

**AMSt 590: SEMINAR IN AMERICAN STUDIES:  
CULTURAL STUDIES  
FALL 2010 – TUESDAY 1:10-4 P.M. – CUE 218**

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**(E-mail is the preferred method for reaching the professor. It is also the method that will yield the quickest response.)**

**Office Hours: Thursday 12-2 p.m., and by appointment**

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*Culture is on the two or three most complicated words in the English Language*  
**Raymond Williams**

*Cultural hegemony is never about pure victory or pure domination (that's not what the term means); it is never a zero-sum cultural game; it is always about shifting the balance of power in the relations of culture; it is always about changing the dispositions and the configurations of cultural power, not getting out of it.*

**Stuart Hall**

*What remains problematic in this new terrain of cultural studies where identity plays such an important role is the actual process of identity acquisition...As it is used in current cultural discourse it implies a combative sense of self, but one which makes sense in terms of a broader overarching category, such as race or sexuality or, indeed, class. Identity, therefore, is predicated on social identity, on social groups or populations with some sense of a shared experience and history. And yet it is also a category doomed to dispersal and to fragmentation, committed to anti-essentialism, to anti-absolutism.*

**Angela McRobbie**

*Rather than holding knowledge in some kind of correspondence with a self-enclosed objective reality, a critical cultural studies views the production of knowledge in the context of power. The consequences of these moves are: to reshape knowledge according to the strategy of transgression; to define the traditional disciplines as much by their exclusions as by their inclusions; and to reject the distinctions between high and low culture. At issue here are not merely aesthetic standards or how they emerge, but the question of how educators address the relationship between difference and democracy, the creation of social and political spaces that speak to the needs of a broader popular culture.*

**Henry Giroux**

**Course Description:**

This graduate seminar will introduce students to the foundations of and contemporary developments within the field of Cultural Studies. An interdisciplinary field of study, Cultural Studies employs varied methods, approaches, and scholarly perspectives (including: political economy, literary theory, media studies, and cultural anthropology, among others) as a means of critically examining the meaning and practices of everyday life. Specifically, the field is concerned with considering cultural practices and their relationships to power. In this course students will read foundational texts in the field alongside recent texts that expand the field into the 21st century.

**Required Texts:**

- Ien Ang. *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West*
- Chris Barker. *Cultural Studies: Theory & Practice*
- Paul Gilroy. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*
- Lawrence Grossberg, et.al. (eds.). *Cultural Studies*
- Kobena Mercer. *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*
- Toby Miller. *Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitanism, Consumerism, and Television in a Neoliberal Age*
- David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds. *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*
- Jasbir K. Puar. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*
- Raymond Williams. *Culture and Materialism*

These texts are all available at The Bookie and Crimson & Gray. Most are also readily available for order on Amazon. [Note: If you choose to order your books on Amazon please be VERY aware of the date each book is scheduled for discussion in class. An untimely order IS NOT a legitimate excuse for not being prepared for class.]

## **Course Requirements:**

### **• General Requirement**

Students are expected to do all course readings prior to class and come prepared to discuss the readings in depth. Class is run in a seminar-style with the expectation that students will actively engage in and drive the discussions. You can also expect to be called on by me at any time during class.

### **• Attendance**

Though your attendance will not be formally used to calculate your final grade, your attendance at each meeting is required. You need to arrive on time and participate in an informed and consistent manner. Anything less will not be tolerated and will result in problems in this class. Despite not being a formal component of your course evaluation, attendance does have the potential to affect your grade. **You will receive a failing grade in this seminar if you are absent more than three times during the semester.**

No kidding. No exceptions.

### **• Participation (15% of final grade)**

You are expected to be **present intellectually as well as physically** in the classroom. This means that not only must you attend, but that you must endeavor to contribute to the flow and body of the course. You will be expected to prepare carefully for each class by completing the required readings by the day on which they are listed in the course schedule. This course asks you to read texts closely and responsively, and to participate actively in class discussion and debate. If you do not: 1) participate in an informed manner, (in other words, in a way that is not merely personal opinion or conjecture, but rather demonstrates you have both done the reading and critically considered it); or 2) participate at all, your grade will be significantly affected.

### **• Mock Conference Paper/Panel (30% of final grade)**

During the second week of class, students will be randomly put into groups. Each group will be responsible for putting together a mock panel for an imaginary “Cultural Studies conference.” As a group you will come up with a topic and title for the panel and will be responsible for submitting a panel abstract of **250 words** on **Tuesday, September 14**. Each member of the panel will then be responsible for writing an **8-10 page paper** that will be presented on the mock panel on the last day of class. (8-10 written pages = approx. 10-12 presentation minutes. Therefore, students **SHOULD NOT** go over **12 minutes** during their individual presentations.) Individual paper abstracts of **250 words** must be submitted on **Tuesday, October 5**.

