

Scripps College – Fall 2009

**American Studies 125:
Race in Popular Culture & Media: History and Consequences
Tuesday & Thursday 1:15 – 2:30
Humanities 202**

Instructor: Professor Matt Delmont

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Office Hours: Tuesday 9:30am – 10:30am & Thursday 3 – 4pm and by appointment

Office: Balch 211

Course blog: <http://amst125.blogspot.com/>

Course Description:

This course will introduce you to the history of popular culture and media, focusing on the sociohistorical contexts of racial representations and the production and consumption of media and popular culture by and about people of color. We will consider examples from minstrel shows, films, music, radio, television, advertising, public amusements, sports, digital media, and other forms of popular culture.

Course Aims:

- 1) Expose students to important themes and developments in the history of popular culture and media, focusing on the sociohistorical contexts of racial representations and the production and consumption of media and popular culture by people of color.
 - Students will be able to compare and contrast popular culture and media in different historical time periods.
 - Students will be able to identify moments when popular culture and media have been sites of struggle over how race and national identity are defined.
 - Students will be able to describe the ways in which popular culture and media intersect with economics, politics, and the law.
 - Students will be able to describe the ways in which popular culture and media, influence and are influenced by, their geographic sites of production and consumption.
- ✓ This course aim will be accomplished through lectures, class discussions, and reading assignments.
- 2) Encourage students to participate in the intellectual conversation among scholars and critics of popular culture and media
 - Students will be able to identify, analyze, and evaluate the methods and types of evidence used in the study of popular culture, and to discuss their findings with peers.

- ✓ This course aim will be accomplished through students' book review, midterm essay, blog posts, and oral exams and through my feedback on these assignments.
- 3) Teach students to think, read, write, and speak critically about historical and contemporary media and popular culture.
- Students will be able to communicate their evaluations of primary and secondary sources in class discussions, oral presentations, and written work.
 - Students will be able to prepare discussion questions based on reading.
- ✓ This course aim will be accomplished through class discussions, midterm essay, oral presentations, book reviews, and oral exams.

Books and Other Media:

📖 The following books are required for this course. Reading assignments are outlined in detail on the following pages.

- Steven Classen, *Watching Jim Crow: The Struggles over Mississippi TV, 1955-1969* (2004)
- Rosa Linda Fregoso, *MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands* (2003)
- Melanie McAllister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000*, 2nd edition (2004)
- Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop—And Why It Matters* (2008)
- Course reader available for purchase in Balch 216

🎧, 📺, 🎵 In addition to the reading assignments, we will watch selections from films and television and listen to music in class.

Assignments/Grading:

Blog Posts (25%):

We will be using a course blog to make connections between our readings and other examples from media and popular culture, both historical and contemporary.

You will be asked to make at least three new posts to the course blog at specific points during the semester. Each of your posts should be ~250 words and should do three things: 1) Identify an example from historical or contemporary media or popular culture that is related to that week's themes; 2) Explain what connections you see and why these are important; 3) Suggest at least one discussion question that links this example to the course. Your examples may draw on newspapers, magazines, television, radio, film, digital media, museum exhibitions, live events/performances, and/or texts you've read in other classes. We will use the blog to start and continue class discussions.

Five of our class discussions will focus on the blog posts and students will be asked to sign up for three of these dates: Sep 15th, Sep 24th, Oct 6th, Oct 15th, Nov 5th. For each of the two dates on which you are not writing original posts you should comment on at least one of your classmates' posts. These responses should be ~100 words and should respond to the question raised in the original post.

The original posts should be made by noon and comments by 10pm the day before the blog discussion in class (e.g., for the first blog discussion on Sep 15th, original posts should be made by noon on Sept 14th and comments completed by 10pm on Sep 14th).

Midterm essay (20%)

Students will write one take home essay that will require synthesis of several readings and an original argument. Essays should be between 4 and 5 pages, double-spaced. Essay questions will be distributed by Friday, October 16 and should be uploaded to Sakai by Friday, October 23.

Independent Reading Book Review and Presentation (15% review / 5% presentation)

You will be asked to read a book about race and media & popular culture that is not on the syllabus. A list of suggested books will be available on Sakai. If you wish to read a book that is not on this list, check with me first. Your book review should be between 500 and 750 words. Samples of book reviews will be provided in class and on the course website. Your review should do four things: 1) Identify the thesis of the book; 2) Identify the evidence the author uses to support her/his thesis; 3) Make a specific connection between this book and at least one of the other books/articles we have read in class; and 4) Identify at least one topic the book addresses about which you would like to learn more. Students should select their book by Friday, October 16. Book review should be uploaded to Sakai by Friday, November 13.

In addition to the written review, students will give a 4-5 minute presentation on their books in class. These presentations should briefly summarize the book's main argument and highlight 1 or 2 of the most interesting examples that the author's uses. These presentations will be followed by Q&A discussion with the class. Presentations will be in class on November 17, 19, & 24.

Class Participation (10%)

Students are expected to come to every class prepared to be active participants in discussion. If you are concerned with your level of participation in the class, you should come to office hours to talk with me about the reading. If you need to miss class for a family emergency or another legitimate reason, you must e-mail me before the start of class. Unexcused absences will negatively impact your class participation grade.

Final Oral Exam (25%)

One of the goals of this course is to make you comfortable talking about the concept of race in the context of the history of popular culture and media. To that end, the final course assignment will be an oral exam. In advance of the exam, students will submit a short abstract highlighting the course themes and texts they have found to be the most interesting or surprising. This should be ~250 pages and will be due on Nov. 20th. The abstract itself will not be graded. Based on these abstracts I will divide the class into 4-6 small groups, clustered around a theme or set of texts. I will meet with each group for a 1 hour exam on Dec. 10th or 11th.

