

**AMST 524: CRITICAL STUDIES IN POPULAR CULTURE  
FALL 2015 – WEDNESDAYS 1:10–4:10 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: Wednesdays 10 a.m.-12 p.m., and by appointment

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*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

*The culture industry not so much adapts to the reactions of its customers as it counterfeits them.*

Theodor Adorno

*Culture relates to objects and is a phenomenon of the world; entertainment relates to people and is a phenomenon of life.*

Hannah Arendt

*The standardization of world culture, with local popular or traditional forms driven out or dumbed down to make way for American television, American music, food, clothes and films, has been seen by many as the very heart of globalization.*

Fredric Jameson

*All over the place, from the popular culture to the propaganda system, there is constant pressure to make people feel that they are helpless, that the only role they can have is to ratify decisions and to consume.*

Noam Chomsky

**Course Description:**

This graduate seminar will introduce students to the foundations of and contemporary developments within the field of pop culture studies. An interdisciplinary field of

study, pop culture 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 popular culture. In this course students will read foundational texts in the field alongside recent texts that expand the field into the 21st century. Our examination will be the relationship between the systems of commodification, capitalism, entertainment, race/class/gender/sexuality, and identity formation. In other words, we will not be arguing the merit of “Good” or “Bad” examples of popular culture, but rather: “How are popular culture trends and representations in popular culture constructed, both materially and ideologically?” “How does popular culture operate in service to various demands including those of individuals, of communities, of market economies, and of empire building?” “And how do we, as simultaneous members of myriad communities including: scholarly, racial, gender, class, sexual, American, Western, and global, negotiate our relationship to popular culture, pop culture representations, their histories, and their social, political, economic, and ideological impact?”

**Required Texts (listed alphabetically by author):**

1. Jean Baudrillard. The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures
2. Lane Crothers. Globalization and American Popular Culture
3. Gail Dines. Pornland: How Porn has Hijacked our Sexuality
4. Christian Fuchs. Social Media: A Critical Introduction
5. Raiford A. Guins and Omarya Zaragoza Cruz (eds.). Popular Culture: A Reader
6. Andrew Hartman. A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars
7. Janell Hobson. Body as Evidence: Mediating Race, Globalizing Gender
8. Nadine Hubbs. Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music
9. Richard Iton. In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era
10. John Storey. Inventing Popular Culture: From Folklore to Globalization

**These texts are all available at The Bookie and Crimson & Gray. Most are also readily available for order online, and as e-books. [Note: If you choose to order your books on online 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.]**

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

- (1) Improve students’ fluency in critically engaging theoretical work.
- (2) Introduce students to foundational texts in popular culture studies.
- (3) Increase students’ knowledge of theoretical and methodological models in popular culture studies.
- (4) Familiarize students with current trends, developments, and topics in popular culture studies.
- (5) Develop students’ writing in a critically theoretical manner and in a variety of academic and scholarly forms.

### **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.

#### **• Participation (20% 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.

#### **• Material case presentations (20% of final grade)**

Each student will write an 8-page essay and give a **twelve (12)** minute presentation examining the critical implications and the popular/commodified materiality of a **singular** pop culture object, trend, narrative, project, etc. You will have twelve minutes to present your material case. Be precise. Present a critical analysis/argument regarding your chosen case, as well as provide concrete examples. Make sure to discuss the **IMPLICATIONS** of your material case for the larger consideration of popular culture studies. Use the readings we have done to date to inform your analysis/argument. You should time yourself prior to class, as I will hold you to the time limit. This is good practice for conference presentations.

Keep in mind that this is a scholarly/intellectual exercise demonstrating your ability to apply popular culture theories/methodologies to a singular case study. As such, the focus of this assignment **SHOULD NOT** be the same or connected to the topic of your final paper.

**[Note: Your presentation should NOT be a straightforward reading of your essay. It should be a presentation that engages the audience and emphasizes your main points. Using various forms of media examples is encouraged.]**

#### **• Facilitation (20% of final grade)**

**One time** during the semester you will present that week's readings. These presentations should be approximately 20-25 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 **ONE** question you want to pose to the group to start discussion.

Additionally, you are responsible for writing a 2-3 page paper that accompanies your presentation. This brief paper should be a critical analysis of the readings. They 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 other broader topics in popular culture studies.