On **Tuesday, November 30**, each student will workshop the paper with another student (to be determined in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> week of class) in class. As such, each student will exchange a draft of their panel paper (**which must be AT LEAST 6 pages**) to their workshop partner **NO LATER THAN Tuesday, November 16**. Each student will type their comments about their workshop partner’s paper and bring **TWO** copies of the comment to class on the day of the in-class workshop – one for their workshop partner to keep and use as they finish/revise their paper, and one to turn in with the draft to which it is associated at the end of the workshop day.

Students will be evaluated on: 1) the critical coherence of their panel; 2) their own individual paper, including the ways in which they utilize the feedback from the workshopping; and 3) the quality, criticality, and usefulness of their comments about their partner's paper.

Students' final versions of their papers may be turned in on **December 14 to the professor's mailbox** so that any useful questions or comments from classmates during the presentation may be integrated into the final product. **NO PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED AFTER THIS DATE.**

- **Presentation and short papers (25% of final grade)**

Twice during the semester you will present that week's readings. These presentations should be approximately 15-20 minutes. Your presentation should be directed towards the themes generated by the readings. (This is especially crucial if you are presenting the readings of an edited collection. **DO NOT** go through **EVERY** essay in the collection. Rather, present the themes generated by the project as a whole, using various examples and ideas from specific essays.) Please **DO NOT** summarize the readings, as we all will have read them. Instead, you should be prepared to discuss the theoretical and methodological insights you have gleaned from the readings. You should discuss the possibilities opened up by the readings as well as its problems. Your presentation should act as a catalyst for a larger group discussion. As such, your presentation should conclude with **TWO** questions you want to pose to the group to start discussion.

The 2-3 page paper that accompanies your presentation should be a critical analysis of the readings. These short papers should be critical and reflective of the general ideas presented by the author(s). Discuss the authors' arguments, their limits, their openings, and how they relate to and further the project of examining racial representation in popular and commodity culture.

- **Close Readings (30% of final grade)**

Each student is responsible for turning in **thirteen (13)** close reading essays, or one **EVERY** week, except for the 2 weeks on which you are presenting. The 2-3 page close readings should **FOCUS** on a specific idea or passage from each week's reading. (If we are reading a collection for a particular week, focus your paper on **ONE** essay only.) Pull out a passage or idea from a reading that you find intriguing or provocative. A close reading examines the passage at a level of sentences, phrases and words and from there examines the implications of the essay's argument in relation to larger theoretical claims. You can use this as a way to engage a specific topic in relation to your own work or in relation to a topic we have dealt with in class.

## **Policies:**

### ***Written Work***

- Written work to be graded should be typed using a 12-point font, double-spaced (unless otherwise specified), spell checked, and proofread.
- **I DO NOT ACCEPT ANY ASSIGNMENTS VIA E-MAIL. NO EXCEPTIONS.**

### ***Late Assignments***

No late assignments will be accepted except in the case of a **documented** emergency, a **documented** university sponsored event, or a **documented** observance of a religious holiday.

### ***Incompletes***

I reserve “Incompletes” **ONLY** for students who are on their deathbeds or are experiencing a comparable catastrophic event. Everyone else will receive a grade in my class. **NO EXCEPTIONS.**

### ***Cell Phones and other communication devices***

Below you will find my standard policy on cell phones, etc. that I require in all of my undergraduate courses. I am easily annoyed by ringing cell phones in the classroom, more so in a class as small as ours. So please read my policy and turn everything off before entering the classroom. The only exception I make is for people with small children. You are allowed to have your device on, but please set it to vibrate and please attend to any phone calls that necessitate your attention by stepping outside of class.

“Turn your cell phones and communication devices off before coming to class, (this includes ANY electronic device that can be used to communicate with the world outside our classroom). The world will survive without being able to reach you for an hour and fifteen minutes. If, for some reason I cannot imagine at this point, you forget to turn off your device, and it goes off, you will, first, and foremost, really aggravate me. (This is never a good thing to do to your professor.) Secondly, you will be faced with a decision. You may: 1) turn it off immediately, or 2) hand it to me and let me answer it. You will take full responsibility for what happens when/if you allow me to answer your phone. If your device goes off more than once during the semester, I will deduct points (at my discretion and without notifying you) from your attendance and participation points.”

