours early in the semester, so we can talk about how you can strengthen your contributions. Don’t wait until the last weeks to discuss your grades.

Your final grade is composed of:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading quizzes</td>
<td>20% (10 x 2%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summarize group discussion</td>
<td>10% (2 x 5%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research primary sources</td>
<td>10% (2 x 5%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflection on museum visit</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
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<td>Final Exam</td>
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Attendance
You may miss 2 meetings unexcused, but for each additional absence you will lose 3 points of your overall grade, and if you have more than five unexcused absences, you will fail this course. You can be excused only if you hand in a doctor’s note or, if you let us know in advance, for the major religious holy days that are acknowledged by AU. For 2012-2013, see: http://www.american.edu/ocl/kay/Major-Religious-Holy-Days.cfm. If you have to miss a class, you are still required to submit any assignments due for that meeting.

Participation
Cell phones and other electronic devices should be turned off. That includes computers.

We meet twice a week for one and a quarter hour each. There will be opportunities to participate in every session, but on Thursdays, we will discuss the topic of the week as a big group and in smaller groups using your comments on the readings, film clips, lectures, and guest speakers. This course therefore relies on your participation – we will all have more fun discussing topics the better you are prepared and the more you contribute. If everybody joins in the conversations this will help clarify new information and raise important questions that not everyone, including myself, has thought of.

Participation includes attendance, punctuality, professional conduct, participating in discussions and in-class projects. Coming in late or leaving early is disruptive for everyone, so be sure to arrive on time and do not leave early.

Reading quizzes (every week, due before class, 10 out of 12)
Reading the assigned texts is essential for this course. You will be discussing the readings each Thursday and the midterm and final exam will be drawing from the readings. In order to get you into the habit of reading regularly—a good habit to have to get through college!—you will take an online quiz via Blackboard (see “Reading Quizzes”) every week after you have finished the readings, but before the Thursday class meeting. There will be 5 questions each week and the questions are framed to ensure that you have read
the primary sources and understood the main points of the essays. The tests will be available by noon on Saturdays. The test is timed and you may re-take it once, if you discover that you did not read the texts closely enough. Each test will only be available during the week the readings for that test are due. There will be 12 quizzes. You may take all of them, but only the best 10 will count as part of your grade.

**Summarize group discussion (2x, see schedule on Blackboard, due Fridays by 5 pm)**

You will rotate roles each week within your groups. Twice during the semester, you will have the role of Recorder/Reporter/Summarizer, which means that you will be responsible for taking notes during your group’s discussion that week, present your group’s findings to the entire class that day, and then post a written summary on Blackboard (“Discussion Summaries”) by 5 pm the following day (Friday).

The written summary should include the following elements:

- Length: 500 words
- What was the object of your discussion (readings, questions, images, etc.)?
- Who contributed in what way to the discussion?
- What were your group’s findings?
- What additional questions came up?
- Did you have any issues? (e.g., did you need more information? Was someone missing, whose role had to be filled? Did someone dominate the conversation, or did someone not talk at all?) What did you do to resolve them?

**Research primary sources (2x, see schedule on Blackboard, due before class meets)**

One of the discussion groups’ roles is that of the Researcher. When it is your turn for this role, you will have the following tasks:

1. Review the websites associated with the week’s chapter (see above section on “Accessing primary sources for each chapter in Major Problems”).
2. From the archives/collections available through these websites find 3 primary sources for your group to discuss in context of the week’s readings.
3. Submit to instructor as an email attachment the following information about one of the websites:
   - What is the scope of the collection available through the website? What dates does the collection cover? What types of primary sources are in the collection (photos, posters, paintings, audio, video, memoirs, oral histories, etc.)? Can you tell who produced them?
   - A list of the 3 primary sources you chose with all the pertinent information. This includes the title, date, call number, collection, and a web link.
   - A brief explanation for how the primary sources you chose relate to the readings.
4. Bring your primary sources to class. If your source is an image, you can bring a printed version. If it is an audio or video recording, you may show it to your group on an electronic device (laptop, iPad, etc. This is the only exception to the no electronics rule for the class!)
5. Report your findings about the collections to the group and explain why you found the sources you chose of interest.

