

University of Missouri-Columbia  
History 4004  
Spring 2008  
T Th 11AM-12:15 PM  
Middlebush 309

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# AMERICAN HISTORY AND AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE



## ***WRITING INTENSIVE***

Through discussions and informal lectures, this course aims to help students become better-informed and more critical consumers of popular culture by situating a selection of important American works and genres within the historical context of their creation, and in the history of American culture. Students will be challenged to look for historical patterns in popular culture and to consider the particular habits of thought and action that American popular culture seems to reinforce. Through multiple writing assignments, they will work towards not just “responding” to popular entertainment, but actively analyzing it. At same time, history majors and other students with a serious interest in history will learn to enrich their research and writing with through the use of sources drawn from popular culture, especially genres and works college students circa 2008 are

unlikely to know well or at all.

The selection will vary from year to year, but the specific works studied will always be drawn from a wide variety of media (including novels, plays, film, TV, music, and comics) and episodically span the whole of American history from the colonial period to the present. This year (2008) we will be spending a lot of time with American popular culture's defining genre, the western, looking at its origins, variations over time, and influence on other genres.

## ASSIGNED TEXTS

### SCHOLARLY BOOKS

Davis, Mike	<i>City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles</i> , new ed. (2006)
Englehardt, Tom	<i>The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation</i> , Revised ed. (2007)
Ray, Robert B.	<i>A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980</i>
Settle, William	<i>Jesse James was His Name. . .</i>
Wright, Bradford	<i>Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture</i>
Wright, Will	<i>Sixguns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western</i>

### NOVELS

Burroughs, Edgar Rice	<i>Tarzan of the Apes</i> and/or <i>A Princess of Mars</i>
Chandler, Raymond	<i>The Big Sleep</i>
Cooper, James Fenimore	<i>The Pioneers</i> and/or <i>The Last of the Mohicans</i>
Miller, Frank	<i>The Dark Knight Returns</i>
Moore, Alan and Dave Gibbons	<i>Watchmen</i>
Wister, Owen	<i>The Virginian</i>

### FILMS

We will be reading about a number of films, seeing a lot of film clips in class, and the largest writing assignment concerns films, but it will be up to students to see many of the films on their own if they are going to get the full benefit of the course. I recommend that everyone sign up for Netflix account for the duration of the semester, as most of the films can be easily obtained on DVD through that channel. I also have copies of some of the key films that I can loan out, while others are available at the MU or Columbia Public Libraries. (Please exhaust the available options before asking to borrow my copies.) If you want to go the traditional video store route, Ninth Street Video downtown is by far the best in terms of carrying many older and classic titles. If there is student interest in group screenings, we may be able to arrange a few, schedules permitting.

## WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

As this is a "Writing Intensive" course, researching, writing, and revising various papers will be the major graded activity. This seems especially appropriate given the fact the purpose of the course is exploring broad cultural patterns and practicing a skill (critically analyzing popular culture) rather than memorizing a mass of factual material.

**DIAGNOSTIC BOOK REPORTS:** For the more complex secondary works on the syllabus,

students will write 1-2-page reports summarizing the approach and primary argument of the book, due on the day we are scheduled to begin discussing each work in class. In 2008, we will follow this procedure for Robert Ray's *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema* and Will Wright's *Six-Guns and Society*, two works whose concepts and methods we will be working with throughout the semester. Students will have the option of revising their reports within three days of the class discussion to reflect anything that was cleared up for them in the class discussion.

**BOOK REVIEW ESSAY:** During the first half of the semester, students will write a 6-8 page analytical review of one novel referenced in the syllabus and at 1-2 others from the same author, genre, or series that is not on the syllabus. The goal is to go beyond the usual approach of student and local newspaper reviewers – summarizing plots and telling readers whether they would enjoy the work in question – and instead place the works they read in historical context and assess the larger cultural significance of the particular form of popular entertainment that they represent.

