

## Understanding English & American Popular Cultures, Spring 2012

Instructor: Gord Sellar

### Course Objectives:

- Broad familiarization with the content and significance of 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:

While Koreans are asked to think about English-language popular culture, they tend to think about American popular culture, and American cultural exports. But for Anglophones, American popular culture is just a piece -- an important piece -- of a bigger picture; Anglophone popular culture is far from monolithic, but it is often experienced as a single, complex unity: for example, people tend not to think of the Beatles primarily as British but as famous rockers, and no one nation makes a claim on modern fantasy literature, even if it was invented by Englishmen (like J.R.R. Tolkien) and popularized by Americans (like George R.R. Martin).

Therefore, while it would be both impossible and very silly to avoid America's pop culture, it will not be our only focus. British (English, Scottish, and Irish), Australian, Canadian, and perhaps other popular cultures will be discussed as well. We will pay special attention to the notion of "global popular culture" of which, generally, a significant part is Anglophone.

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:

- Class preparations: do your readings, listenings, and watchings. If you don't like spending time watching films, listening to songs, and reading about pop culture, why are you taking this class? Your preparations will help you contribute to class, and learn more... and to help you with incentive, I will quiz you occasionally. (The grade will be part of your homework mark.)
- Written work: Any written work you give me needs to be typed and correctly formatted. See <http://classes.gordsellar.com/formatting-written-work-for-your-professors/> I expect your work will be stapled or paperclipped. Late work is penalized by one-half grade point per day it is late: A+ becomes A0 after one day late; after two days, it becomes B0... finally, if your work was A+ quality but you hand it in eight days late, it will get an F. So manage your time wisely!
- Presentations or Panel Discussions (depending on the size of the class) will be a regular part of this class; 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. Your peers will provide the evaluation for the panel discussion or presentations via an online polling system, though I will review the results for fairness.

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 or Panel Discussions (depending on class size): 30%
- Midterm Exam: 10%
- Final Research Paper/Project/Exam (TBA): 10%
- 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.

Since students seem to feel that asking for higher grades for personal reasons is especially permissible with foreign teachers, please be advised that your final grade will remain final unless by some chance I have made a mistake in calculating it. Requests for the "gift" of a higher grade will be considered an invitation to coldly, carefully reconsider the grade, and to lower one's final grade if it seems appropriate to do so.

**My contact information:**

**Office:** IH306      **Office Phone:** 02-2164-4459  
**Email:** mistergord@gmail.com    **Class Website:** <http://gordsclass.com>  
**Office Hours:** See [classes.gordsellar.com/about](http://classes.gordsellar.com/about)

**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.

**Part 1: Starting Out**

**Week 1:** Introductions, Paperwork, etc.

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

**Week 3, Part 1:** The Sitcom as Funhouse Mirror

**Part 2: Ancient as Rivers**

**Week 3, Part 2:** Come On Down to the River: The Makings of a Mongrel Culture

**Week 4:** Back to Roots: African-Americans in Popular Culture 1: The White Audience and the Black Face – The Commodification of Blacks and of Culture

**Week 5:** Up to the Present: African-Americans in Popular Culture 2 – From The Harlem Renaissance, Through Jazz and Motown, to Gangsta Rap

**Part 3: Formulations of Resistance**

**Week 6:** Flapper Girls and Sci-Fi Fans: Self-Fashioning, The Old-Fashioned Way

**Week 7:** Ain't No Depression in Heaven: The Fantasies of the Silent Generation, and Our Fantasies of Them

**Week 8:** *Midterm Exam Period*

**Week 9:** Where Did All the Punk Rockers Come From? Music and Identity

#### **Part 4: Hot and Cool: Manufacturing Our World**

**Week 10:** Like, Zen, Dude: The Beats & Their Legacy

**Week 11:** A Hipster by Any Other Name...: Understanding Self-Fashioning Today

**Week 12:** Gentlemen Prefer Marilyn: Marilyn Monroe, Madonna, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, & Icons of Femininity

