HIST 4820: History of U.S. Popular Culture  
Spring 2017  Professor Chris Endy

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 4:30 to 5:45 pm  
Classroom: King Hall B2008  
Instructor’s Office: King Hall C4076A  
Email: cendy@calstatela.edu  
Office phone: 323-343-2046  
Office hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 3:00-4:25 and 5:50-6:10  
-No appointment needed for office hours! I can also meet other times by appt.  
My web page: http://www.calstatela.edu/faculty/christopher- endy  
-My site contains syllabus, survival advice for college students, links, and more.

This course is designed to provide history students (advanced undergraduate and graduate level) the opportunity to read, view, discuss, and write about the history of U.S. popular culture. Key questions that we will explore include:

1. How do we know what “popular culture” is? What do we mean when we talk about popular culture (vs. folk, mass, or high culture)? What interests or ideologies are served when people attach labels like these to cultural life?

2. Who has controlled the creation and reception of popular culture?

3. To what extent has popular culture brought liberation for average people? To what extent has it brought social or cultural control by reinforcing stereotypes or dominant values?

4. Has popular commercial entertainment brought true happiness, or has it mainly offered false, empty pleasures?

5. How have movies, songs, novels, and other popular culture artifacts reflected (or distorted) broader historical issues such as changing gender and race relations or evolving definitions of class and nationality?

6. How “American” has American pop culture been, both within the United States and around the world? What historical forces have driven the globalization of culture?

Required Books:


-We will also have numerous readings available via the internet. Because of the close readings that we will give each assignment, you are required to come to class with your own printed copy of that day's reading. Your print-out should also contain ample annotations in which you mark key passages and write comments in the margins. If you come to class without a paper print-out of the relevant readings, or with a blank, un-annotated copy, you are not preparing yourself for good class participation. Your print-outs should also be easily legible; do not try to skimp by cramming more than two book or journal pages onto one printed sheet. You might save a few dollars, but your education will suffer. Please consider the print-outs as part of the “textbook” costs for this course.

Course Requirements and Grading:
Class Participation 15%  
Response Essays (8 short essays) 25% (about 4% each)  
Oral Presentation  
-Research Paper (1-2 pages) 5%  
-Presentation in Class 5%  
Digital Storytelling  
-Prep Research 12% (individual grade)  
-Small Team Assignments 5% (team grade)  
-Final Film 13% (team grade)  
-Reflection Form 0% (no grade but still required)  
-Peer Evaluation 7% (individual grade)  
Take-Home Final Essay (4-5 pages) 13%  

Grades will be +/-: 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 (60-66), F (0-59). If you don’t understand the basis of the grade you received or if you disagree with the assessment, speak to me—but only after letting twenty-four hours pass for you to absorb and reflect on the evaluation. Please act within two weeks of the return of the assignment.

Please note that you will receive a failing grade for the course if you miss eight or more class sessions or fail to submit four or more required assignments. Students who do not submit their digital storytelling reflection form on time will also incur a 5% penalty to their overall grade.
Late Policy: Essays: No late response essays are allowed (except for your Free Late). Late take-home final essays are strongly discouraged and may result in a failing grade for the class.
The Free Late: For one of the response essays, you may turn in your work one week late with no penalty. Simply write "Free Late" at the top of the assignment. You may only use this option once; use it wisely. You may NOT use the Free Late for the final essay, nor for anything relating to the oral presentations and digital storytelling project.

Special Note on Late Assignments: Sometimes work, health, or family can make it hard to attend class or meet deadlines. If you see a problem approaching, please stop by office hours or send me an email to keep me posted. When an unexpected problem arises, please let me know as soon as possible. If a real hardship arises and you let me know what's going on at an early stage, I will do my best to work with you and help you do well in the class.

Notes on Technology:
• To promote classroom cohesiveness and interaction, you need to turn off all laptops, tablets, cell phones, and other electronic devices and store them out of sight during class. Students with documented needs may request an exception. We will make exceptions to this rule at times, especially for the digital storytelling workshops.

Disabilities: As your professor, I want all students to succeed in this class. If you have a disability or any other issue that affects your learning, please let me know at any time. Also take note of the resources available through the Office for Students with Disabilities (Student Affairs Building Room 115, 323-343-3140). If you have a verified accommodations form, please share it with me by Week Two of the course.

Change: I may make reasonable changes to the syllabus when needed.