Revisions will be built into this assignment. About a month into the semester, students will turn in a 3-6 page first draft describing and comparing the setting, plot, characters, and themes of the two novels themselves, appending a statement or outline of their ideas for historicizing the two works. Each student will then meet with the instructor to talk over those ideas, and then have roughly a week to turn in a full draft of the paper for written comments. Students will then have roughly a week after receiving these written comments on their review to revise it with the likely goal of deepening and sharpening their analysis.

**“ZEITGEIST” PAPER:** Each student's major writing project will be a 10-15-page paper analyzing the culture of a particular point in American history, or its “zeitgeist” (a German term meaning the “spirit of the time”) through its popular films. Something similar is done in several of our course readings, especially Will Wright's *Sixguns and Society*. In practical terms, this means that each student will need to watch a number of the top-grossing films from a given year (*at least* 3-5 of the top 20-30 grossers) and relate them in some meaningful way to the political events and social trends and intellectual currents of that era. To ensure that everyone does not crowd into the recent past, students will be randomly assigned a year between 1931 and 2000 to work on. I will help each student locate a sufficient number of appropriate films, and identify the background reading necessary to write intelligently about the period in question. Yearly top grosser lists for 1980 to the present are available at the web site Box Office Mojo [ <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/yearly/> ]. I will provide the top grosser list from *Variety* for students who draw years before 1980.

Like the others, this project will be handled in stages:

1. Early in the semester, each student will submit a filmography and bibliography listing all the material they plan to use in writing their paper.
2. Before Spring Break, each student will write a précis no more than a page long describing the connections they see between the films they have watched and their historical context. After discussing their ideas with the instructor and (possibly) presenting them to the rest of the class, students will then write a full first draft of the whole paper.
3. After receiving written comments on the full first draft, students will have until the last class meeting to complete and edit a final draft.

**INTEGRATIVE ESSAY (Final Examination):** Instead of a traditional final exam, students will write a 6-10-page integrative essay answering a question that will require them to pull together material throughout the semester. The questions will be distributed at least a week in advance and the essays will be due on the last of finals week.

**PAPER POLICIES:** Papers should be double-spaced, with one-inch margins, printed in 12 pt. Times New Roman or a similar proportional font. Textual sources should be properly cited according to the *Chicago Manual of Style* or some other recognized academic format (Turabian, *MLA*, etc.) Films and television shows should be clearly identified in the text of the paper, including year of release, director, and episode title where relevant. The class will develop a citation style for some of the other materials we will be using, such as comic books and electronic versions of old pulp novels, to name two. Late papers will be graded down 10% (one full letter grade) for every weekday they are late. Papers submitted electronically should be in Microsoft Word 2003 or pdf (Adobe Acrobat) format.

## **CLASS PARTICIPATION**

There are no traditional tests in this class. Instead of memorizing names and dates and terms, students are expected to actively participate in each class period. **While I will sometimes lecture informally, discussions will be our primary classroom activity. This means that each student will need to have done at least a significant amount of the reading for each class and be ready to give their opinions and observations about it, while also responding to other students' comments and instructor questions.**

Please try to be substantive in classroom discussions, using concrete examples from the class to make your points. Do not simply give a flat opinion such as "I hated it" or "I agree"; justify your opinion with actual ideas and arguments. Feel free to ask questions about concepts you don't understand, but please understand that blunt expressions of your own ignorance or laziness do not count as "participation" and will certainly hurt your grade. In other words, "I didn't read it" and "I didn't get it" are not really acceptable answers.

Discussion participation will be graded roughly as follows: A = Always or almost always contributes, in a spontaneous and substantive fashion. Responds to other students' remarks and follows up when necessary. B = Almost always or usually contributes, but not always as spontaneously or substantively. C = Usually contributes, but not as often or as fully, or participates well but very infrequently. D = Rarely participates, never fully or responsively. F = Never participates.

**ATTENDANCE** will be taken and included in the final grade, with the final attendance percentage derived from the total number of class periods, minus three to account for any unforeseen issues such as automobile mishaps or work schedule conflicts. Military service, official university business (including inter-collegiate athletic participation), documented student illnesses (or documented serious illnesses or deaths in the student's immediate family), are the only excuses that will garner any additional "free" absences. Please note that, in fairness to other students, such excused absences will still be counted against the three "free" absences.

