

ENG 2160: Studies in Popular Culture  
American Popular Culture, 1828-present  
Meeting Times: TR 4:00-5:15p  
Instructor: Owen Cantrell  
Room: Classroom South 409  
Office Hours: Langdale Hall 964  
TR 3:00-4:00p  
Email: owencantrell@gmail.com

“Culture is ordinary; that is where we must start” *Raymond Williams*  
“Always historicize!” *Frederic Jameson*

### Course Description

This course introduces a range of theoretical approaches towards a historical examination of popular culture in the United States, exploring the intersection between everyday life, mass media, and broader political and historical contexts. We will consider key theoretical readings and approaches to studying culture. Using these theoretical tools, we will examine a range of popular media and sites of cultural expression to understand popular culture as a site of ongoing political and social struggle.

### Caution

Popular culture is generally considered to be designed for passive consumption. It is considered easy and entertaining (if not hypnotic) stuff/junk/crap. The critical study of popular culture can be entertaining (and often is), but it is intended to be critical and rigorous, and is thus rarely “easy.” Some of the concepts we will be grappling with this semester are in fact fairly complex and challenging. Although “pleasure” is definitely an issue in cultural studies, cultural studies itself is something more demanding than pleasant.

### Course Goals

- Explore different types of historical and contemporary American culture.
- Examine the social, historical, and cultural context of popular culture products and practices
- Introduce a number of theoretical scholarly approaches to the study of popular culture
- Explore the connection between popular culture and social values
- Learn strategies to connect cultural knowledge to everyday life and practices.
- Improve communication skills by reading about, writing about, and discussing popular culture

### Required Texts

Cullen, Jim. *The Art of Democracy: A Concise History of Popular Culture in the United States*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. New York: Monthly Review P, 2002. Print.

Guins, Raiford A. and Omayra Zaragoza Cruz, eds. *Popular Culture: A Reader*. SAGE, 2005. Print.

Williams, Raymond. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Oxford UP, 1985. Print.

Zizek, Slavoj. *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Other Dates*. Verso, 2002. Print.

In addition, the following reserve texts are required reading available at <http://reserves.gsu.edu>. Please bring printed copies to class. If you do not have a copy of the reading, you may be asked to leave class, as you are not prepared to participate.

“Electronic Reserves” Password: \_\_\_\_\_

- Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation,” *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*
- W.E.B. Dubois, “Of the Sorrow Songs,” *The Souls of Black Folk*
- Lawrence Howe. "Charlie Chaplin in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Reflexive Ambiguity in *Modern Times*". *College Literature* 40.1 (2013): 45-65.
- Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” *Ecrits*
- Karl Marx, “Estranged Labor,” *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*
- Alan Trachtenberg, “The Politics of Culture,” *The Incorporation of America*
- Alan Trachtenberg, “White City,” *The Incorporation of America*
- Rick Worland. "Sign-Posts Up Ahead: *The Twilight Zone, The Outer Limits, and TV Political Fantasy 1959-1965*". *Science Fiction Studies* 23.1 (1996): 103-122.

**The following required readings will be passed out in class:**

- Eric Lott, “Blackface and Blackness: The Minstrel Show in America Culture,” *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*
- Eric Lott, “Love and Theft: ‘Racial’ Production and the Social Unconscious of Blackface,” *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*
- Terry Eagleton, “What is Ideology?” *Ideology: An Introduction*
- Theodor Adorno & Max Horkheimer, “The Cultural Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophic Fragments*
- Lawrence Levine, “William Shakespeare in America,” *Popular Culture in American History*
- Karl Marx, “Theses on Feurbach,” *Marx/Engels Internet Archive*
- “Racy Appeal of the Minstrel Show,” *Popular Culture in American History*

Grading Breakdown	
A	100-93
A-	92-90
B+	89-87
B	86-83
B-	82-80
C+	79-77
C	76-70
Grades below are considered failing grades	
D	60-69
F	below 60

## Grading

Participation and Attendance: 5%  
Response Essay #1 (Terminology): 15%  
Response Essay #2 (Application of Cultural Theory) 15%  
Response Essay #3 (*The Dark Knight* Response): 15%  
Group Presentation 20%  
Final Exam: 30%

## Group Presentation

In groups of three, students will offer a technology-rich presentation on one of the critical issues studied in the course. The objective will be to present a pop cultural text (film, video game, television program, series of advertisements, etc.) not studied in our course readings through the lens of the critical readings and methodologies discussed in class. Presentations will be approximately 20 minutes in length (not including discussion), and must include:

- a brief hand-out for the class
- clear connection to the theories/readings from class
- a multimedia format (Prezi, clips, music, photos, etc.) in which all three students “present” (i.e. speak)
- leading questions for the class (to spark discussion)
- a written summary (4-5 pages, double-spaced) to the instructor

