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Office Hours: Tuesday 12-1, and by appointment

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

American Studies: Cultural History and Cultural Production. 26:050:550:01  
History: American Intellectual and Cultural History. 26:510:551:02  
Conklin 445  
Tuesday, 5:30-8:10  
Fall 2015

**Summary:**

This graduate seminar will explore cultural history from a variety of perspectives, as we ask how scholars from different disciplinary and interdisciplinary “homes” have made sense of cultural history, and as we 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 develop 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 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.
- Discussion questions. **Five** times during the semester, you must prepare discussion questions for the class (not a fixed number of questions, but four should suffice). Please circulate these questions via blackboard to the entire class by **Monday night at 6 pm**. One set of questions is required before Sept. 22; you should submit 2 sets of questions by Oct. 27 and another 2 sets of questions any time after Oct. 27. (Certainly, you are free to post questions as often as you like; it’s a good place to share thoughts prior to and outside of class.)

- Oral presentation, TBA. Depending on the class size of the class 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%)

You must write **four 2-page** critical responses papers based on a specific weekly reading or viewing. 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. That is, use these short responses to engage with the major issues (historiographical, methodological, theoretical) that a given reading may raise. 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, and to get more comfortable writing about this material.

You will be in either group 1 or group 2 and you may write during any of the weeks designated to your group. Please bring hard copy to class unless otherwise indicated (9/22).

**• Tuesday, September 22: Everyone must write a response, based on any of the readings from our first two class meetings.**

- Two other response papers are required by October 27 and two are required after October 27. 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 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. The essay should NOT be a summary of the reading; instead focus on issues of theme, method, argument, and/or approach. I encourage you to submit this essay on the day that we discuss the reading you write about, but you **MUST** submit this review essay by November 3 at the latest, since writing this essay 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 preliminary thesis or initial set of questions, and bibliography: Tuesday, November 24 (via BB)

- A more developed description of topic, with an outline and developed thesis statement: MONDAY, December 7, by noon (via BB).

- Final essay: Tuesday, December 14 (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).**

Banet-Weiser, Sarah. *Kids Rule!: Nickelodeon and Consumer Citizenship* (Duke, 2007)

Bederman, Gail. *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago, 1996)

McAlister, Melani. *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East Since 1945* (California; **SECOND edition**, 2005)

Peiss, Kathy. *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Temple, 1986)

Wald, Gayle. *It's Been Beautiful: SOUL! and Black Power Television* (Duke, 2014).  
(OPTIONAL, as we will be only reading a chapter or two of this book, which I will make these available on bb.)

Plus articles, either available on blackboard (see \* on the syllabus), through links on the syllabus, or through library databases like Jstor, etc.

**Required viewings:**

*The Ten Commandments* (1956)  
Michael Jackson, full "Thriller" video (1983)  
One other film, TBA

**Please note:** This syllabus is a work in progress and some of the required readings may change as we move along through the semester.

You must bring all required readings to class.

**A few other points:**

This class welcomes all kinds of learners. If you have a documented disability that will 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.

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.

Since this is a graduate seminar, I allow laptops and kindles (etc.), for note-taking and reading. Please keep in mind, though, that texting, or otherwise using technology for anything other than course-related purposes is absolutely not allowed. If I see any such use, or if you create the impression that you are using technology in the classroom in an inappropriate way, I will ask you to leave the class and you will be counted as absent for that day.

Given the hour, food and drink are allowed as long as neither is disruptive.

**Schedule:**

**Tuesday, Sept. 1. 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. See: <http://pubpages.unh.edu/~dml3/880williams.htm>

• \*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).

• \*Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," pp. 412-453 in this same 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: University of Chicago Press, 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=PdI2TZ369QgC&printsec=frontcover&dq=The+cultural+turn+in+us+hi+story&hl=en&sa=X&ei=H-S5Uo2KEqbKsQsYmoDoAQ&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,” and Cook and Glickman, “Twelve Propositions.” These are our two main readings for the day.

**Recommended:**

Michael Denning, “The End of Mass Culture,” *International Labor and Working Class History* (Spring 1990), 4-18.

Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society* (Pantheon, 1984)

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, Sept. 8.**

No class. Tuesday is Monday at RN.