**Reflection on museum visit (due Feb. 24, 11:59 pm):**

1. Read “Absorbing or Obscuring the Absence of a Critical Space in the Americas for Indigeneity: The Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian” by Jolene Rickard (on Blackboard)
2. Visit the National Museum of the American Indian
3. Post your reflection on the visit on blackboard (“Museum visit”) by Sunday, February 24th, 11:59 pm, and bring it to class on Monday for your reference during the guest lecture by Shana Klein
Midterm and Final Exams (Mar 7, during class time, and May 2, 8:55-11:25 AM)
We will post a study guide to help you prepare for the exam on the Monday before the exams. The midterm exam will be held during class time on March 7, will last one hour, and will be based on the course readings, lectures, and discussions. You will be asked to:
- match important terms, events, and dates
- complete sentences (fill in the blank)
- provide short answers to questions
- write a longer essay on a question concerning the history of American popular culture

The final exam will have the same components of the midterm and will cover the course readings, lectures, and discussions of the entire course.

Grading Scale
A = 90-100 pts. = Excellent! = Completes all requirements exceptionally well. Exceptional means: creative, original, inspired, extraordinary.
B = 80-89 pts. = Good! = Completes all requirements well. Well means: Good, solid work.
C = 70-79 pts. = Average = Completes all requirements. This means you have met all the basic requirements.
D = 60-69 pts. = Passing = Completes most requirements. This means you have met enough of the basic requirements to avoid failing the class.
F = below 60 pts. = Failing = Completes few requirements. This means you must have had other, more urgent priorities than this class.

Work not handed in earns 0 points.

Late Policies
All deadlines are stated on the syllabus. There will be no extensions in this class save for extraordinary circumstances or a doctor’s note stating you could not finish your work. You lose 5 points from your grade for the assignment if you don’t make the deadline and then 10 points for every succeeding day you fail to hand in your work.

Academic Dishonesty
In accordance with American University policies, no form of academic dishonesty will be tolerated in this class. This includes: plagiarism, inappropriate collaboration, work done for one course and submitted for another, deliberate falsification of data, interference with other students’ work, and copyright violations. For a full explanation of the rules and procedures related to academic integrity violations, visit the Academic Integrity link on the AU website: http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/code.cfm.

Communication and Office Hours
Outside of class, we will communicate with you regularly via email and Blackboard, so you need to make sure that you have access to these tools and that your AU email address is set up correctly. Be sure to check your email regularly, and we will do the same!

Office Hours are the right time and place to give and receive additional feedback. I am happy to discuss questions concerning the class, your grades, the readings, or the assignments. If you cannot meet me during office hours, let me know what your availability is (at least 2 suggestions) and I'll try to meet you at a different time.
Other Sources for Support
American University is committed to providing educational opportunities to a broad range of students, including those with special educational needs. Once students have registered with the university’s Academic Support Center (202-885-3360), they have access to a variety of support mechanisms. We will comply with arrangements a student may need for assignment deadlines. Students must be registered with ASC to receive this support: Please notify me as early as possible.

If you have trouble with the material assigned for this class or are unclear about the written assignments or the papers you need to write, you are invited to come to my office hours to discuss them. However, you might encounter problems during the semester which affect your class performance but with which we cannot help. In this case, the following institutions might be helpful:

- Academic Support Center 202-885-3360, Mary Graydon 243
- The Writing Center 202-885-2991, Battelle-Tompkins 228
- Counseling Center 202-885-3500, Mary Graydon 214
- Disability Support Center 202-885-3315, Mary Graydon 206

Emergency Preparedness
In the event of a declared pandemic (influenza or other communicable disease), American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. We will communicate class-specific information to you via AU email and Blackboard, while you must inform us immediately of any absence due to illness. Students are responsible for checking your AU email regularly and keeping yourselves informed of emergencies. In the event of a declared pandemic or other emergency, you should refer to the AU Web site (www.prepared.american.edu) and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean’s office for course and school/college-specific information.
**SCHEDULE**

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**Week 1 – Jan 14 & 17: Introduction**

"Chapter 1: Why Study Popular Culture?" in *Major Problems in American Popular Culture*

- George Lipsitz, "The Case for Studying Popular Culture"

**Assignments (due for meeting on Thursday, Jan 17):**

1. Take the trial reading quiz on Blackboard
2. Bring a printed image from the collections of one of the websites listed for Chapter 4 of the Major Problems textbook (use instructions above for “Accessing primary sources for each chapter in Major Problem”)

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**Week 2 – Jan 24: How to study popular culture (No class on Jan 21, MLK Day)**

"Chapter 1: Why Study Popular Culture?" in *Major Problems in American Popular Culture*

- Stuart Hall, "Deconstructing Popular Culture as Political"

AND

"Reading Images as Ideological Subjects,” “Encoding and Decoding,” “Reception and the Audience,” “ Appropriation and Cultural Production,” “Reappropriation and Counter-Bricolage,” in *Practices of Looking* by Marita Sturken/Lisa Cartwright (p. 69-82)

