**Topics in U.S. Cultural History:**

**Cultural History and Cultural Studies**

American Studies: Cultural History and Cultural Production. 26:050:550  
History: American Intellectual and Cultural History. 26:510:552:01  
Conklin 447  
Wednesday, 5:30-8:10  
Fall 2023

**Summary:**

This graduate seminar explores cultural history from a variety of perspectives. We ask how scholars from different disciplinary and interdisciplinary “homes” have made sense of cultural history; we consider debates in (and about) cultural history as an approach and method; and we explore relationships between cultural history, American Studies and cultural studies and the theoretical frameworks that inform these areas of inquiry.

The seminar is designed for graduate students to develop skills in three areas:

-- Students should gain an understanding of the historiography, theory, and methodology of cultural history, as this approach has developed and changed--over time and within/across disciplines.

-- Students should be able to write critical analyses of major works by scholars and track debates, conversations and themes in the scholarship.

-- Students should be able to analyze cultural texts, either in writing or in an oral presentation, by drawing on the critical work we have read together.

Please note that this class is organized as a readings seminar and it is important that all students keep up. It is not a comprehensive survey or overview; there are many important topics and texts that we (unfortunately!) will not be addressing.

If you want to take this as a Research Seminar, please notify me in writing as soon as possible and no later than September 20. We will then meet together to make an alternative timeline for assignments so that you can complete a final paper based on independent research in both primary and secondary sources.

**Grading and Expectations:**

The requirements are designed to strengthen reading, writing, and verbal skills, and specifically, to develop the skills necessary to write a thematic and analytic final essay.

- Participation and **five** sets of discussion questions (20%)
- **Four** critical response papers, 2-3 pages each, double-spaced, (12 pt. font); (20%)
- **One** review essay, 5-7 pages double-spaced, (12 pt. font), footnotes required (25%)
- **Final Essay**, approximately 15 pages, double-spaced, (12 pt. font), footnotes required (35%)

1. Participation and Responses to Readings (20%)

This crucial component of the class includes:

- **Attendance**, completing reading by assigned dates, and thoughtful, active participation in class discussions. Your comments must suggest that you’ve done the reading carefully and thoroughly. (Students are always expected to read the footnotes or endnotes carefully and in tandem with the text.) Thoughtful participation does not mean that you understand every word or have the “right” answer. It does mean that you are able to engage in substantive ways even with readings that are challenging and/or those that you do not enjoy. It does mean that you are willing to think out loud and be part of a process of figuring things out together.

   Over the course of the semester, some of you may need to miss a class for various reasons. If you are able, please let me know in advance. Missing more than one class may affect your final grade. This is your seminar and your community; it is not a passive learning environment.
• **Discussion questions.** SIX times during the semester, you must prepare discussion questions for the class (not a fixed number of questions, but two-four suffice). Please post these questions on the canvas discussion board to the entire class by **Wednesday morning at 9 am.** One set of questions is required by **September 13;** another set is required on **Nov. 15;** you may submit the other four sets of questions at any other points during the semester, and you are responsible for keeping track. (Certainly, you are free to post more than 5 sets of questions, and as often as you like; it’s a good place to organize and share thoughts prior to and outside of class.) Responding to discussion questions that others post is welcome but optional; I do urge you to look at the discussion board before class each week so that you can consider in advance what other people have to say.

• Oral presentation, TBA. Depending on the class size and the level of interest, we may include oral presentations; these will focus on a cultural text/ primary source that scholars we read have worked with.

2. **Critical Response Papers (20%)**

• **Four 2-3 page** critical responses papers based on a specific weekly reading or viewing are required (not more than 700 words). In these papers, you should react and comment on a required source for that week. You may focus on a particular argument or key passage, or an overall theme and framework; but, **do not** simply summarize or repeat arguments from those readings. I encourage you to use these short essays to figure out how you feel about a week’s reading, to react (positively or negatively) to materials, to “test out” ideas that you may develop further in longer assignments, to engage with a major issue (historiographical, methodological, theoretical) that a given reading may raise, and to get more comfortable writing about this material more generally. The length is designed to help you be concise and focused. Please stay within the general parameters.