Additionally, I am even more easily annoyed by texting in class. As stated above all electronic devices should be turned off, but if you choose to try to ignore that rule and are discovered texting in class **you will be marked absent for the day. Don't text in class.**

### ***Communicating in the classroom***

While it is obvious that we should avoid abusive and hateful speech, given that we must deal with plenty of that everywhere else, I also want to encourage you to exercise your academic freedoms in thoughtful, intellectually honest discourse. So, speak your mind. Just remember as you do so, people can disagree without being disrespectful.

### ***Plagiarism***

Really? I would hope that in a graduate seminar I would not have to remind people that academic dishonesty of any sort, particularly plagiarism, will NOT be tolerated. The penalty for academic dishonesty is at the professor's discretion. In the case of my graduate seminars, if any academic dishonesty is discovered it will result in an automatic "F" in the course. No discussion. Period. Accordingly, make sure you are familiar with the university's policies on plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty so you are well informed as to what constitutes a violation. Finally, be aware that plagiarism includes not providing proper citation for ANY work including information found on any website, book, pamphlet, etc., as well as copying in full or part someone else's work, (including fellow students AND yourself from a previous essay or project without proper citation.).

### ***Grade Problems***

During the semester use my office hours to talk to me about any problems you are having with your progress and/or evaluations for the course so we can try to fix any bad situation **early**, before it's too late. You must communicate any problems you may be having that are affecting your coursework early on so that I am aware of the situation as I continue to evaluate your work. Any explanations for poor performance, relevant or not, will not be accepted at the end of the semester and will have no effect on your final grade. Please do not come to ask me to change your grade after you have failed the course. Also, do not come to ask me to give you an "I" because you are failing or have failed the course.

### ***Disability Accommodation***

Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and may need accommodations to fully participate in this class, please visit the Disability Resource Center (DRC). All accommodations **MUST** be approved through the DRC (Washington Building, Room 217). Please stop by or call 509-335-3417 to make an appointment with a disability specialist. Please notify me during the first week of class of any accommodations needed for the course.

### ***Campus Safety***

In the interest of campus safety and emergency procedures, please become familiar with the information available on the WSU-provided websites.

<http://safetyplan.wsu.edu> Campus Safety Plan

<http://oem.wsu.edu/emergencies> Emergency management web site

<http://alert.wsu.edu> WSU Alert site

**[Your continued enrollment in this course after the first week means that you have read and understand the information contained within this syllabus, and that you agree to follow the procedures and rules explained within it.]**

• **Grade Breakdown:**

By Grade Point:

**A = 4.0**

**A- = 3.8**

**B+ = 3.5**

**B = 3.0**

**B- = 2.8**

**C+ = 2.5**

**C = 2.0**

**C- = 1.8**

**D+ = 1.5**

**D = 1.0**

By 100 Point Grading Scale:

**94-100 = A**

**90-93 = A-**

**87-89 = B+**

**83-86 = B**

**80-82 = B-**

**77-79 = C+**

**73-76 = C**

**70-72 = C-**

**67-69 = D+**

**63-66 = D**

**60-62 = D-**

**0-59 = F**

## **CLASS SCHEDULE**

[Schedule subject to change. Any modifications will be announced in class.]

Tuesday, August 24:

- **Introductions**
- **[Sign-up for presentations]**

Tuesday, August 31:

***Cultural Studies: Theory & Practice* – Chris Barker**

- **Foreword, Chapters 1-7**

Tuesday, September 7:

***Cultural Studies: Theory & Practice* – Chris Barker**

- **Chapters 8-14**

Tuesday, September 14:

***Culture and Materialism* – Raymond Williams**

**[PANEL ABSTRACT DUE IN CLASS]**

Tuesday, September 21:

***Cultural Studies* – Grossberg, et. al. (eds.)**

- **Preface, Chapters 1, 3-8, 10-13, 15, 18-19**

Tuesday, September 28:

***Cultural Studies* – Grossberg, et. al. (eds.)**

- **Chapters 20-21, 23, 25-26, 28-29, 33, 35-38, 40**

Tuesday, October 5:

***Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* – Morley and Chen (eds.)**

- **pp. 1-261**

**[INDIVIDUAL PAPER ABSTRACT DUE IN CLASS]**

Tuesday, October 12:

***Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* – Morley and Chen (eds.)**

- **pp. 262-503**

Tuesday, October 19:

***The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* – Paul Gilroy**

Tuesday, October 26:

***On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West* – Ien Ang**

Tuesday, November 2:

*Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* – Kobena Mercer  
• Introduction, Chapters 1-4

Tuesday, November 9:

*Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* – Kobena Mercer  
• Chapters 5-10

Tuesday, November 16:

*Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitanism, Consumerism, and Television in a Neoliberal Age* – Toby Miller

Tuesday, November 23:

**THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASS**

Tuesday, November 30:

*Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* – Jasbir K. Puar

Tuesday, December 7: **Panel Presentations**