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**Week 3 – Jan 28 & 31: Leisure time & Sports**

"Chapter 5: Workers Demand Leisure Time, 1866-1914," *Major Problems*

**Introduction to Chapter**

**DOCUMENTS**

1. Songwriter Jesse Henry Addresses Workers' Demands, c. 1866
2. Russian Novelist Maxim Gorky Criticizes Commercialized Leisure, 1907
3. Ordinary People Challenge Propriety at the Beach, 1903–1909
4. The New York Sun Portrays a Typical Baseball Crowd, 1884
5. Anne O'Hagan Describes the Athletic American Girl, 1901

**ESSAY:**

1. Lawrence W. Levine, "Audiences Riot Over Interpretations of Shakespeare"
2. Neil Harris, "Audiences Enjoy Being Fooled by P.T. Barnum"

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**Guest lecture: Roger Launius on the history of sports (Jan 28)**

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**Week 4 – Feb 4 & 7: P.T. Barnum & Shakespeare**

"Chapter 3: Nineteenth-Century Audiences Contribute to Popular Culture, 1849-1880," *Major Problems*

**Introduction to Chapter**

**DOCUMENTS**

2. Viewing the Violent Astor Place Riot, 1843
3. Charleston Courier Reports on an Exhibition of the Fejee Mermaid, 1843
4. P.T. Barnum Explains the Appeal of the Fejee Mermaid, 1855
5. Observer Olive Logan Describes Active Theater Audiences, 1878

**ESSAYS:**

1. Lawrence W. Levine, "Audiences Riot Over Interpretations of Shakespeare"
2. Neil Harris, "Audiences Enjoy Being Fooled by P.T. Barnum"
Week 5 – Feb 11 & 14: Minstrel Shows

“Chapter 2: Popular Culture Expresses and Constructs Race: Minstrel Shows Across Two Centuries, 1850-1950,” *Major Problems*

- Introduction to Chapter
- DOCUMENTS
  1. Minstrel Stump Speech, 1868
  2. Minstrelsy Creates Racist Stereotypes, 1896
  3. Minstrel Sheet Music Extends Racist Stereotypes from African Americans to Asian Americans, 1907
  4. Instructions for Twentieth Century Amateur Minstrels Reinforce Earlier Racist Ideas, 1938
  5. A Catholic Newspaper Confronts Minstrelsy's Racism, 1950
- ESSAYS:
  1. Robert Lee, "Chinese American Stereotypes in Nineteenth-Century Minstrelsy"
  2. Susan Smulyan, "Twentieth-Century Amateur Minstrels"

AND


Week 6 – Feb 18 & 21: Advertising and Consumption

“Chapter 7: Advertising and the Culture of Consumption, 1880-1930,” *Major Problems*

- Introduction to Chapter
- DOCUMENTS
  1. Early Magazine Advertisements Crowd the Page, 1880
  2. Advertising Changes Visually, 1900
  3. A Pioneer Ad Man, Bruce Barton, Defends the Need for Advertising, 1925
  4. Home Economist Christine Frederick Explains How to Advertise to Women, 1929
  5. Radical Critic James Rorty Attacks Radio Advertising, 1934
  6. Humor Magazine Satirizes the Role of Advertising in Hard Economic Times, 1931
- ESSAY: Roland Marchand, "Early Advertising Methods."

AND

“Advertising, Consumer Cultures, and Desire,” in *Practices of Looking* by Marita Sturken/Lisa Cartwright (p. 265-279)

Additional Assignment - Reflection on museum visit (due Sunday, Feb. 24, 11:59 pm)

Week 7 – Feb 25 & 28: World’s Fairs, Circuses, and Wild West Shows

“Chapter 4: World’s Fairs, Circuses, and Wild West Shows Express Ideas about U.S. Imperialism, 1876-1918,” *Major Problems* (p. 90-114)

- Introduction to Chapter
- DOCUMENTS
  1. British Journalist Fred A. McKenzie Notes the Americanization of the United Kingdom, 1901
  2. The Circus Re-Enacts the Spanish-American War, 1899
  3. Circus Clown Jules Turnout Comments on His International Travels, 1910
  4. Wild West Shows Take American Culture Outside the United States, 1896
- ESSAY: Janet M. Davis, "Circuses Educate Americans about Nationalism and Imperialism"

Guest lecture: Shana Klein on the National Museum of the American Indian (Feb 25)
Week 8 – Mar 4 & 7: Radio

“Chapter9: Radio enters the Home, 1920-1942,” Major Problems (256-297)

- Introduction to Chapter
- DOCUMENTS.
  1. Broadcaster Credo Fitch Harris Remembers Early Radio Broadcasting, 1937
  2. Listeners Speak Out in Radio Broadcast Magazine, 1927
  5. President Franklin Roosevelt Uses Radio to Calm Americans at the Beginning of the Great Depression, 1933
- ESSAY: Jason Loviglio, "The Influence of Broadcasting on Politics"

Note: No reading quiz this week, but readings for this week will be part of the Midterm Exam. Study guide for midterm exam will be posted on Blackboard on Monday.

