

**History 510:552/American Studies 050:550, American Intellectual and Cultural History**  
***The American Modern and Postmodern***  
**Fall 2015**

Wednesdays 5:30-8:10, Conklin 447

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### **Course Description**

Despite no clear agreement on what they might mean, the words “modern” and “postmodern” are everywhere in scholarly and popular discourse. This reading seminar in intellectual and cultural history will consider various applications of these terms not so much to settle the matter once and for all, but in order to gain greater understanding of their history and the uses (and abuses) to which they have been put, and in order to use them in our own work more deliberately. To that end, this seminar will expose you to a range of primary sources and methods of analysis in cultural history, primarily as it has been practiced in the American context.

### **Required Texts**

These books are available at the campus bookstore in Bradley Hall and for two-hour checkout at the Dana Library reserve desk.

- Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life*
- Marianne DeKoven, *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern*
- John Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*
- Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*
- David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*
- Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*
- Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century*
- Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age*
- Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again*

All other required readings on the syllabus are available as pdfs on our class Blackboard site. Please print them, read them (obviously), effusively mark them up, and bring them to class.

## Requirements

Weekly pithy commentaries (20%): Each week you will write a brief (1-2 page) commentary on the week's reading to hand in during seminar. You should feel free to comment on whatever aspect of the readings most strikes you. I only ask that your commentary be thoughtful, *not be summary*, and that it come out of a desire to construct a *critical understanding* of the text at hand (rather than, say, a desire to simply celebrate or trash it). *You need not submit a pithy commentary on the weeks that you do a presentation or open discussion* (see below).

Presentations (10% each): You will make two brief (circa 10 minute) presentations in this seminar.

- Near the end of the semester, you will make a short (circa 15 minute) presentation about your final essay project. More details will be provided as the time nears.
- For the other "presentation," you will be responsible for getting discussion started on a day of your choosing. How you do this is up to you, and there is a wide range of options, including commenting on the week's readings, working around the table and asking each of your classmates to do so, introducing a relevant primary source, and/or posing thoughtful discussion questions. You'll sign up for this presentation on the first day of class.

Short essay (20% each): You will write a short (6-8 page) essay as a warm-up for your longer seminar essay (see below). You will choose your own cultural text to focus on. It may be something mentioned in one of the readings – and upon which you will expand or of which you will provide an alternative reading – or something you've found on your own. In the essay, you will make an argument about how that text grows out of and engages with its historical context, both in terms of its content and form. The first due date is floating – you can hand in a draft of the essay anytime before October 28 – and early enough in the semester to allow for multiple revisions in response to both my comments and your own continued reading and thinking. The final version of the essay is due no later than November 18.

Long essay (30%): Similar to the short essay, but longer (10-15 pages) and on a second text (or set of texts) of your choosing. Though no formal proposal is required, you should consult with me on your topic as early as possible in the semester, and certainly by the middle of it. The essay is due on December 16, but I am happy to read drafts if submitted at least one week before then.

Participation (10%): This includes basic attendance and punctuality; informed and active participation in class discussions; and holding each other accountable – *in a civil manner* – for the scholarly claims we make.

*Note:* To my mind, more than one unexcused absence from a graduate seminar is cause for concern and constitutes grounds for serious diminution of final grades.

## Course Schedule

Where there are multiple readings, I strongly suggest reading them in the order listed.

- September 2:**            Reading Assignment: Darnton, “Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Séverin”
- September 9:**            Reading Assignment: Barry, “New Historicism” (excerpt); Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*
- September 16:**          Reading Assignment: Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, chapters 1, 2, 8, 15, 16; Wharton, “Xingu”
- September 23:**          Reading Assignment: Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*
- September 30:**          Reading Assignment: Stansell, *American Moderns*
- October 7:**                Reading Assignment: Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes*
- October 14:**              Reading Assignment: Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*
- October 21:**              Reading Assignment: Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, chapters 3, 4, 9, 17, 19-27; Pynchon, “Entropy”
- October 28:**              Reading Assignment: DeKoven, *Utopia Limited*  
**Remember: Last day to submit first draft of short essay!**
- November 4:**             Reading Assignment: Greenberg, “Avant Garde and Kitsch”; Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*
- November 11:**          Reading Assignment: *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth* (film); Jencks, selection from *The Language of Post-modern Architecture*; *Death Wish* (film); Venturi, “A Significance for A&P Parking Lots, or Learning from Las Vegas”
- November 18:**          Reading Assignment: bell hooks, “Postmodern Blackness”; Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (film available online through the Rutgers Libraries)  
**Remember: Absolute last day to submit final draft of short essay!**
- November 25: NO CLASS; THURSDAY CLASSES MEET**
- December 2:**             Reading Assignment: Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*
- December 9:**             Reading Assignment: Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto”; or McAlister, “What Is Your Heart For?”; or Hagood, “Quiet Comfort”; or Bernstein, “Dances With Things”  
**Remember: Last day to submit draft of long essay for my comments!**
- December 16:**          **Long Essay Due**