Response Essays: Sixteen class sessions offer opportunities to turn in response essays. You are required to choose eight of those sessions to submit essays. Each essay should be 1.5 to 2 typed, double-spaced pages, and each should draw on the readings for that session. A good essay will have a clear and creative thesis and will support that thesis by referring to a wide range of that day’s reading material. In creating your thesis, consider the core class questions listed at the start of the syllabus. Do the readings for this week help answer one of these questions? If so how? You may also develop your own thesis independent of these questions, so long as it allows you to cover a wide range of that day’s readings. Do not try to take on too many issues for your essay. It’s usually best to select just one of the core class questions and develop a thesis that uses the readings to explore that question.

In outline form, each response essay should look like this:
I. A very short introduction: 1-2 sentences, providing your thesis statement
   II. First supporting paragraph
   III. Second supporting paragraph
   IV. (optional) Third supporting paragraph

Normally, a good history essay should have a more developed introduction (around a 1/2 page). For our response essays, which are very short, your introduction should simply lay out your main point. Don’t worry about announcing your topic or trying to hook the reader. Also, do not write a conclusion. You can just end with your last supporting paragraph. Whatever you do, do not go over two pages. You’ll have a chance to write in a more fleshed-out style for the bigger papers in this course. Keep these responses short and sweet. Just deliver an interesting thesis and develop it with supporting paragraphs full of specific examples and ideas from the readings.

For evidence in your supporting paragraphs, provide as many brief quotations and specific examples as you can from the reading. Do not insert long quotations. Instead, quote just the most revealing or interesting two or three words from a passage and build your ideas around it. Provide lots of page references.

Citations: Do not worry about a bibliography or about formal footnotes or endnotes for the brief response essays. At the end of a sentence with quoted material or specific information, just provide a brief parenthetical citation with the page number from that reading.

Final Tip: Make sure to save time for revising and editing your first draft. You can learn more about my expectations for academic writing by reading my tips on writing later in the syllabus.
How I Will Grade Your Essays:

Your grades on the essays will be based on three related criteria, each given equal weight in determining your grade:

1. **ARGUMENT**: development of an argument that answers your essay’s question with clarity, substance, and creativity.
2. **EVIDENCE**: use of relevant class material.
3. **WRITING**: expression of ideas in a clear, concise, engaging prose.

The three areas above will translate into a letter grade for your essays in this way:

- **A**: Outstanding in all three areas.
- **B**: Satisfactory in all three areas, or strengths in two offset by weakness in a third.
- **C**: Satisfactory in one or more areas, offset by weakness in others.
- **D**: Major problems in two or three areas, or minimal engagement with the assignment.
- **F**: Serious problems in all three areas, minimal engagement with the assignment, or violations of academic honesty (e.g. plagiarism).

**Plagiarism**: Plagiarism refers to the use of another author’s words or ideas without acknowledgement of this use. This includes copying from texts or webpages as well as submitting work done by somebody else. Other forms of plagiarism include altering a few words or the sentence structure of someone else’s writing and presenting it as your own writing (that is, without quotation marks or footnotes). Violators will receive at minimum a zero on the assignment and will be reported to University authorities. Please also read the following statement about www.turnitin.com, which comes from the CSU General Counsel and will apply to this class:

Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. You may submit your papers in such a way that no identifying information about you is included. Another option is that you may request, in writing, that your papers not be submitted to Turnitin.com. However, if you choose this option you will be required to provide documentation to substantiate that the papers are your original work and do not include any plagiarized material.

**Oral Presentation**: You will deliver a 6-7 minute presentation in which you introduce the class to some example of popular culture that you find particularly enjoyable or interesting. This artifact of pop culture (e.g. a song, a dance, a comic book, a movie, a fashion style, a video game) can be either historical or contemporary. Your presentation should consist of two parts. The first part is a 2-3 minute explanation of why you find this piece of pop culture so appealing or interesting. This part should also explain some of the social and cultural context surrounding your piece of pop culture. Most importantly, you should frame your comments around at least one of our core class questions listed at the start of the syllabus. You should deliver this part of the presentation in a coherent manner but without reading extensively from notes. For the second part of the presentation, you should share a carefully-selected 3-4 minute excerpt or demonstration of your pop culture artifact. Please rehearse carefully so that your presentation meets these time requirements.

Special note: You should not use PowerPoint or any other presentation software to summarize your lecture. If you use PowerPoint, it should only be to show one or two important images. If you plan to show an internet video (e.g. YouTube), you should email me the web address at least four hours before the start of class. I will then embed the link into my own lecture PowerPoint presentation. This will save time setting up for each presentation. If you have a special vision that differs from the above rules, please contact me at least two days in advance so I know what you’re planning.

