

Understanding English & American Popular Cultures, Spring 2010

Instructor: Gord Sellar

Course Objectives:

- Familiarization with popular cultures both past and present across the English-speaking world, including but not limited to American popular culture.
- Development of a more varied and deeper sense of the history and current state of global Anglophone popular cultures and their connection to mainstream culture, and of a repertoire of critical tools for discussing Anglophone popular culture and its impact on other cultures (including Korea's).
- Development of presentation and discussion-leading skills, and handling traditionally non-academic subjects in an academic manner.
- Development of a degree of expertise in a specific sub-topic within the field.

Course Overview:

Worldwide, students of English language and culture often tend to think of Anglophone culture primarily in terms of contemporary American cultural exports. However, there are many other English-speaking societies with vibrant popular cultures that are not only interesting but play important roles with relation to global popular culture. This course will familiarize students with the popular cultures of various Anglophone cultures around the world.

We will approach these popular cultures through various means, including lectures, media, and student research and presentations.

Homework:

Homework for this class falls into the following categories:

- Basic preparations for classes should be performed by students regularly, not only for their own benefit but for the benefit of classmates who are depending on you to do your part. When assignments involve collaborative work, your contribution will nonetheless be assessed individually. This may involve learning lines, pre-reading some text, or making script revisions.
- Written work: The regular written work assigned in this class must be typed (double-spaced) and include your name, student number, my name, and the course name and number. Submissions consisting of multiple pages should be numbered and stapled or paperclipped, but not submitted in plastic folders or binders to submit their work. Any work failing to meet these criteria will be returned to the student immediately for resubmission within 3 days.
- Presentations or Panel Discussions (depending on the size of the class) will be a regular part of your work in this class, and you will make at least two presentations or participate in two panel discussions during the semester. For each, a typed summary of your presentation including major points must be submitted; you may also distribute a handout to classmates, but this is not required. Presentations using Powerpoint or similar software are allowed, but please take care to ensure that the Powerpoint actually improves the quality of your presentation. If it does not, I may turn the computer off and ask you to proceed without it.

Please note that any form of plagiarism will bring extremely harsh consequences. Consult the handout provided in class, or on the class website, for more information on this.

Textbook:

Instead of using a textbook, we work with handouts, lectures, and student presentations. Should you wish to explore texts or other media not encompassed in this course, or require help in finding materials

pertinent to your presentations, please feel free to ask me for recommendations. I will be more than happy to help you find materials that are suited to your needs and worth exploring.

Assessment:

- Participation: 25%
- In-Class Presentations/Panel Discussions: 20%
- Midterm Exam: 10%
- Final Research Paper/Project/Exam (TBA): 20%
- Homework: 20%
- Department Events: 5%

Receiving a 0% in any of the above marks will result in an incomplete grade. Students must at least attempt all work in this course in order to complete the course.

My contact information:

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Class Website: <http://gordsclass.com>

Course Outline:

The following is extremely tentative and subject to change at any time, but it should give you an idea of what's planned. Student presentations will probably begin in Week 2, and will mostly occur on the days in which our class meetings are one hour and not on the days when we meet for two hours.

Week 1: Introductions, Paperwork, etc.

Week 2: Towards a Definition of "Popular Culture", and Cultural Change in the West and East | Fads

Week 3: Making the Mongrel: Colonial Culture, Folk Music, Blues, and Prison Work Songs (Andy Duncan's "Belutahatchie")

Week 4: Back to Roots: African-American Popular Culture 1 (*Bamboozled* and the Blackface Minstrel Show, and the Commodification of Black Culture)

Week 5: Back to Roots: African-American Popular Culture 2 (The Harlem Renaissance and A Crash Course in Jazz History)

Week 6: Flapper Girls and Hipster Boys (reading: excerpt from *Flapper*)

Week 7: They Got This Depression Goin' On: *Oh Brother Where Art Thou?*

Week 8: Midterm Exam Period

Week 9: The 1940s & 50s: Jazz, War, and The Roots of Rock

Week 10: Kerouac, Ginsberg, Cassady, and Burroughs: An Overview of the Beats

Week 11: *On the Road*: Beats, Hippies, and What Came Next

Week 12: What Was Punk? And What the Heck is Britney Spears?

Week 13: Gangsters, Thugs, and Pirates: The Sopranos & Weeds (1)

Week 14: It's Much Better Now: Looking back in *Life on Mars* and *Back to the Future*

Week 15: Back to Kerouac: A Cross-cultural Discussion | Final Papers Due

Week 16: Paperwork/Conferences (if any)