**On the days that you are not presenting on the day's reading you are responsible for bringing ONE discussion question to be used in the class discussion. Your question should be typed and will be turned in at the beginning of class.**

**[You will be randomly assigned to your facilitation date/text during the first class meeting.]**

- **Close Reading Passages (10% of final grade)**

Each week students will be responsible for choosing a passage from the day's assigned reading. Pull out a passage from a reading that you find intriguing or provocative. The passage should be **NO LESS THAN FOUR (4)** sentences long and **NO LONGER THAN TEN (10)** sentences long, and should be typed on an 8 ½ x 11 in. sheet of paper.

During class, you will exchange your passage with a fellow classmate, and you will then spend 10-15 minutes doing a close reading of the passage. A close reading examines the passage at a level of sentences, phrases and words and from there examines the implications of the passage's argument in relation to larger theoretical claims both within the day's reading and the discipline of popular culture studies. 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.

Every passage you submit should include the following heading in the upper left corner:

**Your name**

**The date**

**The book title and author**  
**The pages of your chosen passage**

• **Final Paper (30% of final grade)**

Your final paper should be an article-length (i.e. 15-20 pages) analysis of an aspect of popular culture studies discussed during the semester. While your final paper must focus on popular culture studies, it is advisable that you choose a topic/aspect that can be useful toward distilling ideas/chapters of your future dissertation or thesis.

**Final Paper is due on Thursday, December 17, 2015 by 4 p.m. to my mailbox in Wilson 111.**

**Course 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.**

***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***

Students with Disabilities: Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and need accommodations to fully participate in this class, please either visit or call the Access Center (Washington Building 217; 509-335-3417) to schedule an appointment with an Access Advisor. All accommodations **MUST** be approved through the Access Center. Please notify me during the first week of class of any approved accommodations needed for the course.

### ***Campus Safety***

Washington State University is committed to maintaining a safe environment for its faculty, staff, and students. Safety is the responsibility of every member of the campus community and individuals should know the appropriate actions to take when an emergency arises. In support of our commitment to the safety of the campus community the University has developed a Campus Safety Plan, <http://safetyplan.wsu.edu>. It is highly recommended that you visit this web site as well as the University emergency management web site at <http://oem.wsu.edu/> to become familiar with the information provided.

**[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**

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+**

D = 1.0  
F=0

63-66 = D  
60-62 = D-  
0-59 = F

### CLASS SCHEDULE

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

Wednesday, August 26:

**Introductions**

[Facilitation assignments]

Wednesday, September 2:

*Inventing Popular Culture: From Folklore to Globalization* – John Storey

Wednesday, September 9:

*Popular Culture: A Reader* – Raiford A. Guins and Omayra Zaragosa Cruz (eds.) (Sections I and II in their entirety; Chapters 15, 18, 19, 20, and 21)

Wednesday, September 16:

*Popular Culture: A Reader* – Raiford A. Guins and Omayra Zaragosa Cruz (eds.) (Section VI in its entirety; Chapters 24, 26, 35, 38, 39, and 40)

Wednesday, September 23:

*The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* – Jean Baudrillard

Wednesday, September 30:

*In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era* – Richard Iton

Wednesday, October 7:

**NO CLASS**

Wednesday, October 14:

*Body as Evidence: Mediating Race, Globalizing Gender* – Janell Hobson

Wednesday, October 21:

*Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music* – Nadine Hubbs

Wednesday, October 28:

*Pornland: How Porn has Hijacked Our Sexuality* – Gail Dines

Wednesday, November 4:

*A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* – Andrew Hartman

Wednesday, November 11:

***NO CLASS – Veteran’s Day holiday***

Wednesday, November 18:

**Material case presentations**

Wednesday, November 25:

***NO CLASS – Thanksgiving break***

Wednesday, December 2:

***Globalization and American Popular Culture* -- Lane Crothers**

Wednesday, December 9:

***Social Media: A Critical Introduction* – Christian Fuchs**

**Thursday, December 17, 2015**

**Final paper due in professor’s mailbox in Wilson 111 by 4 p.m.**

**(No assignments accepted via e-mail. No late papers will be accepted. No exceptions.)**