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Honors American History:
American Popular Cultures, 1890-1945
 Fall 2014
 Class Location: Conklin 348
 Class Meeting Time: Tuesday, 2:30-5:20

Summary:

This course investigates popular cultures in the United States from the turn of the century through World War II. By considering literature, films, music, and radio, we will ask how popular culture mattered: 1. to debates about immigration and changing race relations; 2. to the federal government and policy-making; and 3. to social movements. In other words, what do films, literature, and music and radio tell us about changing values and contested issues in a particular time period? How did entertainment shape debates about what it meant to be a “good American” in different historical moments?

The format of the course will be a combination of discussion, group activities, and lecture. We will often read, watch, and discuss together primary sources from the period in question, including films. Because of the central role discussion will play in this Honors Seminar, **it is essential that you complete the assigned required readings and/or the required viewings by the date indicated on the syllabus.**

Required Texts:

BOOKS (for sale at the Rutgers University Bookstore. Books are also available on reserve at the Dana Library.)

Burroughs, Edgar Rice. *Tarzan of the Apes* (Penguin/Signet, 1990; 1914)

Inada, Lawson Fusado, ed.. *Only What We Could Carry: The Japanese American Internment Experience* (Heyday Books, 2000) (**recommended**; this is a great collection, but I will include the required pages on bb).

ONLINE READINGS, INDICATED BY * ON THE SYLLABUS.

The online readings will either be available on blackboard, OR through links listed here on the syllabus. You **MUST** print out and bring hard copy of these readings to class.

FILMS (available for rental on blockbuster, Netflix, Youtube, etc., and on reserve on the 4th floor of the Dana Library)

The Great Train Robbery (1903)

The Sheik (1921)

Modern Times (1936)

Casablanca (1943)

While we will be watching sections of these films (and others) together in class, you will also need to see these sources in their entirety on your own. You **MUST** plan accordingly.

Grading, Requirements, and Expectations:

- Attendance and Class Participation (15%)
- Quizzes (15%)
- Midterm (20%)
- 4-5 page paper (draft and revision) (25%)
- Final Exam (25%)

1. Attendance and Class Participation (15%). This crucial component of the course includes:

•Showing up prepared (with required readings). Attendance *combined with* consistent and thoughtful participation in class discussions is required, and will be counted toward your final grade. This is an honors seminar, and each student has a responsibility to complete all assignments and to engage with the material and with other students. If you must miss a class for family/personal/health reasons, please let me know in advance if at all possible. If you miss more than one class for medical reasons, you must provide a doctor's note. I will usually take attendance twice each week—once at the outset of class and again after the break. More than four unexcused absences (**two classes total**), will affect a final grade. **Any student who misses four or more class sessions through any combination of excused and unexcused absences may not earn credit in this class.** Such students should withdraw to avoid getting an F.

• To facilitate this participation and to help you prepare for the essay-writing part of the class, you must come to class with a typed one-page response to the discussion question listed for that week on the syllabus at **four points** during the semester. You will receive a check, check+, or check – on these response papers, and not a letter grade; they will count, however, toward the numeric grade that you will receive for class participation. You must complete two of these responses the first month of class: the first on either **September 9 OR 16**; the second on either **September 23 or 30**. On **October 28**, everyone must submit a response paper. You may submit the fourth and final response at any point in November-December. When you are not writing a response paper, please use the discussion questions to help guide your reading. You may submit up to two additional responses as extra credit.

2. FOUR unannounced quizzes (15%).

During the first 10-15 minute of four classes, there will be a quiz, based on the material required for that day of class. The lowest quiz grade may be dropped at the end of the semester. Please note that class will begin promptly at 2:35 each week. If you arrive late, you may not take the quiz, and you will receive an F for that quiz.

3. Midterm exam. October 21 (20%).

The midterm exam will consist of an in-class “blue book” exam. More TBA.

4. Essay. (4-5 pg., 12 pt font), FRIDAY, December 5, 25%

Everyone must write and revise an essay. You will receive a list of potential topics from which to choose, and you will have two possible due dates for submitting an essay draft. Your grade will be based on how you engage with the process as a whole and not just your final essay. The draft and revision are mandatory; if you turn in one component and not the other, you will receive an “F” for this assignment—even if the one component itself is well-written.

Draft due dates:

- **Monday, October 5** (for the first set of topics)

OR:

- **Tuesday, November 11** (for the second set of topics)

Final Essay due:

- **Friday, December 5**, by 9 pm

5. Final exam. Thursday, December 18, 11:45-2:45. 25%

NOTE: All assignments are due on the dates indicated. **Grades will be lowered on late papers**, unless you have talked with me in advance and received an official extension.

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. The essays for this class are based **ONLY** on required readings on the syllabus. You need not—and indeed should not—be going to any sources beyond the syllabus as you write your papers. However, should you make the choice to look at other sources, you still **must** cite those sources. Violations of the university honor code will be prosecuted to the full extent that is permitted. All students will sign the Rutgers University Honor Code Pledge.