• **ONE** of these four response papers should be about one of the required primary sources (9/20, 10/4, 11/8, 11/29). This assignment will offer you an opportunity to evaluate a primary source- films or text; you may also want to reflect on how scholars have approached the same source. The other three critical response papers should focus on a secondary source and scholars’ approaches.

• **Everyone must write their first critical response paper, based on any of the readings from the first two weeks of class, by September 13 at the latest.** You may submit the other three short response essays at any point through November 29, but I encourage you to keep yourselves on roughly an every-other-week schedule. You must submit all but the first response essay on the **same day that we are discussing the text that is your topic.**

• You will not receive letter grades on these critical response papers (you will get a numeric response of 1-10), but they are required, and are important building blocks for both the review essay and the final essay.

**Note:** You may submit discussion questions and write short responses on the same readings, but try to avoid duplicating your ideas exactly in questions and in papers.

3. **ONE article review essay (25%)**

Each student must write one essay (5-7 pages) that offers a critical analysis and discussion of a week’s reading (of your choosing), by **November 15th at the latest.** You may focus on a single book or article, or write about two articles in comparison. The essay should **NOT** be a summary of the reading; instead focus on issues of theme, method, argument, and/or approach to develop your own thesis. As you develop your **own thesis** about this reading/these readings, consider the following:

• what questions does the scholar ask and how do they locate themselves in relation to larger debates in the field/s of which they are a part?;

• what is the thesis of the book or article?;

• how do the author define “culture” and how are they engaging with questions about culture- with regard to cultural production, cultural consumption, cultural meaning-making, power relations, political economy, etc.?

• what sources does the scholar draw on to answer these questions and develop the thesis?;

• how does the scholar read and interpret these sources?; what other avenues of research does each article invite, and what sources might you look to if you were to explore further?;

• do you find the argument/s persuasive? why or why not?
• if you are writing about a more theoretically-oriented source, consider how and why the scholar theorizes culture; if you are writing about a more historically-oriented source, consider if, how, and why that scholar employs a particular theoretical approach or approaches.

You certainly need not answer all of these questions (and could not do so in 5-7 pages!), but these are the types of issues that should inform your analysis and shape your thesis. **Note that these are also the kinds of questions you should be asking yourselves each week as you do the reading and prepare for class.**

You must submit this essay on the day that we discuss the reading your write about.

4. **Final Essay (35%):** Your final paper will be a historiographical review essay that explores a topic, theme or approach across several readings (3-5 sources) from the syllabus. I encourage you to generate your own topic, but you may also respond to topics that I distribute in advance.
   • One-paragraph description of topic, with a preliminary set of questions, and bibliography: **Friday, November 10.**
   • A more developed description of topic, with an outline and/or a preliminary thesis statement: any time between November 16 and Wednesday, November 22.
   • Final essay: **Friday, December 15**

****I encourage you to consider the syllabus as a whole when you are developing your topic. Please note that if you are interested in writing about the material that we will be reading and discussing toward the end of the semester, you will need to read ahead.****

Should you want to include sources that are not on the syllabus, you are welcome to do so, but you must discuss this with me in advance, and you must include at least one source from the syllabus.

One meeting with me to discuss your final paper is **required.** More TBA.

**Required books, to purchase if possible** (also on reserve; several are available online through the Dana Library as ebooks)
Rizzo, Mary. *Come and Be Shocked: Baltimore Beyond John Waters and the Wire* (Hopkins, 2020)

**Recommended books** (We will be reading portions of these books and the required chapters are available on Canvas; but you may want to own these, especially if you are interested in doing additional work in U.S. Cultural History and/or American Studies and building your own libraries).
Plus articles, see links and pdfs on canvas.

You must bring all required readings to class and/or have access to online pdfs for our discussions.