The final oral exams are meant to be a focused small group discussion. Students will be evaluated individually based on three criteria: 1) The breadth and depth of connections they make among texts and ideas; 2) The ability to make these connections clearly and in their own words; and 3) The ability, in the course of the discussion, to generate ideas that build on the course material and the discussion itself.

Week 1:

Tuesday: September 1

Course Introduction and Overview

Thursday: September 3

- 📖 Michael Omi & Howard Winant, "Racial Formation," in *Racial Formation in the United States*, pp. 53-76 (course reader and PDF on Sakai)
- 📖 George Lipsitz, "Popular Culture: This Ain't No Sideshow," in *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*, pp. (course reader and PDF on Sakai)

Week 2:

Tuesday: September 8

- 📖 Alexander Saxton, "Blackface Minstrelsy," in *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic* (1990), pp. 165-181 (course reader)
- 📖 David Roediger, "White Skins, Black Masks," in *Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (1991), pp. 115-127 (course reader)

Thursday: September 10

- 📖 Robert G. Lee, "The 'Heathen Chinese' on God's Free Soil" in *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (1999), pp. 15-50 (course reader)
- 📖 Susan Smulyan, "Minstrel Laughs: Popular Culture, Race, and the Middle Class" in *Popular Ideologies: Mass Culture at Mid-century* (2007), pp. 16-40 (course reader)
- 📖 Mark Kendall, "Controversy/Alma Mater: A Time to Sing," *Pomona College Magazine*, Winter 2009 (course reader)
- 🎧 *Bamboozled* (2000) (selections in class)

Week 3:

- Minstrelsy wrap-up and Blog discussion #1

Thursday: September 17

- 📖 Shari M. Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (2001), introduction and chapters 1-2, pp. 1-128 (course reader)

Week 4:

Tuesday: September 22

- 📖 Robert G. Lee, “Inner Dikes and Barred Zones” in *Orientalisms: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (1999), pp. 106-144 (course reader)
- 📖 Rosa Linda Fregoso, *MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands* (2003), preface, chapters 7-8 & epilogue, pp.xiii-xvi, 126-168 (course reader)

Thursday: September 24

- Hundorf/Lee/Fregoso wrap-up and Blog discussion #2

Week 5:

Tuesday: September 29

- 📖 Luis Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance during World War II* (2008), chapters 3-5, pp. 77-199 (course reader)

Thursday: October 1

- Rock ‘n’ Roll lecture & discussion (no reading assignment)

Week 6:

Tuesday: October 6

- Zoot/Rock ‘n’ Roll Wrap-up and Blog discussion #3

Thursday: October 8

- 📖 Steven Classen, *Watching Jim Crow: The Struggles over Mississippi TV, 1955-1969* (2004), introduction and chapters 1-3, pp. 1-106
- ☐ Television News and Civil Rights (Link to University of Virginia Center for Digital History: <http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/civilrightstv/>) (selections in class)

Week 7:

Tuesday: October 13

- 📖 Steven Classen, *Watching Jim Crow*, chapters 4-6, pp. 107-195

Thursday: October 15

🗨️ TV & Civil Rights Wrap-up and Blog discussion #4

****Students Selection of Independent Reading Book Due: Friday, October 16th****

Week 8:

Tuesday: October 20

Fall Break – No Class

Thursday: October 22

🗨️ Obama, Popular Culture, and Media – lecture and discussion (no reading assignment).
Please bring one article or link related to the Obama campaign or presidency to class

****Midterm Essay Due: Friday, October 23th****

Week 9:

Tuesday: October 27

📖 Melanie McAllister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (2004), preface, introduction, chapter 2, pp. xi-xix; 1-42; 84-124)

Thursday: October 29

📖 McAllister, *Epic Encounters*, chapters 4-5, pp. 155-234

Week 10:

Tuesday: November 3

📖 McAllister, *Epic Encounters*, chapter 6 and conclusion, pp. 235-307

🎧 *The Siege* (1998) (selections in class)

Thursday: November 5

🗨️ *Epic Encounters* wrap-up and Blog discussion #5

Week 11:

Tuesday: November 10

🎧 *Señorita Extraviada* (screening in class)

Thursday: November 12

📖 Rosa Linda Fregoso, *MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands*, chapter 1, pp. 1-29

****Independent Reading Book Review Due: Friday, November 13****

Week 12:

Tuesday: November 17

- Students' independent reading presentations and group discussions

Thursday: November 19

- Students' independent reading presentations and group discussions

****Oral Exam Abstract Due: Friday, November 20****

Week 13:

Tuesday: November 24

- Students' independent reading presentations and group discussions

Thursday: November 26

Thanksgiving Break – No Class

Week 14:

Tuesday: December 1

- 📖 Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop—And Why It Matters* (2008), read Preface and Introduction (pp. ix-xii; 1-30), at least two chapters from “Hip Hop’s Critics” (pp. 33-131), and at least two chapters from Hip Hop’s Defenders (pp.133-213)

Thursday: December 3

- 📖 Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop—And Why It Matters* (2008), read “Progressive Futures,” chapters 11-13, pp. 217-273

Week 15:

Tuesday: December 8

- Hip Hop wrap-up and Course wrap-up

****Final Oral Exams: To be schedule either Thursday, Dec. 10 or Friday, Dec. 11****