Summary:
This graduate seminar will explore cultural history from a variety of perspectives. We will ask how scholars from different disciplinary and interdisciplinary “homes” have made sense of cultural history, and we will consider debates in (and about) cultural history as an approach and method. We will also consider relationships between U.S. cultural history, American Studies and cultural studies.

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 is 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.

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 discussion questions (30%)
  • Five critical response papers, 2 pages (ungraded; check/check+/check-) (10%)
  • One review essay, 5-7 pages (20%)
  • Final Essay, approximately 15-20 pages, double-spaced, (12 pt font), footnotes required (40%)

1. Participation and Responses to Readings (30%)
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.)
  Over the course of the semester, some of you may need to miss a class for various reasons. If that is the case and 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. Five times during the semester, you must prepare discussion questions for the class (not a fixed number of questions, but three-four should suffice). Please post these questions on blackboard to the entire class by Monday night at 9 pm. One set of questions is required by February 5; you should submit a second set of questions by March 12, and another set of questions by April 23. You may submit the other two sets of questions at any other points during the semester. (Certainly, you are free to post more than 5 sets of questions, and as often as you like; it’s a good place to share thoughts prior to
and outside of class.) Responding to discussion questions that others post is optional, but 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 be focused on your individual analyses of a cultural text.

2. Critical Response Papers (10%)

• Five 2-page critical responses papers based on a specific weekly reading or viewing are required. 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 the major issues (historiographical, methodological, theoretical) that a given reading may raise, and to get more comfortable writing about this material more generally.

Starting on February 5, you will be in either group 1 or group 2 and you may write during any of the weeks designated to your group. Please submit your responses on bb; you may also bring hard copy to class, but you don’t have to.

• Everyone must write their first response paper, based on any of the readings from our first three class meetings, by February 5 at the latest.

• Two other response papers are required by March 12 and two others are required at any point after that, with specific groups designated for each week. These papers are ungraded (check, check+, check-) but are required, and are important building blocks for the final essay. Please submit all but the first response essay on the same day that we are discussing the text that is your topic.

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 (20%)

Each student must write one essay (5-7 pages) that offers a critical analysis and discussion of a week’s reading (of your choosing). 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 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?;
• 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?;

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.

You must submit this essay on the day that we discuss the reading your write about, and not later than due April 2, since this assignment will help you to prepare for the final essay.

4. Final Essay: 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. You may generate your own topic, or respond to topics that I distribute in advance.

• One-paragraph description of topic, with a preliminary set of questions, and bibliography:

Tuesday, April 16 (via BB)

• A more developed description of topic, with an outline and a preliminary thesis statement:

MONDAY, April 29, by noon (via BB).

• Final essay: Thursday, May 9 (via BB)
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.

If there is a compelling reason for you to write a research paper or analysis of primary sources instead of a final historiographical essay, please be in touch as soon as possible to discuss. As well, should you want to include a secondary source that is not on the syllabus, please discuss with me in advance.

**Required books:** (available at the R-N Bookstore and on reserve).


Plus articles, either available on blackboard, through links on the syllabus, or through library databases like Jstor, etc.

**Recommended books:** (available at the R-N Bookstore and on reserve).


Note: We will not be reading all of these books in their entirety (specifically, Cooper, Foucault, Tchen), and I will do my best to make relevant chapters available on BB as well. But if you are able to purchase them, they will be useful to own, especially if you are interested in doing additional work in U.S. Cultural History and/or American Studies.

You must bring all required readings to class.

**Required viewings:**

*The Watermelon Woman* (1997)

*The Ten Commandments* (1956)

Michael Jackson, full “Thriller” video (1983)

*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.

**NOTE:**

The 36th Annual Marion Thompson Wright Lecture Series takes place on SATURDAY February 16, 9:30 am. Please try to attend if it’s at all possible to do so; the readings the week prior will be in preparation for that event. Please plan accordingly.

**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 usually have a 5-10 minute break.

--Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: [https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines](https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines). If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: [https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form](https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form). For more information please contact Kate Torres at (973) 353-5375 or in the Office of Disability Services in the Paul Robeson Campus Center, in suite 219 or by contacting [odsnewark@rutgers.edu](mailto:odsnewark@rutgers.edu).

**Schedule:**

**Tuesday, January 22.** Introductions. What is “culture”? What is “cultural history”?

- 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).


- 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 BB, but also see google books for all but the last pages of notes: [http://books.google.com/books?id=Pdl2TZ369QgC&printsec=frontcover&dq=The+cultural+turn+in+us+history&hl=en&sa=X&ei=H-S5Uo2KEqKsQSvmoDoAQ&ved=0CC8Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=The%20cultural%20turn%20in%20us%20history&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=Pdl2TZ369QgC&printsec=frontcover&dq=The+cultural+turn+in+us+history&hl=en&sa=X&ei=H-S5Uo2KEqKsQSvmoDoAQ&ved=0CC8Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=The%20cultural%20turn%20in%20us%20history&f=false)

**NOTE:** If you cannot get through everything for the first day, please focus on Geertz, “Deep Play,” Cook and Glickman, “Twelve Propositions,” and Hsu “Stuart Hall” (specifically the first few pages). These are our main readings for the day.