**Required viewings:**
*Something Good - Negro Kiss* (1898)
*Modern Times* (1936)
*The Ten Commandments* (1956)
*Rear Window* (1954)

Please keep in mind that this syllabus is a work in progress and some of the required readings may change as we move along through the semester.
Accommodation and Support Statement

Rutgers University-Newark (RU-N) is committed to the creation of an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students and the University as a whole. RU-N has identified the following resources to further its mission of access and support:

• **For Individuals Experiencing Disability:** The Office of Disability Services (ODS) works with students with medical, physical, and/or mental conditions who encounter disabling barriers to determine reasonable and appropriate accommodations for access. Students who have completed the process with ODS and have approved accommodations are provided a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) specific to each course. To initiate accommodations for their course students must both provide the LOA and have a conversation with the course instructor about the accommodations. This should occur as early in the semester as possible. More information can be found at the RU-N ODS website (ods.newark.rutgers.edu). Contact ODS at (973) 353-5375 or via email at ods@newark.rutgers.edu.

• **For Individuals who are Pregnant:** The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance is available to assist with any concerns or potential accommodations related to pregnancy. Students may contact the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance at (973) 353-5063 or via email at TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu.

• **For Short-term Absence Verification:** The Office of the Dean of Students can help with absences related to religious observance, emergency or unavoidable conflict (illness, personal or family emergency, etc.). Students should refer to University Policy 10.2.7 for information about expectations and responsibilities. The Office of the Dean of Students can be contacted by calling (973) 353-5063 or emailing deanofstudents@newark.rutgers.edu.

• **For Individuals with temporary conditions/injuries:** The Office of the Dean of Students can assist students who are experiencing a temporary condition or injury (broken or sprained limbs, concussions, recovery from surgery, etc.). Students experiencing a temporary condition or injury should submit a request using the following link: https://temporaryconditions.rutgers.edu.

• **For Gender or Sex-Based Discrimination or Harassment:** The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance can assist students who are experiencing any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, or stalking. Students can report an incident to the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance by calling (973) 353-1906 or emailing TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu. Incidents may also be reported by using the following link: tinyurl.com/RUNReportingForm. For more information, students should refer to the University’s Title IX Policy and Grievance Procedures located at https://uec.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/60-1-33-current-1.pdf

• **For support related to Interpersonal Violence:** The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance (VPVA) can provide any student with confidential support. VPVA is a confidential resource and does not have a reporting obligation to Title IX. Students can contact the office by calling (973) 353-1918 or emailing run.vpva@rutgers.edu. VPVA also maintains a confidential text-based helpline available to students; students can text (973) 339-0734 for support. Students do not need to be a victim/survivor of violence to receive assistance; any student can receive services, information, and support.

• **For Crisis and Concerns:** The Campus Awareness Response and Education (CARE) Team works with students in crisis to develop a plan of support plan and address personal situations that might impact their academic performance. Connect with the CARE Team by using the following link: tinyurl.com/RUNCARE or emailing careteam@rutgers.edu.

• **For Psychological Support (Stress, Mood, Family Issues, Substance Use concerns and other personal challenges):** The Rutgers University-Newark Counseling Center provides individual therapy and support groups for students dealing with psychological issues. To schedule an appointment, email counseling@newark.rutgers.edu or call (973) 353-5805.

Additional support is available to any RU-N student through Uwill services:
• Umatch: Teletherapy with flexible scheduling, starting with a free account.
• Uhelp: Crisis support at 833-646-1526 (available 24/7/365).
• Urise: Wellness-based video collection with a free account. Access Uwill@RUN at https://my.rutgers.edu using your netid. Services are confidential and free. For emergencies, call 911 or Rutgers University Police Department at (973) 353-5111.

A few other important points.
--Rutgers University treats cheating and plagiarism as serious offenses. In your papers, you must cite and provide a reference for all language and/or ideas that are not your own. While this should be understood in a graduate seminar, it is important to note that violations of the university honor code will be prosecuted to the full extent that is permitted.

