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, and we consider debates in (and about) cultural history as an approach and method. We also consider relationships between cultural history, American Studies and cultural studies and the theoretical frameworks that inform these (sometimes) overlapping 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 21. 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 (or a research paper, for those who might choose that route).

• Participation and five sets of discussion questions (20%)
• Five critical response papers, 2 pages each (ungraded: √/√+/√-) (20%)
• One review essay, 5-7 pages (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 those readings that are challenging. 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 two-four suffice). Please post these questions on canvas to the entire class by Monday night at 9 pm. One set of questions is required by September 21; 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 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%)

• Five 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.

• Everyone must write their first response paper, based on any of the readings from the first two weeks of class, by September 14 at the latest. You may submit the other four short response essays at any point, but I encourage you to keep yourselves on an every-other-week schedule.

• These papers are ungraded (check, check+, check-) but are required, and are important building blocks for the review essay and the final essay. You must submit response essays 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 (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 16th 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 they 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:

   **Tuesday, November 9**
   - A more developed description of topic, with an outline and/or a preliminary thesis statement:

   **Tuesday, November 23**
   - Final essay: **Tuesday, December 14**

****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.

**Required books** (also on reserve)

**Recommended books** (We will be reading portions of these books and the required chapters available on Canvas, but you may want to own, especially if you are interested in doing additional work in U.S. Cultural History and/or American Studies and building your own libraries; also available on reserve).
Rizzo, Mary. *Come and Be Shocked: Baltimore Beyond John Waters and the Wire* (Hopkins, 2020)
Plus articles, see links and pdfs on canvas.

You must bring all required readings to class.

**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.

**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.

-- The Office of Disability Services (ODS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter barriers due to disability. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact ODS, register, have an initial appointment, and provide documentation. Once a student has completed the ODS process (registration, initial appointment, and documentation submitted) and reasonable accommodations are determined to be necessary and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be provided to the student. The student must give the LOA to each course instructor, followed by a discussion with the instructor. This should be completed as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found [here](#). Contact ODS: 973-353-5375 or ods@newark.rutgers.edu.

--With regard to religious holidays, students are advised to provide timely notification to instructors 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:

**Tuesday, September 7. 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)


(This article is on canvas, but also see google books for all but the last pages of notes: [http://books.google.com/books?id=Pdl2TZHs69QgC&printsec=frontcover&dq=The+cultural+turn+in+us+history&hl=en&sa=X&ei=H-S5Uo2KEqBkSvmoDoAQ&ved=0CCQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=The%20cultural%20turn%20in%20us%20history&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=Pdl2TZHs69QgC&printsec=frontcover&dq=The+cultural+turn+in+us+history&hl=en&sa=X&ei=H-S5Uo2KEqBkSvmoDoAQ&ved=0CCQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=The%20cultural%20turn%20in%20us%20history&f=false)

**NOTE:** If you cannot get through everything by Sept. 7, please focus on Geertz, “Deep Play,” Cook and Glickman, “Twelve Propositions,” and Hsu “Stuart Hall” (specifically the first few pages). These are the main readings.
Recommended:
(NOTE: This book is an excellent overview of American Studies and interdisciplinary work in general).
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, September 14. Crowds, consumers, and “culture”

- Peiss, Cheap Amusements  (chapters to focus on TBA)
- Hartman, Wayward Lives

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)

Tuesday, September 21. Mass Culture Debates, I: The Frankfurt School and Beyond

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

- Required Film: Modern Times (1936) (available through the Dana Library)
- Lolly Bowean, “Tracing Chicago Origins of 'Something Good,' a Recently Discovered Film Clip Depicting First Onscreen Kiss Between Two African Americans,” Chicago Tribune, December 22, 2018,  

- Required Film: Something Good- Negro Kiss (1898) (see Chicago Tribune article for links)
The Kiss (1896) (see Chicago Tribune article for link)

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

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)
Roland Barthes, “In the Ring,” from Mythologies (o. 1957).

Tuesday September 28: Mass Culture Debates, II: The Frankfurt School and Beyond


• Elizabeth Chin, My Life With Things, selected chapters, TBA.

Recommended:
Dick Hebdige, Subculture: The Meaning of Style (1979)
The Frankfurt School and Critical Theory, Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy
Geoff Dyer, “Raymond Williams was one of the Left’s great thinkers,” New Statesman, March 12, 2015.

Tuesday, October 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/foucaultrepressiveive278.pdf)

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

• MAYBE: Teddy Roosevelt, “The Strenuous Life” (1899).
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)
**Tuesday, October 12: The Birmingham School, I**


- TBA, Nestor Garcia Canclini.

**Recommended:**

**Tuesday, October 19: Birmingham School II: Reception and Black Cultural Studies --the 1980s and After**


- TBA. Readings on Black Panther

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%2 0Blackness.pdf](http://www19.homepage.villanova.edu/silvia.nagyzekmi/postcol/Fanon%20The%20Fact%20of%20Blackness.pdf)

**Recommended:**

**Tuesday, October 26: Affects and Pleasures**


• Melani McAlister, “‘What is Your Heart For?’: Affect and Internationalism in the Evangelical Public Sphere,” *American Literary History* 20 (Winter 2008): 870-895.

**Recommended:**
Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Duke, 2011)
Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake* (Duke, 2016)

**Tuesday, November 2:** The Politics and Culture of Empire, I


**Recommended:**
Donald Pease and Amy Kaplan, eds., *Cultures of U.S. Imperialism* (Duke 1994);

**Tuesday, November 9:** The Politics and Culture of Empire, II

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

• Required film: *The Ten Commandments* (1956)

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

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

**Tuesday, November 16: Culture and Public History**


**Recommended**
Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (California, 1998)


**Tuesday, November 23: No Class**
Final Paper Proposal Due

**Tuesday, November 30: Another Look at Looking**


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


- **Required film**: *Rear Window* (1954)

**Recommended:**

**Tuesday, December 7. Conclusions?**

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