**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].

**Tuesday, January 29. Crowds, class, and culture**

  

- Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*

**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)


Benjamin Looker, *A Nation of Neighborhoods: Imagining Cities, Communities and Democracy in Postwar America* (Chicago: 2015)

**Tuesday, February 5. Cultural History and Foucault**

- Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, pages to focus on TBA.
  
  [https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/fulllist/special/endsandbeginnings/foucaultrepressiveen278.pdf](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/fulllist/special/endsandbeginnings/foucaultrepressiveen278.pdf); see also:
  
  [http://home.ku.edu.tr/~mbaker/CSHS503/FoucaultHistorySex.pdf](http://home.ku.edu.tr/~mbaker/CSHS503/FoucaultHistorySex.pdf)

- Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization* (focus on the foreword, chapters 1-2, 5, and conclusion)

**Recommended:**


Amber Musser, *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power and Masochism* (NYU, 2014)

**Tuesday, February 12. Sexuality, Race, and Culture (Preparation for Marion Thompson Wright Lecture, Saturday February 16, “The Erotic as Power: Sexuality and the Black Experience”**

• E. Patrick Johnson, TBA


• Required viewing: Watermelon Woman (1997)

Group 1: Critical response paper

Recommended:
Marcus Johnson, “All the Gays are White and all the Blacks are Straight: Black Gay Males, Identity and Community,” Sexuality Research and Social Policy 7 (2): 81-92.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 16: Marion Thompson Wright Lecture, 9:30 am.
Please try to attend as much of the events this day as you can.

Tuesday, February 19  Mass Culture Debates, I: The Frankfurt School and Beyond


http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm

• John Berger, Ways of Seeing (British Broadcasting Publication, 1972), pp. 7-34.


• OPTIONAL, BUT INTERESTING: David Campbell, “Photojournalism in the New Media Economy,” Nieman Reports (2010) (OPTIONAL)


Group 2: Critical response paper

Recommended:
Andreas Huyssen, “Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other,” from After the Great Divide (1986)
Janice Radway, Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature (UNC, 1984)
Tuesday, February 26. Mass Culture Debates, II: The Frankfurt School and Beyond


• George Lipsitz, *Time Passages*, chapters to focus on TBA.


Group 1: Critical response paper

**Recommended:**
*The Frankfurt School and Critical Theory*, Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy
Stuart Jeffries, *A Timeline of the Frankfurt School*

Tuesday, March 5. The Birmingham School


• Ramzi Fawaz, *The New Mutants* (chapters to focus on, TBA)

Group 2: Critical response paper

**Recommended:**
**Tuesday, March 12. Black Cultural Studies in the 1980s & 1990s**


AND: Full-length *Thriller* video: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOnqjkJTMaA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOnqjkJTMaA)


- OPTIONAL (but an important essay to read at some point if not now):

  [http://www19.homepage.villanova.edu/silvia.nagyzekmi/postcol/Fanon%20The%20Fact%20of%20Blackness.pdf](http://www19.homepage.villanova.edu/silvia.nagyzekmi/postcol/Fanon%20The%20Fact%20of%20Blackness.pdf)

**Group 1: Critical response paper**

**Recommended:**


**Tuesday, March 19. Spring Break**

**Tuesday, March 26. Place and Cultural History**

- John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York Before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882* (Johns Hopkins, 1999), chapters to focus on TBA


**Group 2: Critical response paper**

**GUEST SPEAKER:** Jack Tchen

**Recommended:**

- Timothy Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics* (U of PA, 2017);
Robert Snyder, *Crossing Broadway: Washington Heights and the Promise of New York City* (Cornell, 2014);
Mark Krasovic, *The Newark Frontier: Community Action in the Great Society* (Chicago, 2016);
Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (MIT, 1997) (and other work by Hayden);
David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City* (2009)

**Tuesday, April 2: Culture and Empire Before and After 9/11**

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

**Required film:** *The Ten Commandments*

**Group 1: Critical response paper**

**Recommended:**
- Alex Lubin, *Geographies of Liberation: The Making of an Afro-Arab Political Imaginary* (UNC, 2014)

**FINAL DAY TO SUBMIT REVIEW ESSAYS**

**Tuesday, April 9. Learning to Look**

• **Required films:** *Rear Window* (1954)  
  *Something Good-* *Negro Kiss* (1898) (see *Chicago Tribune* article for link)  
  *The Kiss* (1896) (see *Chicago Tribune* article for link)

Group 2: Critical response paper

**Recommended:**  

**Tuesday, April 16. No Class**

**Due (BB):** One paragraph initial description of your topic, with a preliminary set of questions and bibliography.

I will be holding extended office hours leading up to this deadline, so as to discuss final essay topics. More TBA. Please use this week to catch up, catch your breath, and push forward on your final essay.

**Tuesday, April 23: Culture and Public History**


• TBA.

**Due (BB): MONDAY, April 29:** More developed description of your topic, with an outline and working thesis.

**Tuesday, April 30. “Stuff,” and Reconsiderations**

• TBA.


Final Essay Due: Thursday, May 9 (BB)