## Response Essays

There are three response essays throughout the semester. The essays are intended to be concise and should be no more than **three pages double-spaced**. **Response Essay #1** uses Raymond William’s *Keywords* as an avenue to analyze the words and terms that are used in everyday infotainment. **Response Essay #2** is an application of one of the cultural theories we have studied in the beginning of the semester to a cultural artifact of your own choosing. **Response Essay #3** will attempt to analyze the film *The Dark Knight* through the lens of Slavoj Zizek’s book *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*. These essays are to be submitted digitally, through the Lore CMS, by the date and time they are due. **Anything else will be considered late and may not be accepted.**

## Final Exam

The final exam is a cumulative exam over what we have studied throughout the semester. The exam format will be a mixture of matching, multiple choice, short answer, and essay. The exam will last approximately 2.5 hours. Our assigned final exam time is **Thursday, May 1<sup>st</sup> from 4:15-6:45pm.**

## Attendance & Participation

Attendance is mandatory. I will allow for four (4) absences per semester. I will not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences, so please plan wisely. I would not advise missing class for any reason other than absolutely necessary in case emergencies should arise and absences become necessary. If you have to miss class for extra-curricular activities, please see me regarding what verification I will need from your coach/advisor.

Anyone more than fifteen (15) minutes late to class will be counted absent, regardless of the reason. This is a good reason to keep your four (4) absences in mind when planning for the semester. If you are going to be more than fifteen (15) minutes late, I would advise taking this tardiness as one of your absences and make sure to be prompt in the future.

### **Late Work**

Late work will not be accepted, even for a reduced grade. If you are absent on the day an assignment is due, I expect you to make arrangements to have the assignment to me by class time. In-class assignments or class participation cannot be made up for credit if you are absent. There are plenty of grading opportunities during the semester and I do not expect a one or two missed in-class assignments or class participation grades to significantly affect your overall grade.

In case of emergency, I will allow assignments to be made up, within one week (7 days) from assignment due date. An emergency is a very serious situation so please do not fabricate or exaggerate events to delay due dates. Events that qualify as an emergency that would permit a make-up assignment will be at my discretion.

All of our major assignments are **mandatory** and part of the course requirements. This means that **all assignments must be completed in order to pass the course**, regardless of when they are turned in, even if you do not get any points for it. I do not accept late work for a grade but I still require all assignments to be completed since they are of educational value and essential to your growth as a writer. Please make sure to note this policy because I do not want to have any surprises later in the semester.

Late work should not be an issue to anyone in this class. There are plenty of opportunities to meet with me, each other, or a tutor in the Writing Studio to discuss your work during the semester. Please see me if you are having any difficulties completing an assignment so we can talk through an assignment before it becomes late and affects your grade.

### **Technology**

I expect everyone to act as adults in the classroom. This means respecting the right of each and every student to learn in an environment relatively free of electronic distractions. While I will not ban all cell phones, iPods, or laptops from the classroom, I do reserve the right to tell any student to put any electronic media away when it proves to be a distraction from course material. If it becomes a consistent distraction, I will ask students to leave the classroom until they are able to control their cell phone, laptop, or iPod usage.

### **Lore Course Management System**

I will be using the Lore Course Management System to post readings, and initiate class discussion. **It is required that you join for this class.** Please go to Lore.com and input the code: YRBJQA to join this course. I will be checking at the end of the first week and grading you joining as a homework grade.

## Engrade

We will be using Engrade to keep track of grades and attendance throughout the semester. Engrade will also allow you to see your grade in real time, so you will always be aware of exactly how you are doing in the class. I will invite you through your student email after the first class period.

## Writing Studio

The Writing Studio, located in room 976 in the General Classroom Building, provides personal, one-on-one service for students to help them at all levels of the writing process. You can schedule an appointment in person or online for thirty minutes at a time. There is no charge for this service, so I suggest you take advantage of the Writing Center if you need additional assistance working through a writing assignment. As a point of courtesy to the tutors, please make sure to be prompt for your appointment and come prepared to talk about your writing, with sample in hand. The more prepared you are for your appointment, the more productive it will be for you and the tutor.

## Course Evaluation

Your constructive assessment of this course plays an indispensable role in shaping education at Georgia State. Upon completing the course, please take time to fill out the online course evaluation.