To ensure that everyone gets proper participation credit, I will be asking a different student each class period to act as participation recorder and note down on the attendance sheet who speaks up in class.

# FINAL GRADES

Class Participation	20%
Attendance	10%
Book reports	5%
“Zeitgeist” paper	30%
Book review essay	15%
Final	20%

**GRADING SCALE** will be on a standard percentage scale, not formally "curved": A=93-100%, A-=90-92%, B+=87-89%, B=83-86%, B-=80-82%, C+=77-79%, C=73-76%, C-=70-72%, D+=67-69%, D=63-66%, D-=60-62%, F=59% or below.

## OFFICIAL NOTICES

### ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

*MU says:*

Academic integrity is fundamental to the activities and principles of a university. All members of the academic community must be confident that each person's work has been responsibly and honorably acquired, developed, and presented. Any effort to gain an advantage not given to all students is dishonest whether or not the effort is successful. The academic community regards breaches of the academic integrity rules as extremely serious matters. Sanctions for such a breach may include academic sanctions from the instructor, including failing the course for any violation, to disciplinary sanctions ranging from probation to expulsion. When in doubt about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quoting, collaboration, or any other form of cheating, consult the course instructor.

*Professor Pasley says:*

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in this course. Any student who cheats on a test or submits written work that is not his or her own ("plagiarism") will fail the course and be reported to the appropriate university authorities. All students are, and should consider themselves, bound by the university regulations on Academic Discipline and Student Conduct that can be found in the "M-Book" at <http://web.missouri.edu/~mbookwww/> . Students should be aware that plagiarism and cheating can take more subtle forms than simply copying another student's paper or a published work verbatim. Paraphrasing, rewriting, or borrowing ideas without giving credit are also considered academic dishonesty. It goes without saying that submitting papers downloaded, purchased, or commissioned over the Internet or through any other means other than composing the text yourself, is strictly forbidden.

Keep in mind that plagiarism is usually very easy to catch. Most college students just do not write as well or in as sophisticated a manner or in the same authoritative, polished style as the professional published authors whose works are typically plagiarized. This is especially true for those students who may be most tempted to plagiarize because of poor writing skills, test performance, or class attendance. Papers and tests that are very dramatically different in style and content from a student's other work, or diverge widely from an assignment or paper proposal without explanation, will be carefully scrutinized. Grades for any suspicious work will be withheld

until a full investigation can be conducted, even if it takes until after the semester is over.

## **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

If you need accommodations because of a disability, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please inform me immediately. Please see me privately after class, or at my office.

Office location: **Read 214A** Office hours: **Fridays, 2-5PM**

To request academic accommodations (for example, a notetaker), students must also register with the Office of Disability Services, (<http://disabilityservices.missouri.edu>), S5 Memorial Union, 882-4696. It is the campus office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students requesting academic accommodations, and for accommodations planning in cooperation with students and instructors, as needed and consistent with course requirements. For other MU resources for students with disabilities, click on "Disability Resources" on the MU homepage.

## **INTELLECTUAL PLURALISM (NEW FROM THE MISSOURI STATE LEGISLATURE)**

The University community welcomes intellectual diversity and respects student rights. Students who have questions concerning the quality of instruction in this class may address concerns to either the Departmental Chair or Divisional leader or Director of the Office of Students Rights and Responsibilities ( <http://osr.missouri.edu/> ). All undergraduate students will have the opportunity to submit an anonymous evaluation of the instructor(s) at the end of the course.

# **TENTATIVE SCHEDULE**

**NOTE:** The reading schedule will be reconfirmed and announced as we go along. Paper due dates will be as below. Readings with the notation “.pdf” will be distributed via students’ university email approximately one week before we use them. We may have to resort to a file sharing service or the university Blackboard service if the files prove too large. Students with poor email connections, such as dependence on dial-up access, can get the materials directly from me if they bring in a CD or a USB storage device (memory stick, keychain drive, etc.)

