

# **HIST 3110 T03: Topics in History: American popular culture from vaudeville to hip hop**

Winter 2016

Instructor: George Buri

Room: Tier 313

Time: MWF 1:30-2:30

**Office Hours:** I will be in my office (University College 343) Monday and Wednesday from 2:30 to 3:30. If this is not convenient we can set up another time for a meeting. You can also email me: [george.buri@umanitoba.ca](mailto:george.buri@umanitoba.ca)

**Objectives:** This course will consist of an exploration of American popular culture from the rise of mass amusement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century to the present day. It will include the study of amusement parks and dance halls, theatre, music, comic books, film, television and sport. In addition to examining the process of cultural change, we will explore how cultural texts can be used to analyze issues of class, gender, race, politics, nationalism and imperialism within American history. We will also address issues of authenticity, commercialism, celebrity culture and impact of mass media on American society.

## **Required Readings:**

John F. Kasson. *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century*

David Hajdu, *The Ten Cent Plague: The Great Comic Book Scare and How it Changed America*

Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation*

Books are available in the Bookstore. Other readings are available online through UM Learn

## **Assignments:**

1. Historiographical Essay = 30% (Due Mar 30)
2. Research Essay = 30% (Due Feb 22)
3. Class Participation = 10%
4. Final Exam = 30%

All assignments are to be typed, double spaced and in 12 point font with standard margins etc. Citations should be in the form of footnotes or endnotes that follow Chicago Style as per history department guidelines. Parenthetical citation is not acceptable.

**Research Essay:** The research essay is to be 10-12 pages (2500-3000 words) in length and on a topic of the student's own choice. Topics must be approved by myself at least two weeks in advance of the due date in order to ensure suitability. The research presented in this essay will come from secondary sources as well as from at least one primary source. Primary sources can include film, television, music, or other cultural documents.

**Historical Debate Essay:** Three books are assigned as required reading for this course. You are to write an essay that analyzes these works in terms of how they contribute to the field of history of popular culture in the United States. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each book as well as how they compare to each other and how they collectively constitute a field of history. This paper should be 8-10 pages (2000-2500 words) in length.

**Class Participation:** Student are expected to come to every class prepared to discuss the required readings for that day (see the class schedule). The quality and quantity of participation in group and class discussions will be taken into consideration for this portion of the mark.

**Final Exam:** The exam will consist of two essay questions in which you will be required to develop and argue a thesis using the information learned in this course. A list of potential essay questions will be distributed prior to exam. Exam questions will be based both upon lectures and required readings so it is important that you read everything you are assigned.

*Uncollected term work will become the property of the Faculty of Arts and will be subject to confidential destruction.*

*Students who wish to appeal a grade given for term work must do so within 10 working days after the grade for the term work has been made available to them.*

**Late policy:** You will lose one grade for every class that your assignment is late. If you cannot hand your assignment to me in person it may be dropped off at the history office. No work can be accepted after the last day of term.

Deadlines are flexible if you ask for an extension IN ADVANCE

If you are experiencing problems with the workload in this or a combination of courses please come to see me and we can work something out. Please come see me beforehand rather than not handing anything in and then coming to see me afterward.

Revised papers will not be accepted for further evaluation during the course period.

**Academic Integrity:** *The common penalty in Arts for plagiarism on a written assignment is a grade of F on the paper and a final grade of F (DISC) (for Disciplinary Action) for the course. For the most serious acts of plagiarism, such as purchase of an essay and repeat violations, this penalty can also include suspension for a period of up to five (5) years from registration in courses taught in a particular department/program in Arts or from all courses taught in this Faculty.*

*The Faculty also reserves the right to submit student work that is suspected of being plagiarized to Internet sites designed to detect plagiarism or to other experts for authentication.*

*The common penalty in Arts for academic dishonesty on a test or examination is F for the paper, F (DISC) for the course, and a one-year suspension from courses acceptable for credit in the Faculty. For more serious acts of academic dishonesty on a test or examination, such as repeat violations, this penalty can also include suspension for a period of up to five years from registration in courses taught in a particular department or program in Arts or from all courses taught in or accepted for credit by this Faculty.*

**The Voluntary Withdrawal Date:** is March 18 and evaluation of term work will be provided before then

**Marking:** Letter grades correspond to number grades as follows: I will exclusively use letter grades in marking your assignments. The goal of this course should be to improve your skills, rather than to achieve any specific grade. Thus my comments on your assignments are far more important than the specific grade given. Please read comments carefully.

A+ = 90-100  
A = 80-89  
B+ = 75-79  
B = 70-74  
C+ = 65-69  
C = 60-64  
D = 50-59  
F = below 50

**ClassSchedule:** Seminar and Due Dates in **Bold**

Week One: Course Introduction  
Jan. 6: Intro to course

Week Two: Popular Culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century  
Jan 8, 11: Class and Culture  
Jan 13: **Seminar: High and Low Cultures and Theories of Culture, Dwight McDonald, “A Theory of Mass Culture”**  
Jan15: Minstrel shows, Race and Culture

Week Three: Culture in the Progressive Era  
Jan 18: Working Class Leisure and the Culture of the Labor Movement  
Jan 20: Vaudeville and Ragtime  
Jan 22: **Seminar: Kason, *Amusing the Million***

Week Four: Culture in the Progressive Era II  
Jan 25: The 1892 Colombian Exhibition  
Jan 27: Sport: Gender, Class and Professionalism  
Jan 29: Leisure and Middle Class efforts at reform

Week Five: The 1920s and Modernism  
Feb 1, 3: The Jazz Age: Music, dancing and mass consumerism  
Feb 5: **Seminar: Erenberg, *Steppin' Out* (selection)**

Week Six: The Movies  
Feb 8: Origins and Growth of Cinema  
Feb 10: Hollywood in the Silent and early Talkie Era  
Feb 12: Seminar: **Lipsitz, *Time Passages* (selection)**

**Feb 15-19: NO CLASS MID TERM BREAK**

Week Seven: The Great Depression  
Feb 22: Folk Music and the Dust Bowl  
**Research Essay Due Today**  
Feb 24: New Deal Culture  
Feb 26: **Seminar: Denning: *The Cultural Front* (selection)**

Week Eight: World War II, Cold War and Culture

Feb 29: World War II Culture

Mar 2: Cold War Culture: Witch hunts, anticommunism and Vietnam

Mar 4: **Seminar: Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture (selection)***

Week Nine: 1950s Culture

Mar 7: Early Television, Family and Gender

Mar 9: Rock and Roll and the Teenager

Mar 11: **Seminar: David Hadju, *The Ten Cent Plague***

Week Ten: Sixties Counter-Culture I:

Mar 14: Early Counterculture: The Beats

Mar 16: The Folk Revival

Mar 18: Drug Culture, Hippies and San Francisco

Week Eleven: Counter-Culture and its influence

Mar 21: Counterculture and Race: Black Is Beautiful

Mar 23: **Seminar: Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop***

Mar 25: Counterculture, “sexual revolution” and Gender

Week Twelve: The 1970s and 1980s

Mar 28: The legacy of the Counterculture in Film and TV

Mar 30: Disco, Corporate Culture and the 1980s

**Historiographical Paper Due Today**

Apr 1: Bruce Springsteen and the Culture of Economic Decline

Week Thirteen: American Culture from the 1990s to Present

Apr 4: The Culture of Irony: The Simpsons and Grunge

Apr 6: **Seminar: Irony and Camp. Susan Sontag, “Notes on Camp”, Bruce LaBruce, “Notes on Camp Anti-Camp”**

Apr 8: Niche culture, consumer culture and Neo-liberalism