Course Description

American popular culture as Jennifer Mueller, et al. argues is, “woven deeply and intimately into the fabric of our everyday lives. While it may be tempting to imagine such amusements and attachments as apolitical, popular culture both reflects and plays a significant role in contouring how we think, feel and act in the world, for better and often for worse” (Mueller, et al. 70). This reflection has often articulated the worst of America’s fears and desires. Once we look past the entertainment value of popular culture, we begin to see how America’s identity is formulated through popular culture sand sometimes that identity can be exclusive instead of inclusive. While this reflection has often articulated the worst of America’s fears and desires, there are creators who seek to articulate progression, inclusivity, and triumph – to illustrate that the identity that has been depicted can be multicultural and diverse. This class asks for you to analyze and investigate this field of study due to the importance it has on culture.

Throughout the semester as we read and discuss the visual and verbal narratives assigned, there are a few questions to keep in mind:

• How do we understand our culture’s identity through popular mediums?
• Who is being exploited and what does this mean for constructing identity?
• What is the purpose of thinking about popular culture as contouring and reflecting our fears and desires?

The class is a seminar class, which means discussion will be the driving force of the way in which the class is structured. There will be days in which I will lecture but those are far and few. I want to hear your thoughts, questions, feelings of dismay, etc. towards the materials we will be looking at throughout the semester.

Required Texts

• *Popular Culture* Introductory Perspectives Marcel Danesi
• *Gender and Popular Culture* Katie Milestone, Anneke Meyer
• *Major Problems in Popular Culture* Kathleen Hyson, Susan Smulyan Franz
• *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture an Introduction* John Storey
• *Introduction to Popular Culture in the Us: People, Politics, and Power* Jenn Brandt, Callie Clare

Assignments

These assignments are multi-modal instead of the traditional paper method of assessment. Learning different ways in which you can articulate your argument is exceptionally beneficial.

Discussion Posts

These posts will be factored into your homework/in-class writing grade. For every piece of secondary reading that is assigned, you will need to post a 300-500-word analysis of the reading with 3 talking points/questions you would like to address in class. You can add in memes or anything that you think will enhance our understanding of the work that you are analyzing for this particular assignment. The discussion posts must be submitted to canvas before class begins. Any posts turned in after class time will have a 10-point deduction and then a letter grade for each day it is late.

*Evolutionist Podcast*
Podcasts are extremely popular, and I would argue heavily that this is a popular culture medium. Podcasts can be used for educational purposes and entertainment. This project is designed around mapping the evolution of popular culture based on a time period or subject of your choosing. For example, you can choose the 1920s and think about the evolution of fashion, beauty, music, food, culture, etc. during that decade. You will need to upload an episode every two weeks and you can work by yourself or with a partner. One of the episodes must include an interview with someone of your choosing.

**Research Proposal**

This proposal should be 1-2 pages in length detailing your research question and topic for your final paper. This proposal should include your intended audience both scholarly and general and why your topic is relevant to both audiences. You should also include how you plan to map out this final paper.

**Annotated Bibliography**

For the annotated bib, you will need to find 15-20 sources and write 100-150 words about the author’s argument and how you plan to use each source within your final paper. Are there any quotes that stuck out to you or that you did not agree with? Use this assignment to help you hone in on your research question.

**Panel Presentation**

As you are writing and conducting your research for the final paper, you will have a 5-10-minute panel presentation with panel members researching a similar topic as you. You can have visual aids, or you can read an excerpt of your final paper. After each panelist has presented, there will be 5-10 minutes for questions and feedback that you can use to revise your final paper.

**Final Paper**

This paper will take the place of a final exam. You will have to ability to write on a topic of your choosing using one of the verbal or visual narratives that has been assigned on the syllabus. The purpose of this paper is for you to investigate the implications the work you selected has on American identity and culture. This paper will be 4,000-6,000 words in length. You will have a research proposal and annotated bibliography that accompanies this assignment. You will complete both of those assignments before you begin your paper. You are required to meet with me during the drafting period of your paper.

**Assessment and Grading**

- Discussion Posts: 15%
- Evolutionist Podcast: 25%
- Research Proposal: 5%
- Annotated Bibliography: 5%
- Panel Presentation: 10%
- Final Paper: 30%
- Participation: 10%

**Assignment Submission and Late Work**
All assignments will be due on the day and time specified by the course outline. For each day that an assignment is late, starting immediately after the stated deadline and occurring on a 24-hour cycle, the grade on that paper will be reduced by a full letter grade. You will submit much of your work for this class using Canvas. Should you ever have difficulty using Canvas to submit your work, immediately email me to let me know about the problem and send the work as an attachment. As such, difficulty with Canvas is not a valid excuse for late work. Late Final exams are immediately deducted points.

