

Syllabus of Record

Program: CET Beijing

Course Code / Title: (BJ/HIST 363) Popular Culture and American History

Total Hours: 45

Recommended Credits: 3

Primary Discipline / Suggested Cross Listings: History / Political Science, East Asian Studies, History, Media Studies

Language of Instruction: English

Prerequisites/Requirements: None

Description

This course traces the history of America from the mid-nineteenth century to the present through the lens of popular culture. The course will explore the social and cultural contexts in which influential forms of popular culture emerged, with particular attention to popular magazines, film, music and television. The satire in political cartoons of the late 1800s, class consciousness manifested in Charlie Chaplin films, the expression of African-American culture in jazz and blues music, post-war disenchantment of Kerouac and the beat poets, social upheaval and the rise of rock music, and the rampant commercialism of television – all reflect the changing American social landscape, and reveal how popular cultural forms have impacted the political and social landscape. Popular culture in America has always been both a reflection of the society and a powerful influence upon it. This course will evaluate the ways in which popular American culture has been a force to promote the dominant culture, as well as a subversive pressure to contest it.

Objectives

By the end of the course, students will have:

- A basic understanding of how to interpret history through the lens of popular culture
- An understanding of the tight mutual influence of social changes and the content of popular media
- An awareness of how popular culture both reflects, and is determined by, the societal consciousness of the time

Course Requirements

Course readings, averaging 30 pages per session, should be completed before class. Students must attend all classes and are expected to participate actively in all class discussions. Graded assignments include:

- A midterm exam
- Final paper: 10-page research paper that shows original thinking and independent analysis of the issues in question
- Presentation of the final paper topic

Syllabus of Record

Grading

- Class participation: 10%
- Midterm exam: 30%
- Class presentation: 20%
- Final paper: 40%

Readings

Ashby, LeRoy. *With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture since 1830*: University Press of Kentucky, 2006.

Belton, John. *American Cinema/American Culture* (5th Edition): McGraw-Hill Education, 2017.

Cullen, Jim. *Popular Culture in American History*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

Franz, Kathleen & Susan Smulyan (eds) *Major Problems in American Popular Culture* (Major Problems in American History Series) 1st Edition: Cengage Learning, 2012.

Hantke, Steffen. *Monsters in the Machine: Science Fiction Film and the Militarization of America after World War II*: University Press of Mississippi, 2016.

Mittell, Jason. *Television and American Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

Rielly, Edward J. *The 1960s: American Popular Culture Through History*: Greenwood, 2003.

Roberts, Brian. *Blackface Nation: Race, Reform, and Identity in American Popular Music, 1812-1925*: University of Chicago Press, 2017.

Sagert, Kelly Boyer. *The 1970s (American Popular Culture Through History)*: Greenwood, 2007.

Additional Resources

Some other readings from academic journals are provided regularly throughout the course.

Outline of Course Content

Part I: The 1800s

- Topic 1: The rise of political satire
- Topic 2 – The era of the minstrel shows

Part II: The Turn of the Century

- Topic 3: Origins of media technology: the gramophone and film
- Topic 4: America goes to the movies

Part III: The Roaring Twenties

Syllabus of Record

Topic 5: The jazz age: Jazz music and its social context
Topic 6: The movie star and the American dream

Part IV: World War II

Topic 7: War propaganda

Part V: The Fifties

Topic 8: The Beat era; Television in its infancy; film noir

Part VI: The 60s and 70s

Topic 9: The rise of Rock 'n' Roll;
Topic 10: Television dominates

Part VII: The 1980s to the present

Topic 11: The rise of the Internet
Topic 12: The digital explosion and "me-media"