<b>Week</b>	<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>READING</b>	<b>Movies-of-the-Week*</b>
Jan. 22	Introduction: A Culture Industry?	Recommended: Max Horkheimer & Theodor Adorno, “The Culture Industry,” <a href="http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1944/culture-industry.htm">http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1944/culture-industry.htm</a>	
Jan. 24	Bruce Springsteen & the American Working Class in the Era of Deindustrialization	Jim Cullen, "Bruce Springsteen's Ambiguous Musical Politics in the Reagan Era," <i>Popular Music and Society</i> 16 (1992): 1-22 – pdf or handout Englehardt, <i>The End of Victory Culture</i> , ch. 1	<i>Blue Collar</i> <i>Saturday Night Fever</i> <i>The Deer Hunter</i>
Jan. 29-31	Classic Hollywood Film: Real & Disguised Westerns	Ray, <i>Certain Tendency</i> , Part 1 --1 <sup>st</sup> book report due (1/29)	<i>Shane</i> <i>Casablanca</i> <i>Sergeant York</i> <i>My Darling Clementine</i> <i>Gunfight at the O.K. Corral</i>

Feb. 5-7	Popular Culture and Social History: The Evolution of the Hollywood Western	Wright, <i>Sixguns and Society</i> --2d book report due (2/5)	<i>Dodge City</i> (1939) <i>The Man from Laramie</i> <i>The Professionals</i> <i>The Wild Bunch</i>
Feb. 12-14	The Indian Captivity Narrative and the Origins of American Popular Culture	Rowlandson, <i>Sovereignty and Goodness of God</i> – several versions on Internet Hugh H.Brackenridge, ed., <i>Narratives of a Late Expedition Against the Indians</i> - pdf Roy Harvey Pearce, "The Significances of the Captivity Narrative," <i>American Literature</i> 19 (1947): 1-20 – pdf Englehardt, <i>The End of Victory Culture</i> , ch. 2	<i>Unconquered</i> <i>Black Robe</i> <i>The Searchers</i>
Feb. 19-21	The Emergence of the American Hero	John Filson, <i>The Adventures of Colonel Daniel Boon</i> (1786) - pdf James Fenimore Cooper, <i>The Pioneers</i> and/or <i>Last of the Mohicans</i> John A. Stone, <i>Metamora</i> (play) - pdf	<i>The Last of the Mohicans</i> <i>Northwest Passage</i> <i>Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier</i>
Feb. 21 (Th)	<b>BOOK REVIEW-ESSAYS DUE IN CLASS (first draft)</b>		
Feb. 26-28	Jesse James: From Confederate Raider to Social Bandit and Back	Richard White, "Outlaw Gangs of the Middle Border: American Social Bandits," <i>Western Historical Quarterly</i> 12 (1981): 387-408 - pdf Settle, <i>Jesse James was His Name</i>	<i>Jesse James</i> <i>The Long Riders</i> <i>The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid</i> <i>The Assassination of Jesse James . . .</i>
Feb. 29 (F)	<b>FILMOGRAPHIES/BIBLIOGRAPHIES DUE during office hours – Students also need to meet with instructor about review essays around this time</b>		
March 4-6	Teddy Roosevelt, the End of the Frontier, and the Origin of the Western	Owen Wister, <i>The Virginian</i> and/or Zane Grey, <i>Riders of the Purple Sage</i> (web) Frederick Jackson Turner, <i>The Frontier in American History</i> ( <a href="http://xroads.virginia.edu/~Hyper/TURNER/">http://xroads.virginia.edu/~Hyper/TURNER/</a> ), chap. 1	<i>The Virginian</i> (1929) <i>The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance</i> <i>Ride the High Country</i> <i>Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid</i> <i>The Shootist</i>
Mar, 11-13	The Real Pulp Fiction	Burroughs, <i>Tarzan of the Apes</i> and/or <i>A Princess of Mars</i> John F. Kasson, <i>Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America</i> , chap. 3 – pdf	Any "Tarzan" film
March 13 (Th)	<b>BOOK REVIEW-ESSAYS DUE IN CLASS (final draft)</b>		
March 18-20	Depression, World War, and the Rise of the Superhero	Kenneth Robeson, <i>The Man of Bronze</i> and/or any other "Doc Savage" novel - .pdf [see list & reviews at <a href="http://docsavage.org">http://docsavage.org</a> ] Wright, <i>Comic Book Nation</i> , chaps. 1-3 Englehardt, <i>End of Victory Culture</i> , pp. 16-53 Early Superman & Captain America comics - .pdf (if possible)	Early Fleischer "Superman" cartoons <i>I am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang</i> <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>
March 21 (F)	<b>ZEIGEIST PAPER PRECIS DUE, 5pm by email – earlier is better</b>		

