|  |
| --- |
| AMST3423: American Popular Culture Fall 2009  **Professor Stacy Takacs**  Office: Main Hall 2221  Office Hours: M,T, & R, 2-4:00 pm  Email: stacy.takacs@okstate.edu  Phone: 918-594-8331  OSU American Studies Website  <http://amst.okstate.edu/index.php>  Also, catch us on Facebook. Search for American Studies Oklahoma State University. |

**Course Description:**

|  |
| --- |
| When we speak of "popular culture" what exactly are we talking about? How does it relate to "mass culture," "folk culture," or "high culture"? Is something "popular culture" merely because it is consumed in large quantities, or does the label "popular" refer to a particular style of production, reception, or participation? This course will assume a critical stance toward American popular culture asking about the origins of both the category and the media that convey it. We will begin by surveying the emergence and democratization of "leisure time" in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As wages rose and work hours diminished, what sorts of "amusements" were available to fill this "leisure time," who took advantage of these amusements, and how did they do so? Once the historical foundation is established, we will investigate contemporary examples of popular culture with an emphasis on what people *do* with cultural "texts" (loosely defined). Topics will include: fan culture (Elvis), comic books/graphic novels (*Superman, Batman, Spiderman, Watchmen*)and film (*Watchmen,* blockbuster economics). The course will be reading and writing intensive, but you will have a lot of opportunity to research your own interests in popular culture.  Evaluation will be based on 3 short (2-3 pp) analytical response papers, one longer (5-6 pp) analytical research paper, and two exams. |

**Texts:**

|  |
| --- |
| * David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*; * Erika Doss, *Elvis Culture* * Alan Moore, *Watchmen* * A selection of readings available in the "Readings" Folder of the Desire2Learn site for this course (https://oc.okstate.edu) |

**Policies:**

|  |
| --- |
| **Participation:** Students are expected to attend every class and participate actively in class discussions, both real and virtual. Participation determines borderline grades and eligibility for extra credit!  **Excessive absence** may result in a failing grade for the course. Absences will be excused only for dire illness and family emergency, both of which must be substantiated by documentation (a Dr's note, a funeral notice, etc.). If you accumulate more than one unexcused absence, you forfeit the right to earn extra-credit points.  **Active participation** means:   * You will have read the materials and completed any writing assignments, including on-line assignments, *before* you arrive in class. * You will bring the day’s reading materials with you to class so that you may refer to them. * You will engage with and respond to your peers during both large and small group discussions and during on-line assignments. * You will listen attentively to every speaker and respond respectfully to the ideas of others both in class and in the virtual venue (about which, see below). * You will exhibit a deliberate effort to apply, extend, and challenge concepts that we generate in class. * You will demonstrate your curiosity and willingness to ask questions, advance comparisons, and make observations.   **Short Analytical Essays:** You will complete three 2-3 page analytical writing assignments related to primary sources assigned for this class. You will have four chances to complete this assignment, which means you can skip one of the essays. Each essay will call for you to critically examine a primary source text in relation to the historical and theoretical readings assigned in the course. For example, the first assignment will ask you to attend a performance of *The Drunkard* at the Tulsa Spotlight Theatre and discuss how the play, its presentation, and reception by the audience illustrates certain aspects of the early American theatre-going experience. Others will focus on the film *Birth of a Nation*, an Elvis film, and superhero comics. See the ASSIGNMENTS folder on the D2L for full details.  **Longer Analytical Essay:** You will research and present an in-depth analysis of a form of contemporary popular culture of your choosing. You may focus on any text, phenomenon, or practice as long as it fulfills two requirements: (1) it is contemporary (from the 2000s forward) and (2) it is analyzed in relation to US cultural circulation and reception (this is a course in American Studies, after all). So, for example, you could look at recent Japanese horror films, but only in relation to how they circulate in or are received/remade in the US context. You will be given a series of broad questions/topics to help you focus your analysis. Essays should be 5-6 pages in length. See the ASSIGNMENTS folder on the D2L for full details.  **Exams:** There will be one mid-term and one final exam in this class. The exams will consist of identifications, short-answer responses, and/or essay questions and will cover the course readings, lectures, media, and discussions in equal measure. Check the course schedule to determine the exam dates. There will be a study guide offered for each exam; it behooves you to use these. *Make-up exams will be given only in cases of documented emergency and only if I am notified of said emergency well before the scheduled date and time of the exam.* If you contact me after you miss an exam, I will be unable to help you, and you will receive a grade of zero. The exams will be worth 250 points each, and together will comprise 50% of your course grade.  **Academic Honesty:** **All work you turn in for this class must be your own work.** Incidents of plagiarism—including the failure to cite your sources properly—will result in a **failing grade for the assignment**. Any more egregious violation (turning in someone else's paper as your own, copying content from the internet, or cheating during an exam, for example) will result in a **failing grade for the course**. Consult [OSU’s Office of Academic Affairs](http://academicintegrity.okstate.edu/) for more information on the University's new, more stringent Academic Integrity policy.  **Special Needs and Disabilities:** Please feel free to contact me with any special needs that you may have related to a physical or mental disability; I’ll be happy to work with you to accommodate your needs. NOTE: If you have a disability, physical or otherwise, you must register with the appropriate liaison in the Student Disability Services Office (103 North Hall;918-594-8354) |