## Course Schedule

Date	Topics Covered	Reading #1	Readings #2
<b>Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture</b>			
January 14 <sup>th</sup>	Course Introduction		
January 16 <sup>th</sup>	What is Popular Culture?; Syllabus Quiz		<b>K:</b> Popular, Masses, Culture (handout)
January 21 <sup>st</sup>	Introduction to Marxism	<b>E:</b> Marx, Excerpts from <i>Economic &amp; Philosophic Manuscripts</i> ; <b>PC:</b> Marx, "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof" <b>H:</b> Marx, "Theses on Feurbach"	<b>K:</b> Alienation, Bourgeois, Capitalism, Class
January 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Media Technologies	<b>PC:</b> Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"	<b>K:</b> Media, Art, Taste, Technology
January 28 <sup>th</sup>	Introduction to Psychoanalysis	<b>E:</b> Lacan, "The Mirror Stage"	<b>K:</b> Unconscious, Psychological
January 30 <sup>th</sup>	Introduction to Ideology	<b>H:</b> Eagleton, "What is Ideology?"; <b>E:</b> Althusser, "ISAs & RSAs"	<b>K:</b> Ideology, Hegemony

February 4 <sup>th</sup>	The Culture Industry	<b>PC:</b> Adorno, “The Culture Industry Reconsidered”; <b>E:</b> Horkheimer & Adorno, “The Culture Industry”	<b>K:</b> Consumer, Democracy, Aesthetic
February 6 <sup>th</sup>	Spectacular Culture	<b>PC:</b> Debord, “The Commodity as Spectacle”; Jameson, “Reification and Utopia as Mass Culture”	
<b>Introduction to American Popular Culture, 1830-2001</b>			
February 11 <sup>th</sup>	Introduction to American Popular Culture  <b>Response Essay #1 Due</b>	<b>AOD:</b> Ch. 1: “Novel Approaches”	<b>H:</b> Levine, “Shakespeare and the American People” <b>K:</b> Folk
February 13 <sup>th</sup>	Culture & Class	<b>AOD:</b> “Democratic Vistas, 1800-1860”	<b>H:</b> Lott, “Blackface and Blackness”, “Love and Theft”
February 18 <sup>th</sup>	Culture & Race	<b>AOD:</b> “Stages of Development, 1860-1900”	<b>E:</b> Dubois, “Sorrow Songs” <b>H:</b> “Racy Appeal”
February 20 <sup>th</sup>	Corporatism	<b>E:</b> Trachtenberg, “Politics of Culture,” “White City”	
February 25 <sup>th</sup>	The Birth of Film & the Jazz Age	<b>AOD:</b> Ch. 4: “Mediating Communities”	
February 27 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Modern Times</i> (film viewing)		
March 4 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Modern Times</i> (film viewing)		<b>E:</b> Howe, “Mechanical Reproduction”
March 6 <sup>th</sup>	The Birth of Television	<b>AOD:</b> Ch. 5: “Small Screens”	
March 11 <sup>th</sup>	<i>The Twilight Zone:</i> “It’s a Good Life” & “The Monsters are Due on Maple Street” (film viewing)		
March 13 <sup>th</sup>	<i>The Twilight Zone:</i> “Eye of the Beholder” & “The Shelter” (film		<b>E:</b> Worland, “Sign Posts Up Ahead”

	viewing) <b>Response Essay #2 Due</b>		
March 18 <sup>th</sup>	<b>SPRING BREAK</b>		
March 20 <sup>th</sup>	<b>SPRING BREAK</b>		
March 25 <sup>th</sup>	The Digital Age	<b>AOD:</b> Ch. 6: “Harmonic Convergence”	
March 27 <sup>th</sup>	Popular Music: Rap & Hip-Hop	<b>PC:</b> Hall, “What is this ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture”; Rose, “A Style Nobody Can Deal With”	
<b>American Popular Culture, 2001-present</b>			
April 1 <sup>st</sup>	Post 9/11 Politics, Media, & The Spectacle	<b>WDOR:</b> Ch. 1	
April 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Post 9/11 Politics, Media, & The Spectacle (continued)	<b>WDOR:</b> Ch. 2 -3	
April 8 <sup>th</sup>	Post 9/11 Politics, Media, & The Spectacle (conclusion)	<b>WDOR:</b> Ch. 4-5	
April 10 <sup>th</sup>	<i>The Dark Knight</i> (film viewing)		
April 15 <sup>th</sup>	<i>The Dark Knight</i> (film viewing)		
April 17 <sup>th</sup>	<i>The Dark Knight</i> discussion		
April 22 <sup>nd</sup>	<b>GROUP PRESENTATIONS</b>		
April 24 <sup>th</sup>	<b>GROUP PRESENTATIONS</b>		
April 29 <sup>th</sup>	Final Exam Review		
May 1 <sup>st</sup>	<b>FINAL EXAM</b>	4:15p-6:45p	
May 5 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Response Essay #3 Due</b>		

**K-Keywords**

**WDOR- Welcome to the Desert of the Real**

**E- E-reserve**

**AOD- Art of Democracy**

**PC- Popular Culture: A Reader**

**H- Handout**