

Understanding English & American Popular Cultures, Spring 2008

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 occasional 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 will be a regular part of your work in this class, and you will make at least two presentations 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.

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: 20%
- Panel Discussions: 20%
- Midterm Exam: 30%
- Final Research Paper/Project: 30%

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:

Office: N223 Office Phone: 02-2164-4459 Email: mistergord@gmail.com
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" | Genre and Figures

FIGURE 1: THE OTHER

Week 3: The African in America (*Bamboozled* and the Blackface Minstrel Show)

Week 4: African-American Culture in the World (From The Harlem Renaissance to Hip-Hop)

Week 5: Other "Others" (Villains and Foreign Types)

FIGURE 2: "THE MAN" & THE MAN OF ACTION

Week 6: Loving Our Leaders, and Hating Them Too

Week 7: Good Cop, Bad Cop

Week 8: Midterm Exam Period

FIGURE 3: THE OUTLAW

Week 9: The Outlaw Heart of America: Cowboys, Pirates, and Gangsters

Week 10: Why We Love The Mob: The Godfather and The Sopranos

FIGURE 4: THE FEMME FATALE AND HER SISTERS

Week 11: Female Types and their Sad History: Desperate Housewives and Bechdel's Rule

Week 12: Keeping and Breaking the Mold: Weeds, Madonna, and... Britney Spears?

FIGURE 5: THE VISIONARY

Week 13: What Will It Be Like Tomorrow? Styles and Conceptions of the Future

Week 14: The Golden Age of SF (The Psychology of Monster Movies and More)

Week 15: The Mad Scientist, The Cautionary Tale, and Sensawunda | Final Exam?

Week 16: Paperwork/Final Exam?