**Tuesday, Sept. 15. Crowds, class, and culture**

• \*E.P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” *Past and Present* 50 (Feb. 1971): 76-136 (pages to focus on TBA)  
<https://provisionaluniversity.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/thompson-ep-the-moral-economy-of-the-english-crowd-in-the-eighteenth-century.pdf>

• 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)

Lawrence Levine, “The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and its Audiences,” and responses by Robin D.G. Kelley, Natalie Zemon Davis, Jackson Lears, and L. Levine, *American Historical Review* 97, no. 5 (December 1992): 1369-1430.

**Tuesday, Sept. 22. NO CLASS.**

Short response essay due, based on any of the readings from our first two weeks together. You may use this week to catch up on readings and/or start readings for the following week. Please email your response essays to me, and name your paper: lastname.docx

**Tuesday Sept. 29. Mass Culture Debates, I: The Frankfurt School and Beyond**

• Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936) from *Illuminations* reprinted in the *Routledge Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*.  
<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>

• \*Salamishah Tillet, “Strange Sampling: Nina Simone and her Hip-Hop Children,” *American Quarterly* 66 (March 2014): 119-137.

- \*John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (British Broadcasting Publication, 1972), pp. 7-33.
- David Campbell, "Photojournalism in the New Media Economy," *Nieman Reports* (2010) (OPTIONAL)  
<http://niemanreports.org/articles/photojournalism-in-the-new-media-economy/>

Group 2: Critical response paper

**Recommended:**

Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other," from *After the Great Divide* (1986)  
Vanessa Schwartz, "Walter Benjamin for Historians," *American Historical Review* (2001): 1721-1743.  
Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (UNC, 1984)  
Tim Raphael, *The President Electric: Ronald Reagan and the Politics of Performance* (2009)

**Tuesday, Oct. 6. Mass Culture Debates, II: The Frankfurt School and Beyond**

- \* Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947, 1944; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).
- Lizabeth Cohen, "Encountering Mass Culture at the Grassroots: The Experience of Chicago Workers in the 1920s," *American Quarterly* 41 (March 1989): 6-33. (available through Jstor; see also: <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~DRBR2/cohen.pdf>)
- \* Uta. G. Poiger, "Jazz and German Respectability," chapter 4 in Poiger, *Jazz, Rock and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (California, 1989), pp. 137-167, but focus specifically on pp. 137-146. (OR: •\*Bernhard Rieger, "From People's Car to New Beetle: The Transatlantic Journeys of the Volkswagen Beetle," *Journal of American History* 97 (June 2010): 91-115.)
- OPTIONAL: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/09/15/naysayers>

Group 1: Critical response paper

**Recommended:**

T. J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *American Historical Review* 90 no. 3 (June 1985): 567-593.  
George Lipsitz, "Listening to Learn and Learning to Listen: Popular Culture, Cultural Theory, and American Studies," *American Quarterly*, Dec. 1990.

**Tuesday, Oct. 13. The Birmingham School**

- \*Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms," in Dirks, et al ed. *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory* (1993; 1980), pp. 520-538. See also: <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~drbr/hall.html>
- \*Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular" from *Media & Cultural Studies: Keywords*. See also: [http://www.udel.edu/History/suisman/611\\_S05\\_webpage/Hall\\_Notes-decon-popular.pdf](http://www.udel.edu/History/suisman/611_S05_webpage/Hall_Notes-decon-popular.pdf)
- \* Stacy Wolf, "'Defying Gravity': Queer Conventions in the Musical *Wicked*," *Theater Journal* 60 (2008): 1-21.
- \* Ramzi Fawaz, "Where No X-Man Has Gone Before! Mutant Superheroes and the Cultural Politics of Fantasy in Postwar America," *American Literature* 83:2 (2011).

Group 2: Critical response paper

**Recommended:**

Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979).

George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minnesota, 1990)

Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working Class Culture in America* (2d Ed., Verso, 1998).

**Tuesday, Oct. 20. Black Cultural Studies in the 1980s & 1990s**

•\* Stuart Hall, “What is this ‘black’ in black popular culture?,” *Social Justice*, 20 (1993), pp. 104-114.

• \* Kobena Mercer, “Monster Metaphors: Notes on Michael Jackson’s *Thriller*,” (1984), in *Welcome to the Jungle*. See: <http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic989302.files/WEEK%20%20-%20OCTOBER%2017/Kobena%20Mercer.pdf>

AND: Full-length *Thriller* video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOnqjkJTMaA>

•\* Robin Kelley, “The Riddle of the Zoot: Malcolm Little and Black Cultural Politics During WWII,” from *Race Rebels* (1996).