--In this course, we will be reading and discussing material on which we may not all agree; some of the themes and imagery we encounter in the sources may seem offensive or otherwise controversial. In this context especially, it is crucial for us to combine the free expression of ideas with respect for each other. This is your community and your class; each one of you has a responsibility to that community.

--Please turn cell phones off and put phones & all other electronics away before class begins. If you take notes on a laptop, please remember that only that document (or related required sources) may be open. Texting or emailing or otherwise using technology in an inappropriate way at any time during class is prohibited. Again, this should be a given in a graduate seminar, but it is worth emphasizing.

--Food and drink are permissible as long as neither is disruptive. We will almost always have a 5-10 minute break.

--With regard to religious holidays, students are advised to provide timely notification about necessary absences for religious observances and are responsible for making up the work according to an agreed-upon schedule. The Division of Student Affairs is available to verify absences for religious observance, as needed: 973-353-5063 or DeanofStudents@newark.rutgers.edu

Schedule:
Wednesday, September 6. Introductions: What is “culture”? What is “cultural history”?
Please complete the following required reading before our first class meeting.

• Raymond Williams, excerpts from “Culture,” in Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 87-93, and 236-238.

• Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays (Basic; 2000; 1973), Parts I-III (pp. 3-13 in this edition) AND parts VII-end (pp. 24-33 in this edition) (feel free to skim this one)


• James W. Cook and Lawrence B. Glickman, “Twelve Propositions for a History of U.S. Cultural History,” in Cook et.al., eds., The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present, and Future (Chicago: 2008), pp. 3-57. (This article is on canvas, but also see google books for all but the last pages of notes: http://books.google.com/books?id=Pdf2TZ369QgC&printsec=frontcover&dq=The+cultural+turn+in+us+history&hl=en&sa=X&ei=H-SSUo2KEqbkS5SvmoDoAQ&ved=0CC8Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=The%20cultural%20turn%20in%20us%20history&f=false
• Roy Rosenzweig, Susan Porter Benson and Stephen Brier, eds., *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public* (Temple, 1986), chapter TBD.

**NOTE:** If you cannot get through everything by Sept. 6, please focus on Geertz, “Deep Play,” and Cook and Glickman, “Twelve Propositions.” These are the main readings.

**Recommended:**
(NOTE: This book is an excellent overview of American Studies and interdisciplinary work in general).  
Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?* (2d edition, Polity, 2008)
Aletta Biersack, “Local Knowledge, Local History: Geertz and Beyond,” in Lynn Hunt, ed. *The New Cultural History* (California, 1989), [and this volume generally].

**Wednesday, September 13. Crowds, Consumers, and “Culture”**

• Peiss, *Cheap Amusements* (Introduction, chapter 2 and chapter 4)

• Hartman, *Wayward Lives* (as much as possible, but please focus on the opening pages (including epigraph, "A Note on Method," "Cast of Characters"); Book One; Book Three.


**Recommended:**
Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge, 1985)
Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Illinois, 1987)

**Wednesday, September 20. Mass Culture Debates, I: The Frankfurt School and Beyond**

[https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm)


**Required Film:** *Something Good- Negro Kiss* (1898) (see *IndieWire* article for links)

**Required Film:** *The Kiss* (1896) (see *IndieWire* article for link)

**Required Film:** *Modern Times* (1936) (available through the Dana Library; login on Kanopy)

Optional (but useful to skim at some point): Stuart Jeffries, *A Timeline of the Frankfurt School*

**Recommended:**
Andreas Huyssen, “Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other,” from *After the Great Divide* (1986)

**Wednesday September 27: Mass Culture Debates, II: The Frankfurt School and Beyond**


**Recommended:**
[The Frankfurt School and Critical Theory](http://www.iep.utm.edu/ftsct/), Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy
Geoff Dyer, “Raymond Williams was one of the Left’s great thinkers,” *New Statesman*, March 12, 2015.