#### **Part 5: And Now For Something Completely Different...**

**Week 13:** The Games We Play: Gaming, Pastimes, Development, and Identity

**Week 14:** SF, Geek Chic, and Global Anglophone Culture

**Week 15:** The Outlaw & The Lawman: An American Obsession | Final Papers Due

**Week 16:** Paperwork/Conferences (if any)

#### **Selected Resources for Use With This Class**

We may use some of the following resources, but I plan on changing this content extensively. I will make a new topics schedule and post it to the class website as soon as possible. If there is some aspect of Anglophone Popular Culture that you want to discuss, I strongly encourage you to approach me one on one.

Topics I would like to discuss include:

- fashion and sexuality
- the sports industry
- humor and cultural differences in the Anglophone world
- popular literature (the Harry Potter phenomenon, Twilight)
- pop culture and "tribal identity"
- geek culture and technoculture
- music and cultural differences

Some of the following resources will be dropped from the list, and others will definitely be added. The following is only a rough guide.

#### **Some Texts From Which Excerpted Readings Will Be Assigned:**

- *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity, and the Women Who Made America Modern* by Joshua Zeitz
- *Black Like You: Blackface, Whiteface, Insult & Imitation in American Popular Culture* by John Strausbaugh
- "Belutahatchie" from *Belutahatchie* by Andy Duncan
- *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book* by Gerard Jones
- *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the 20th Century* by Greil Marcus
- *The Black Culture Industry* by Ellis Cashmore
- *Race* by Studs Terkel
- *Where Dead Voices Gather* by Nick Tosches

- *This Is How We Flow: Rhythm in Black Cultures* by Angela M. S. Nelson
- *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* by Robin D.G. Kelley
- *The Collected Poetry of Langston Hughes* by Langston Hughes
- *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac
- *Selected Poems of Allen Ginsberg* by Allen Ginsberg
- "Why Nerds are Unpopular" by Paul Graham (website:<http://www.paulgraham.com/nerds.html>)
- "Wake Up, Geek Culture. Time to Die," by Patton Oswalt (website:[http://www.wired.com/magazine/2010/12/ff\\_angrynerd\\_geekculture/all/1](http://www.wired.com/magazine/2010/12/ff_angrynerd_geekculture/all/1))
- *The Hacker Crackdown* by Bruce Sterling
- *The Dreams Our Stuff is Made Of* by Thomas Disch
- *The South Korean Film Renaissance: Local Hitmakers, Global Provocateurs* by Jinhee Choi

#### **Some Films & Media Which Students Will Need to View:**

- *Some Like It Hot* and *The Seven Year Itch*, starring Marilyn Monroe
- *Bamboozled*, dir. Spike Lee
- *Malcolm X*, dir. Spike Lee
- *The Great Debaters*, dir. Denzel Washington
- *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World* (the film, but see also the graphic novels if you can)
- *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, dir. Sergio Leone
- *The Sopranos*, Season 1 (TV Show)
- *Dexter*, Season 1 (TV Show)
- *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Season 3, created by Joss Whedon
- *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*, dir. Joss Whedon
- *The Social Network*, dir. David Fincher
- *Hackers*, dir. Iain Softley

#### **Some Music That Will Be Discussed in Class**

- *The Anthology of American Folk Music*, as compiled by Harry Smith
- TBA by Duke Ellington Big Band
- *Strange Fruit* as sung by Billie Holiday
- TBA by Charlie Parker
- *Kind of Blue* by Miles Davis Quintet
- *Giant Steps* by John Coltrane
- *The Complete Village Vanguard Sessions* by John Coltrane (et al)
- *Free Jazz* by Ornette Coleman
- *Bitches' Brew* by Miles Davis
- *Never Mind the Bollocks...* by the Sex Pistols
- "Material Girl," by Madonna
- "Paparazzi," by Lady Gaga
- "Hey Ma," by Cam'Ron