Class Policies

Accessibility and Accommodations

Please let me know if you are needing accommodations for the course and also contact the office of accessibility and accommodations so that they are aware that you will be needing documented accommodations for your courses. I am perfectly fine with eating in class, but I do not allow nut products within my classroom. Nut allergies are severe and that can result in someone getting very sick.

Attendance

Generally, absences will make success in this class difficult. Ultimately, if you miss class regularly, you will find it difficult to have current knowledge of due dates, expectations, concepts, and to therefore succeed in this class. However, absences are likely to occur due to unforeseen circumstances. Students will be held accountable for the following attendance policy:

• You are allowed three (3) unexcused absences. Upon your sixth (4th) unexcused absence, you will receive an FA (failure due to absences) for the course.
• Tardiness will be marked as an absence if you are more than 15 minutes late.
• Every two instances of tardiness by fewer than 15 minutes will be counted as one absence.

If you plan to miss class or would like to have an absence excused, please note:
• Notify me before the absence when possible.
• You must provide me with documentation for the excused absence within one week of the missed class.
• In the case of an absence, it is your responsibility to find out about missed work or content.
• Excused absences do not excuse you from completing the work in a timely manner. Submit work due before the excused absence when possible. With an excused absence, you have until the first day of returning to class to turn in any missed homework. The experiences and discussions associated with in-class writing cannot be replicated and therefore cannot be turned in late.
• Excused absences do not permit you to turn in major papers late. If you have concerns about completing major assignments on time, please do not hesitate to talk with me about it.

Participation

This class is a seminar which means the class is discussion driven. You must contribute to the class discussions as part of your participation grade.

I also expect you to be professional within this studio community, arriving on time for class with all the things you need (the assigned readings, organizational tools like your calendar, class handouts, etc.). I expect you to respect the general rules of academic decorum (use technology to help you accomplish tasks rather than distract you, silence your devices, be a generous listener who
works to understand the ideas other share, suspend any disbelief about any assignments or tasks I ask you to try, etc.). If you merely don’t detract from our classroom community throughout the semester, you should expect a C in participation. If you contribute and participate frequently in our class, engaging with the work of our class consistently and positively, you should expect an A in participation.

Technology

You are welcome to bring a laptop or tablet to class, so long as you use it responsibly. (If I notice a pattern of misuse, this privilege may be revoked.) There may be class sessions where I encourage bringing these devices. Further, talking, texting, using social media, etc. on a cell phone during class or a conference is prohibited and may result in your dismissal and/or an unexcused absence.

Reading Schedule

What is popular culture?

Week 1: “The Apocalyptic Strain in Popular Culture: The American Nightmare Becomes the American Dream” Paul A. Cantor

Week 2: “Print and the Creation of Middlebrow Culture” Trysh Travis

*Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* Pierre Bourdieu

Gender

Week 3: “Two Ways a Woman Can Get Hurt” Jean Kilbourne

*Mad Men*, Season 5 Episode 10: “The Other Woman”

Week 4: “Gender, Class, and the Pleasures of Popular Culture” Jayne Wark

Captain Marvel Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck


“The Man” Taylor Swift

*Some Like it Hot* Billy Wilder

Week 6: “The Male Glance” Lili Loofbourow

Psycho Alfred Hitchcock

Race


*Get Out* Jordan Peele

Week 8: “The Pride and Power of Representation in Film” (Ted Talk)

“How Film Transforms the Way We See the World” (Ted Talk)

*Crazy Rich Asians* Jon M. Chu
Week 9: “Race, Racism, and Popular Culture” John Solomos and Les Back
   Scandal, Season 4 Episode 14: “The Lawn Chair”
   The Hate U Give George Tilman Jr.

Week 10: Candyman Bernard Rose
   Candyman 2 Jordan Peele

Week 11: Kindred Octavia Butler
   Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation Damian Duffy and John Jennings

**Sexuality**
   Week 12: “Bodies, Sexualities, and Women Leaders in Popular Culture: From Spectacle to Metapicture” Emma Bell and Amanda Sinclair
   Rocketman Dexter Fletcher

Week 13: Rent Chris Columbus
   “No Day but Today’: Queer Temporality in Rent” Sarah Taylor Ellis

Week 14: Library Research

Week 15: Panel Presentations