**Grading:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Short Essay 1 | 10% | (100 points) | A=90-100% |
| Short Essay 2 | 10% | (100 points) | B=80-89% |
| Short Essay 3 | 10% | (100 points) | C=70-79% |
| Longer Essay | 20% | (200 points) | D=60-69% |
| Midterm Exam | 25% | (250 points) | F=59% or less |
| Final Exam | 25% | (250 points) |  |
| Total | 100% | (1000 points) |  |

**Schedule:**

Readings marked with an Asterisk (\*) are available in the "Readings" section of the D2L website (https://oc.okstate.edu)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **8/18**  **Read:** | **The History of Popular Entertainment I: Early American Theatre**  Nasaw, *Going Out* (Chaps 1-4, pp. 1-46) |
| **8/25**  **Read:** | **The History of Popular Entertainment II: Fairs and Other Spectacles** Nasaw, *Going Out* (Chaps 5-9, pp. 47-119) |
| **9/1**  **Read:** | **The History of Popular Entertainment III: Picture Shows**  Nasaw, *Going Out* (Chaps 10-14, pp. 120-204)  **Screening:** Samples of early cinema: actualités, spectacles, & early narrative forms  **DUE: Short Essay Option #1**  **2-3 page analysis of *The Drunkard*, or another 19th C. "melodrama** |
| **9/8 Read:** | **The History of Popular Entertainment IV: Emergence of New Modes of Leisure**  Nasaw, *Going Out* (Chaps 15-17, pp. 205-256) |
| **9/15**  **Read:** | **Culture and Social Identity: Race in Popular Culture**  \*Stuart Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media"  ***Screening: Ethnic Notions, Birth of a Nation;* "Race Films"** |
| **9/22**  **Read:** | **Can Mass Culture Be "Popular" Culture: The Question of Consumption**  \*John Fiske. "Commodities and Culture." **\*Lawrence Levine, "The Folklore of Industrial Culture"** \*T.J. Jackson Lears, “Making Fun of Popular Culture”  ***Screening:*** *Barbie Nation*  **DUE: Short Essay Option #2**  **2-3 Page analysis of *Birth of a Nation*** |
| **9/29** | **Midterm Exam** |
| **10/6**  **Read:** | **Fan Culture I: How and Why Elvis Lives**  Doss, *Elvis Culture* (Chaps. 1-2, pp. 1-68) |
| **10/13**  **Read:** | **Fan Culture II: Elvis Worship and Gender Ideologies**  Doss, *Elvis Culture* (Chaps. 3-4, pp. 69-162)  **Screening:** *Girls, Girls, Girls* or other Elvis film |
| **10/20**  **Read:** | **Fan Culture III: Elvis, Race and Economics**  Doss, *Elvis Culture* (Chap. 5-7, pp. 163-260)  **DUE: Short Essay Option #3**  **2-3 page analysis of an Elvis film of your choice** |
| **10/27** **Read:** | **Understanding Comics I: Aesthetics of Graphic Literature**  \*Rocco Versaci, "Why Comics?"  \*Scott McCloud, selection from *Understanding Comics* |
| **11/3**  **Read:** | **Understanding Comics II: History and Culture of Comics**  \*Matthew Putsz, “Comics Literacy”  Selections from the following comics (all available on D2L):   * Siegel & Shuster, *Superman* * Kane & Finger, *The Bat-Man* * Lee & Ditko, *Spiderman* * Kirby, Lee, & Ditko, *Fantastic Four*   **DUE: Short Essay Option #4**  **2-3 page analysis that compares the aesthetic style of TWO of the comics assigned for today (*Superman, Bat-Man, Spiderman, Wonder Woman*)** |
| **11/10**  **Read:** | ***Watchmen* and ComicsCulture**  \*Douglas Wolk, “Watchmen: What Makes the World Tick?”  Moore, *Watchmen* (1-4) |
| **11/17**  **Read:** | Moore, *Watchmen* (5-8) |
| **11/24**  **Read:** | **Moore, *Watchmen* (Chaps. 9-12)**  **Screening:** *The Watchmen*  **DUE: 5-6 page Research Essay** |
| **12/1**  **Read:** | **Comics to Film: Blockbuster Production, Aesthetics, and Fan Culture**  \*M. McCallister, I. Gordon, & M. Jancovich, “Blockbuster Meets Super Hero Comics”  **Screening:** *The Watchmen* |