Guest lecture: Fath Ruffins on advertising and ethnic imagery (Feb. 18)
MIDTERM EXAM (in class, Mar 7)

Week 9 – Mar 11 & 14: SPRING BREAK!

Week 10 – Mar 18 & 21: Movies


- Introduction to Chapter
- DOCUMENTS:
  2. William Lewis Gordon Advises Fans on How to Script Movies, 1914
  3. Playwrights George S. Kaufman and Marc Connelly Explain Male Film Fans in "Merton of the Movies," 1925
  4. Chicago Daily Tribune Reports Positive Audience Reaction to Movie about Fans, 1924
- ESSAY: Daniel Czitrom, "Movies as Popular Culture"

AND


Guest lecture: Roger Launius on Westerns films (Mar 18)

Week 11 – Mar 25 & 28: Cars

“Chapter 8: Cars as Popular Culture: Democracy, Racial Difference, and New Technology, 1920-1939,”
Major Problems (p. 227-254)

- Introduction to Chapter
- DOCUMENTS:
  1. Cornelius Vanderbilt Jr., Wealthy Writer and Movie Producer, Says Automobiles Democratize Leisure, 1921
  2. Native Americans Take Control of the Car and Their Image, 1916
  6. Urban League Magazine Explains the Difficulties for African American Drivers, 1933
- ESSAYS:
  Kathleen Franz, "African-Americans Take to the Open Road"
  Philip DeLoria, "The Racial Politics of the Automobile"
Week 12 – Apr 1 & 4: Music


- Introduction to Chapter
- DOCUMENTS:
  2. Influential Music Critic Reviews the Negro Folksongs as Sung by Lead Belly, 1937
  3. Richard Wright, an African American Novelist, Describes the Politics of Lead Belly's Image, 1937
  4. Américo Paredes, Ethnographer and Culture Critic, Investigates the Political Meanings of El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez, 1958
  5. Folk Ballad Remembers the Courage of Gregorio Cortez and Conflicts along the Mexico-Texas Boarder, 1958.

- ESSAYS:
  - Benjamin Filene, "Culture Brokers and Questions of Authenticity"
  - José David Saldivar, "Collecting Culture on the Mexico-Texas Border"

Week 13 – Apr 8 & 11: TV


- Introduction to Chapter
- DOCUMENTS:
  1. Advertisement Pictures Television in the Family Circle, 1955
  4. The Chicago Daily Defender, an African American Newspaper, Views Bill Cosby as Presenting a New Image for African Americans, 1965

- ESSAYS:
  - Lynn Spigel, "Television in the Family Circle"
  - Herman Gray, "Television as Representation"

Week 14 – Apr 15 & 18: Youth Culture during the Cold War


- Introduction to Chapter
- DOCUMENTS.
  4. Songwriters Carole King and Gerry Goffin Reproduce Girls Talking, 1960

- ESSAYS:
  - James Gilbert, "Boy Culture/Bad Boys"
  - Susan J. Douglas, "Girl Culture/Bad Girls"

AND

Film: “Blackboard Jungle” (1955) or “Rebel Without a Cause” (1955), DVDs on reserve at AU Media Library

**Guest lecture: Margaret Weitekamp on popular culture in the National Air and Space Museum (Apr 18)**
Week 15 – Apr 22 & 2: Popular Culture in a global context


- Introduction to Chapter
- DOCUMENTS:
  4. David Y.H. Wu, Anthropologist, Believes Taiwanese McDonald's Is a Local Institution, 1997
  6. Turkish Journalists Interview Hip-Hop Star Ceza on Cultural Difference, 2008
- ESSAYS:
  John Storey, "Americanization or Glocalization: Studying American Culture's Place in the World"
  Gülriz Büken, "An Argument against the Spread of American Popular Culture in Turkey."

Week 16 – Apr 29 & May 2: Recent Developments in American Popular Culture

No readings!

FINAL EXAM, May 2, 8:55-11:25 AM

*Syllabus is subject to change. Changes will be announced in class and on blackboard!*