April 1-3	Los Angeles and the Hard-Boiled Detective Story	Chandler, <i>The Big Sleep</i> Davis, <i>City of Quartz</i> , pp. tba	<i>The Big Sleep</i> <i>Farewell, My Lovely</i> <i>Sunset Boulevard</i> <i>Kiss Me Deadly</i> <i>Chinatown</i>
April 8-10	Postwar Anxieties and the Containment of Popular Culture	Ray, <i>Certain Tendency</i> , Part Two Englehardt, <i>End of Victory Culture</i> , pp. 54-171 Wright, <i>Comic Book Nation</i> , chs. 4-6	<i>It's A Wonderful Life</i> <i>She Wore a Yellow Ribbon</i> <i>Fort Apache</i> <i>High Noon</i> <i>Rebel Without a Cause</i> <i>East of Eden</i> <i>The Wild One</i> <i>The Blackboard Jungle</i> <i>Invasion of the Body Snatchers</i> (1956)
April 15-17	Liberal & Radical Popular Culture in the 1960s	Wright, <i>Comic Book Nation</i> , chapters 7 & 8 "Silver Age" comics: <i>Fantastic Four</i> , <i>Silver Surfer</i> , <i>Green Lantern/Green Arrow</i> --.pdf	<i>Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?</i> (1967) <i>In the Heat of the Night</i> <i>The Defiant Ones</i> (1958) <i>Village of the Damned</i> (1960) <i>The Magnificent Seven</i> (1960) <i>The Wild Angels</i> <i>The Battle of Algiers</i> <i>The Chase</i> (1966) <i>If . . . ; Joe</i> <i>Bonnie and Clyde</i>
April 17 (Th)	<b>ZEITGEIST PAPERS FIRST DRAFT DUE by email – earlier is better</b>		
April 22-24	Vietnam and the Temporary Transformation of American Popular Culture	Englehardt, <i>End of Victory Culture</i> , Part IV Ray, <i>Certain Tendency</i> , Part Three	<i>The Long Goodbye</i> (1973) <i>Night Moves</i> <i>Little Big Man</i> <i>Blazing Saddles</i> <i>The Outlaw Josey Wales</i> <i>The Godfather</i> <i>Taxi Driver</i> <i>Rollerball</i> (1975) <i>Apocalypse Now</i> <i>First Blood</i>
Apr. 29-May 1	Reactionary Popular Culture & Reactionary Politics from Nixon to Reagan	Miller, <i>The Dark Knight Returns</i>	<i>Coogan's Bluff</i> <i>Dirty Harry</i> <i>The Exorcist</i> <i>Walking Tall</i> (1973) <i>Death Wish</i> <i>Star Wars</i> (1977) <i>Rambo: First Blood, Part II</i> <i>Red Dawn</i>
May 6-8	The 1980s Cold War and the Deconstruction of the Superhero	Moore & Gibbons, <i>Watchmen</i> Englehardt, <i>End of Victory Culture</i> , Part IV	<i>Robocop</i> <i>Batman</i> (1989) <i>Unbreakable</i>
May 8 (Th)	<b>ZEITGEIST PAPER FINAL DRAFT DUE in class – Final essay question distributed</b>		
May 16(F)	<b>INTEGRATIVE ESSAYS DUE by 10AM in 304 Read Hall or by email</b>		

\* "Movies of the Week": mentioned in the readings, or clips to be shown in class; viewing is recommended but not necessarily required. The lists are subject to change, and very non-comprehensive.