--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.

--Please turn cell phones off and **PUT PHONES & IPODS AWAY** before class begins. If you want to take notes on a laptop, please email me in advance to receive written permission, and 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**. If your phone rings during class, I will ask you to leave the room to turn it off. If this happens more than once, a student will be counted as absent for that entire day. If any phones or ipods are visible during class, this will create an impression of texting, etc. That student will be counted as absent for that day.

--Food and drink are permissible as long as neither is disruptive. We will usually have a 5-10 minute break during the class, but not always. When we are not having a break, only one student may leave the class at a time.

--This class welcomes all kinds of learners. If you have a documented disability that could have an impact on your work, please be in touch with me directly outside of class to discuss accommodations confidentially. If you have not already done so, please also contact the Office of Disability Services at the Robeson Center as soon as possible.

Class Schedule and Readings:**UNIT I:*****Making a New Century:******Consumption and Modernity in Leisure, Literature, and Film, 1890-1920s*****September 2:****Introductions and Setting the Scene: Work & Leisure in the Early 20th Century****September 9:****Looking Outward, I: Civilization, Modern Life, and the “Primitive”****Required:**

Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes* (1914)

Question: Early on in *Tarzan*, Burroughs compares the young boy to the apes with whom he has been raised (pp. 52-55). Draw on the passage below to consider how Burroughs makes these comparisons. What is the significance of his language and imagery? What effects might it have had on readers to see that Tarzan feels that the apes are superior to him and more attractive, than he is?

“He was nearly ten before he commenced to realize that a great difference existed between himself and his fellows. His little body, burned brown by exposure, suddenly caused him feelings of intense shame for he realized that it was entirely hairless, like some low snake, or other reptile....”

...“As they leaned over, both little faces were mirrored on the placid pool; the fierce and terrible features of the ape beside those of the aristocratic scion of an old English house.

“Tarzan was appalled. It had been bad enough to be hairless, but to own such a countenance! He wondered that the other apes could look at him at all.

That tiny slit of a mouth and those puny white teeth! How they looked beside the mighty lips and powerful fangs of his more fortunate brothers!

“And the little pinched nose of his; so this was it that it looked half starved. He turned red as he compared it with the beautiful broad nostrils of his companion. Such a generous nose! Why it spread half across his face! It certainly must be fine to be so handsome, thought poor little Tarzan.”

September 16:**Looking Outward, II: Modernity, Popular Culture, and Empire****Required:**

•* Teddy Roosevelt, “The Strenuous Life” (1905).

<http://www.bartleby.com/58/1.html>

• *Mark Twain, “To the Person Sitting in the Darkness” (1901).

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~DRBR/sitting.html>

Question: Draw on the passage below to consider why Teddy Roosevelt thinks the “strenuous life” is a good thing. What does this passage suggest about what is important to him? What kinds of language and imagery does he use to make his points?

“We have a given problem to solve. If we undertake the solution, there is, of course, always danger that we may not solve it aright; but to refuse to undertake the solution simply renders it certain that we cannot possibly solve it aright. The timid man, the lazy man, the man who distrusts his country, the over-civilized man, who has lost the great fighting, masterful virtues, the ignorant man, and the man of dull mind, whose soul is incapable of feeling the mighty lift that thrills “stern men with empires in their brains”—all these, of course, shrink from seeing the nation undertake its new duties; shrink from seeing us build a navy and an army adequate to our needs; shrink from seeing us do our share of the world's work, by bringing order out of chaos in the great, fair tropic islands from which the valor of our soldiers

and sailors has driven the Spanish flag. These are the men who fear the strenuous life, who fear the only national life which is really worth leading.”

September 23:

Silent Films, I: The Allure of Spectacle

Required:

•* Read: 1. “The Spanish-American War in Motion Pictures. ‘Remember Maine’: The Beginnings of War”: <http://www.loc.gov/collections/spanish-american-war-in-motion-pictures/articles-and-essays/the-motion-picture-camera-goes-to-war/>

2. “A Drama of the Spanish-American War”: <http://www.loc.gov/collections/spanish-american-war-in-motion-pictures/articles-and-essays/the-motion-picture-camera-goes-to-war/#a-drama-of-the-spanish-american-war>

3. one more essay, TBA

•*Watch: 1. four-five silent films about the Spanish American War (you must watch these before class; they are short, and you will need to watch each one more than once to understand them).

--“Burial of the ‘Maine’ Victims” (1898): <http://www.loc.gov/item/98500963/>

--“Love and War”(1899): <http://www.loc.gov/item/98501279/>

--“Aguinaldo’s Navy” (1902): <http://www.loc.gov/item/98500758/>

--“Advance of Kansas Volunteers at Caloocan”(1899):

<http://www.loc.gov/item/98501192/>

2. **One other film from this list, that you may choose:**

http://www.loc.gov/collection/spanish-american-war-in-motion-pictures/?q=&sb=title_s

3. *The Great Train Robbery* (1903):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8oTdpkIBE0Y>

Question: *The Great Train Robbery* is known as a milestone in film history, and as the first narrative film. Pick one scene or moment that stood out to you in this film, and explain why it would have been significant to audiences in 1903.