•\* 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.nagyzekmi/postcol/Fanon%20The%20Fact%20of%20Blackness.pdf>

Group 1: Critical response paper

**Recommended:**

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

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Writing, ‘Race,’ and the Difference it Makes,” *Critical Inquiry* (1985).

Gates, “Reading ‘Race’, *Writing, and Difference*, *PMLA* (Oct. 2008)

Eric Lott: “Criticism in the Vineyard: Twenty Years after *Race, Writing, and Difference*, *PMLA* (Oct. 2008).

**Tuesday, Oct. 27: Cultural History and Foucault**

• Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*

• \*Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (excerpts, TBA), (Chicago, 1992).

**Recommended:**

Lisa Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence and American Modernity* (Duke, 2001)

Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Duke, 1995)

Group 2: Critical response paper

**Tuesday, Nov. 3: No Class  
Review Essays- Final Due Date.**

I will hold extended office hours (probably on Thursday, November 5, mid-day) to discuss final essay topics. More TBA.

**Tuesday, Nov. 10. Culture and Empire Before and After 9/11**

- \* Amy Kaplan, “‘Left Alone with America’: The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture,” in Kaplan and Pease eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Duke, 1993), pp. 3-21. (
- McAlister, *Epic Encounters* (2d edition, 2005), chapters to focus on TBA.
- Required film: *The Ten Commandments*

Group 1: Critical response paper

**Recommended:**

Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Pantheon, 1978)

Robert Rydell, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869-1922* (Chicago, 2005)

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

Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Harvard, 1993)

**Tuesday, Nov. 17. Looking/Listening**

- \*Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16, 3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18.
- \*Michel Foucault, “Panopticism,” from *Discipline and Punish* (1975) in *Blackwell Critical and Cultural Studies Reader*.
- \* Sherri Tucker, “‘Not One to Toot Her Own Horn(?)’: Melba Liston’s Oral Histories and Classroom Presentations,” *Black Music Research Journal* 34 (Spring 2014): 121-158.

Group 2: Critical response paper

**Recommended:**

Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory* (Routledge, 2005; 1988).

Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the Frenzy of the Visible* (1989)

Jennifer Nash, *The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography* (2014)

Sherri Tucker, *Dance Floor Democracy: The Social Geography of Memory at the Hollywood Canteen* (2014)

**Tuesday, Nov. 24: Culture and Public History**

**TBA**

Group 1 or 2: Critical response paper

- Final essay topics: one paragraph description, bibliography and preliminary thesis (or pre-thesis ideas and questions). Please submit via blackboard.

**Tuesday, Dec. 1: Culture and Institutions**

- Sara Benet Weiser, *Kids Rule!*
- \*Gayle Wald, *It's Been Beautiful* (2015), chapter TBA.

Group 1: Critical response paper

**Recommended:**

Katherine Meizel, *Idoloized: Music, Media and Identity in American Idol* (Indiana, 2011)  
 Janice Peck, *The Age of Oprah: Cultural Icon for a Neoliberal Era* (Paradigm, 2008)  
 Devorah Heitner, *Black Power TV* (2013)

**• MONDAY, DECEMBER 7: 1-pg paper summary, with outline and thesis due (submit via blackboard).**

**Tuesday, Dec. 8: “Stuff,” Events, and Reconsiderations**

• \* Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, et.al, *Tangible Things: Making History Through Objects* (2015), Introduction: “Thinking with Things,” pp. 1-21.

• \*Robin Bernstein, “Dances with Things: Material Culture and the Performance of Race,” *Social Text* (Winter 2009): 67-94.  
<http://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/3659694/Bernstein%20Dances.pdf?sequence=2>

• \* Scott Saul, “What You See Is What You Get”: *Wattstax*, Richard Pryor, and the Secret History of the Black Aesthetic,” *Post45* (2014).  
<http://post45.research.yale.edu/2014/08/what-you-see-is-what-you-get-wattstax-richard-pryor-and-the-secret-history-of-the-black-aesthetic/>

• \* 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: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 3-57.

(EVERYONE must read Bernstein and look back at Cook and Glickman; then choose between Saul and Ulrich as the third reading; each group will present that reading to the group that has not read it.)

Group 2 : Critical response paper

Recommended:

Steven Lubar, ed., *History From Things: Essays on Material Culture* (1995)  
 Jules Prown and Kenneth Haltman, *American Artifacts* (2000)

**Final essay Due: Tuesday, December 15 (via BB)**