**Oral Presentation Research Paper**: This 1.5 to 2 page paper (typed, double-spaced) will be due in paper two weeks before your presentation. This paper should begin by selecting one of the core class questions (or a different question, with my approval), and providing a thesis that explains how your presentation topic helps answer that question. Please provide a bibliography for all primary and secondary sources that you cite. This paper will prepare you for the presentation.

**Take-Home Final: Oral Presentation Synthesis Essay**: For the final exam, you will write a 4 to 5 page paper (typed, doubled-spaced) in which you develop an original argument based on interesting ideas and examples that you found in your classmates’ presentations. Your argument should help answer one of the core class questions. You should draw on four to six different presentations, not including your own. You do not need formal citations when referring to the presentations. However, you will need to take detailed notes during each presentation, because you should be as specific as possible when giving examples from the presentations to support your paper’s argument. Your paper should also make numerous references to at least four of our class readings. As a general rule of thumb, about 50-60% of your examples should come from your classmates’ presentations, and about 40-50% of your examples should come from our common class readings.
BRIEF WRITING GUIDE

For my full writing guide, see the resources section of my faculty web page: www.calstatela.edu/faculty/christopher-endo

Tip 1. Write with a concise introduction and thesis statement. Start the essay with a half-page intro. The intro needs to include a thesis statement that clearly answers the assigned question. Avoid details and evidence in the introduction, but let readers know the basic reasoning behind your thesis.

Tip 2. Topic sentence arguments (TSA’s) are crucial to good argumentative essays, but they rarely emerge in first drafts. A topic sentence is the first sentence of a paragraph in the body of an essay. Each topic sentence should have a mini-thesis statement (or TSA) that conveys the main argument of that paragraph. When you start body paragraphs with a clear and interesting TSA, you can show to your readers (and yourself) that you know the purpose of that paragraph. Most first drafts have weak TSA’s, or they bury the TSA idea at the end of the paragraph. The best time to work on TSA’s is after you complete your first draft. At that point, you know exactly what evidence and ideas each paragraph conveys, and you can thus better summarize the main argument of that paragraph in the opening TSA.

Tip 3. Write with clear paragraphs. In the body of your essay, a paragraph should contain just one basic idea or point. Paragraphs should hardly ever be more than 1/2 or 2/3 of a page (typed, double-spaced). If a draft paragraph grows longer, break it in pieces and give each new paragraph a good TSA.

Tip 4. Use lots of short quotations, and provide adequate context for each one. Brief context and analysis makes your evidence meaningful. Explain who wrote or said the words. When useful, convey how that person’s position in society shapes the meaning of the quotation.


[Better: This is bad because we don’t know the position of who said this.]

BETTER: The late 1960s saw a decline in optimism. As civil rights activist Jane McKay wrote to Martin Luther King in 1967, “the government never cared for us.”

[Note: We don’t need to describe MLK because he is very well known. Most historical figures, however, require that you give some context.]

WEAK: The war was senseless, and “even the victors gained nothing.”

BETTER: The war was senseless. According to historian Karen Silverman, “even the victors gained nothing.”

Tip 5. Write in the active voice. The active voice stands in contrast to the passive voice. Passive voice hides key information from your readers. Your audience cannot tell who took the action (or held the viewpoint) that your sentence describes. Historians care deeply about cause and effect, and active-voice sentences do a better job than the passive voice in conveying causality.

PASSIVE VOICE: The movement was accused of being communist.

ACTIVE: Truman’s White House accused the movement of being communist.

Tip 6. Save time to revise your drafts. Good writing takes time.

Tip 7. Seek advice and ask questions. I am very happy to work with you individually to improve your writing skills. Please visit office hours to talk more. If you cannot make my office hours, I am very happy to schedule another time to meet.

A great online resource comes from the Writing Center at the University of North Carolina. Visit the website below and you can find “handouts” offering more detail on both grammar issues (e.g. run-ons, passive-voice, quotation set-ups) and “big picture” issues (e.g. thesis statements, procrastination).

http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/

You can also receive free writing tutoring from the University Writing Center, located in JFK Library, Palmer Wing, room 1039A. Stop by, call (323-343-5350), or visit their website:

http://www.calstatela.edu/uwc

But remember to come to me as well. I am here to help you improve your writing.
Class Participation
We will spend a substantial part of class time engaged in some activity other than lecture. Your participation grade will reflect both your attendance and your participation in activities. **What is good class participation?** Good class participation comes in many forms. It does not mean talking as often as possible in class. Here are different ways that you can achieve good class participation:

- Read carefully before class. Come to class with paper copies of the readings and good reading notes. Use the core class question on page 1 of the syllabus to guide your note-taking on the readings. Be prepared to point to specific page references in class. This is one of the most important steps you can take for good class participation.
- Help members of your small group. Receive help with enthusiasm.
- Frame your comments in response to what classmates have said. If a classmate says something that strikes you as smart, funny, or provocative, let us know.
- Be aware of what the group or class needs at any given moment to keep our energy and focus on track. That could mean sharing a question, a reading passage, a joke, etc. It could mean keeping a small group on task. It could mean letting a constructive silence continue.
- Be aware if you are speaking too much. For students with a tendency to speak all the time, good class participation can mean stepping back and seeing what you and others can learn by **listening** to classmates for a while.
- Pay attention to emotions—yours and others. An honest examination of history requires us to explore the role of racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice in both the past and the present. Discussing these topics can sometimes be disturbing or upsetting, but this discomfort is often an essential part of the learning process. Hopefully, you will find yourself provoked, intrigued, at times amused, but above all enlightened during this class. You can help in this effort by respecting the views of your classmates and by being eager to listen to what classmates and historical sources have to say.
- Visit my office hours. This also counts as class participation.
- Attend class. This is big. If you have responsibilities outside your academic studies, make sure that you can prioritize attending class.

CLASS SCHEDULE:
*Note: When the schedule lists Tuesday and Thursday together, the week’s readings and assignments are due on the Tuesday (unless otherwise noted). Except for the books, all readings are on Moodle.*

24 January • Class Intro

26 January • What is Popular Culture? What Do Audiences Do?

Response Essay 1 Due (focus on core class questions 1 or 2; refer to both readings)

31 January • Love, Theft, and Masks: Race and Popular Culture before 1900
- No Readings

2 February • How Did Coney Island Help Invent Mass Culture and Modernity?
- Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, whole book

Response Essay 2 Due

7/9 February • The Mid-Century Frankfurt School’s Criticism of the Culture Industry?
- Alex Ross, “The Naysayers: Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, and the Critique of Pop Culture,” *New Yorker*, 15 September 2014 (excerpts)

Response Essay 3 Due

14 February • What Have Female Impersonators Revealed about their Times?

Response Essay 4 Due

16 February • How Did Gangster Movies Relate to Immigrant Life & Nativist Anxiety?
- Rubin & Melnick, *Immigration*, 1-4, 11-48
- Production Code of 1930 (one-page excerpt)

Response Essay 5 Due
21/23 February • What Did Zoot Suits Mean?
Rubin & Melnick, Immigration, 49-87
Response Essay 6 Due

28 February • Can “Sentimental Modernism” Explain Disney’s Appeal?
Viewing: Mickey Mouse videos (details TBD)
Response Essay 7 Due

2 March • The Power of the Musical: What Did West Side Story Mean?
Rubin & Melnick, Immigration, 88-128
Response Essay 8 Due
Oral Presentation Research Papers due beginning this week (two weeks before your presentation date)

7/9 March • The 1960s Counterculture and the Question of Appropriation
Rubin & Melnick, Immigration, 129-175
Response Essay 9 Due

14/16 March • Gender Play: Conformity and Resistance
Douglas, Where the Girls Are, 3-138
Response Essays 10 and 11 Due. If you do both responses, please select two different core class questions as your springboard for each response.
Oral Presentations start this week and continue until end of semester

21 March • Digital Storytelling Workshop
Team Progress Report due by 11:59pm today via Moodle (small team assignment.) You will find a template for the progress report on Moodle.

23 March • Digital Storytelling Workshop
Readings on copyright and fair use (details TBD)

SPRING BREAK: No class on 28/30 March

4/6 April • Feminism and the Media
Douglas, Where the Girls Are, 139-307
Response Essays 12 and 13 Due. If you do both, follow same rule as above.

11/13 April • Digital Storytelling Workshop
Digital Storytelling Prep Research due on the 11th (individual assignment)

17 April • MONDAY
Digital Storytelling Draft Due by 11:59pm via Moodle (small team assignment—but important!)

18 April • “Cheese” as a Category of Analysis
Response Essay 14 Due

20 April • Digital Storytelling Workshop

25 April • How Has Music Travelled Across Borders?
Rubin & Melnick, Immigration, 176-184, 197-211
Response Essay 15 Due

27 April • Digital Storytelling Workshop

2 May • What Happens to “American” Culture in a Global and Digital Age?
Rubin & Melnick, Immigration, 217-47
Response Essay 16 Due

4/9 May • Digital Storytelling Workshops

11 May • That’s a Wrap! Class Party!
A) Digital Storytelling Films due (big group assignment)
A) D.S. Reflection Form due by 10pm Sunday the 14th via Moodle

18 May • Finals Week (Thursday):