September 30:

Silent Films, II: Film Culture, Race, and Nation

Required:

•*Reviews and Commentaries on the film *Birth of a Nation* (1915) from the time of its release, collected in Robert Lang, ed., *The Birth of A Nation: D.W. Griffith, Director* (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1994), pp. 159-189.

•* “**Jane Addams Condemns Race Prejudice Film**,” *New York Evening Post*, March 13, 1915. <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4994/>

(NOTE: The above two are the **main readings** for this week.)

•*“‘Art [and History] by Lightning Flash’: *The Birth of a Nation* and Black Protest,” and “An NAACP Official Calls for Censorship...”:

<http://chnm.gmu.edu/features/episodes/birthofanation.html>

Question: What kind of **language** and **logic** did D. W. Griffith and/or Thomas Dixon use to respond to the criticisms they received? Draw on at least two examples in your response.

**Monday, October 5:
Due Date I, Essay Draft.**

October 7:

Silent Films, III: Film Culture, Immigration, and Ethnicity

Required:

- * TBA

•* "Madison Grant, on the New Immigrants as Survival of the Unfit" (1918), in Leo Fink, ed., *Major Problems in the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Co., 1993).

FILM: *The Sheik* (1921)

Question: Madison Grant was not an ignorant racist; he was a highly educated and published university professor. Why did he see the "new" immigrants as "the survival of the unfit"? What did he think immigrants were doing to the U.S.?

October 14:

The Harlem Renaissance: The "New Negro" in New York City

Required:

- * Alain Locke, "The New Negro" (1925)

<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai3/migrations/text8/lockenewnegro.pdf>

- *Langston Hughes, poems: "Harlem Nightclub"; "The Weary Blues":

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/176785>

- *Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1926)

- George Schuyler, "The Negro Art Hokum" (1926) <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5129/>

- *MORE TBA

Question: How and why does Schuyler object to the notion of "Negro art"?

October 21:

MIDTERM EXAM, in class

UNIT II:

***Culture Industries, Consumption, and the State,
1930-1945***

October 28:

The Depression, I: Class, Consumption, and the New Deal

Required:

* Lizabeth Cohen, "Encountering Mass Culture at the Grassroots," in L. Glickman, ed., *Consumer Society* (1999), pp. 147-169.

- * Franklin Roosevelt, "Fireside Chat": <http://www.mhric.org/fdr/chat1.html>

• FSA Photographs: See “15 Staff Selections from the FSA-OWI Collection” (**Review ALL 15 (enlarged)**).

See: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/fsa/selections.html>

• “Dorothea Lange's "Migrant Mother" Photographs in the Farm Security Administration Collection: An Overview” (read and look):

http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/128_migm.html

Question: (**EVERYONE MUST SUBMIT A RESPONSE WEEK**). Which photo had the biggest impact on you, and why do you think it did so?

November 4:

The Depression, II: The Left and Popular Culture

Required:

- * Clifford Odets: “Awake and Sing” (info on location TBA) and Odets, “Waiting for Lefty” : <http://www.unz.org/Pub/CerfBennett-1943n02-00521>

FILM: *Modern Times*

Question: Who or what is Odets most critical of in either one of his plays?

OR: Who or what is Charlie Chaplin most critical of in the film *Modern Times*?

November 11:

Due Date II, Essay Draft

MORE TBA

November 18:

World War II, I: Producing Nationalism in the 1940s

Required:

- Read: Inada, ed., *Only What We Could Carry*:
 - Preface (xi-xiv);
 - Editorials in the Wake of Pearl Harbor, pp. 11-26
 - Mine Okubo, from *Citizen 13660*, pp. 87-96
 - A WRA Center Lexicon of Japanese American Terms, pp. 220-227
 - FDR, Presidential Statement, pp. 341-342
 - FDR, Executive Order 9066, pp. 401-2

- *Watch: WWII-era cartoons. TBA

Question: How did people in the 1940s discuss and make sense of the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II? Consider this question with a focus on 1-2 documents from the collection.

November 25:

NO CLASS, Tuesday is Thursday at R-N.

December 2:

Essay Revising Workshop
More TBA

FRIDAY DECEMBER 5: FINAL ESSAY DUE, 9 pm.

December 9

World War II, II: Consuming Nationalism in the 1940s and after

Required:

• *Aljean Harmetz, *The Making of Casablanca: Bogart, Bergman and World War II* (Hyperion, 2002), pp. 102-116; 266-283.

•* "Bureau of Motion Pictures Report: *Casablanca*" (1942):
http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/historyonline/bureau_casablanca.cfm

Film: *Casablanca* (1942)

Question: How does the narrative in *Casablanca* either support or oppose U.S. intervention into World War II?

FINAL EXAM, Thursday December 18, 11:45-2:45.