**Wednesday, October 4: Cultural History and Foucault**


- Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization* (focus on the foreword, chapters 1-2, 5, and conclusion)
• Please spend a little time with one of the following primary sources:
  - Teddy Roosevelt, “The Strenuous Life” (1899); OR
  - https://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/roosevelt-strenuous-life-1899-speech-text/

Recommended:
Lisa Duggan, Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence and American Modernity (Duke, 2001)
George Chauncey, Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay World, 1890-1940 (Basic, 1995)
Amber Musser, Sensational Flesh: Race, Power and Masochism (NYU, 2014)

Wednesday, October 11: The Birmingham School, I


• Stephen Vider, The Queerness of Home: Gender, Sexuality and the Politics of Domesticity After World War II (Chicago, 2021), chapters TBD.


Recommended:

Wednesday, October 18: Birmingham School II: Reception and Black Cultural Studies --the 1980s and After


• TBD.

OPTIONAL (but an important essay to read at some point if not now): Franz Fanon, “The Fact of Blackness,” from Black Skin, White Masks (French 1952; English 1968). http://www19.homepage.villanova.edu/silvia.nagyekmi/postcol/Fanon%20The%20Fact%20of%20Blackness.pdf

Recommended:
Tricia Rose, Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America (1994)

**Wednesday, October 25. Performance Studies and Culture**


- TBD, additional reading

- **Required Listening/Viewing:** Judith and Holofernes, “When Drones Leave the Hive” (2003) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdMpqiyXS7g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdMpqiyXS7g)

**Recommended:**
Barbara Kirschchenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (California, 1998)
Jose Esteban, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minnesota, 1999)
Kathryn Bishop-Sanchez, Creating Carmen Miranda: Race, Camp, and Transnational Stardom (Vanderbilt, 2016)

**Wednesday, November 1. The Politics and Culture of Empire, I**


**Recommended:**
Jose David Saldivar, *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (California, 1997)
Donald Pease and Amy Kaplan, eds., *Cultures of U.S. Imperialism* (Duke 1994)

**Wednesday, November 8: The Politics and Culture of Empire, II**

- Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters* (2d edition, 2005), chapters to focus on TBA

- Required film: *The Ten Commandments* (1956) (available to rent on Amazon)

**DUE ON FRIDAY 11/10:** One-paragraph description of final essay topic, with a preliminary set of questions.

**Recommended:**
Alex Lubin, *Geographies of Liberation: The Making of an Afro-Arab Political Imaginary* (UNC, 2014)
Su’ad Khabeer, *Muslim Cool* (NYU: 2016)

**Wednesday, November 15: Culture and Public History, I: Cities and Cultures**


**NOTE:** Everyone is required to submit two question in advance for Professor Rizzo, who will be joining us for part of class.

**Recommended**

**Wednesday, November 22:** No Class
Final Paper Proposal Due

**Wednesday, November 29: Another Look at Looking**


- Michel Foucault, “Panopticism,” from *Discipline and Punish* (1975) in *Blackwell Critical and Cultural Studies Reader*

• **Required film:** *Rear Window* (1954) (available online through the Dana Library)

**Recommended:**
Jacqueline Bobo, *Black Women as Cultural Readers* (Columbia, 1995)

**Wednesday, December 6. Culture and Public History, II: Why Museums**

**Required Museum Field Trip.** Please visit any one of the following exhibits.

• “The Dinner Party” exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum (https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/dinner_party/). ($10 student admission)

• “Seeing America: 20th and 21st Centuries”, exhibit at the Newark Museum (https://newarkmuseumart.org/exhibition/seeing-america-20-21/). ($8 student admission)

• “This is New York: 100 Years of the City in Art and Popular Culture,” exhibit at Museum of the City of New York (https://www.mcny.org/exhibition/new-york-100); ($14 student admission)

**Required Related Readings**

• TBD

**Wednesday, December 13. Conclusions: Cultures and Memory**

• Michel Rolph-Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon, 2015), chapters TBD.

• IF YOU ARE ABLE: Please re-read the readings from the first week of class, especially the Cook essay. How do they “land” now as compared to the first week of the semester?