

HIST 4820: History of U.S. Popular Culture

Spring 2020 Professor Chris Endy

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:40 to 2:55 pm

Classroom: King Hall B2014

Instructor's Office: King Hall C4076A

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 3-4 pm and 5-6 pm; Thursdays 3-4 pm.

-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:

John Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).

Rachel Rubin and Jeffrey Melnick, *Immigration and American Popular Culture: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995).

-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** (unless otherwise noted). 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)	35% (about 4% each)
Oral Presentation Project	
Research Paper (2-3 pages)	10%
Responses to Teammates Papers	1%
Oral Presentation	5%
Family History Paper (3-4 pages)	10%
First Synthesis Essay (2-3 pages)	8%
Second Synthesis Essay (5-7 pages)	16% (counts as our take-home final)

Important policies regarding HIST 4820 assignments:

- Unless otherwise noted, all assignments are due in paper at the start of class and should be typed and double-spaced.
- Students will receive an automatic failing grade for the course if they miss ten or more class sessions or fail to complete five or more required assignments.
- We will use a "+/-" system: 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 the instructor—but only after letting twenty-four hours pass for you to absorb and reflect on the evaluation.

Late Policy:

Response Essays are designed to prepare you for class discussion, so you cannot submit response essay late, unless you are using a Free Late.

Other assignments will be penalized 10% of their value per class session late, maxing out at a 25% reduction if completed before the start of finals week.

Late take-home final essays are strongly discouraged and will carry a heavier late penalty.

The Free Late: For two of the essays or papers (but not the finals week second synthesis essay), 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 twice; use it wisely. You cannot use your Free Late for the Oral Presentation.

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.

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: Numerous class sessions offer opportunities to turn in response essays. You are required to choose eight of those sessions to submit essays. You are still responsible for doing the readings on days when you do not submit an essay. 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).

What if I'm Not a Good Writer? Nonsense! Everyone can become a good writer. Some people might have an unusual talent for writing, but everyone can learn how to become a clear, confident writer. All it takes is a good writing method and time. We will work together in class on the *method* part. If you invest the *time*, you can write strong essays, and you can use this skill for the rest of your life. To get started, look on Canvas for my handout, "How to Write Argumentative Essays." I am happy to work with you individually to improve your writing skills. Visit office hours to talk more.

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 of someone else's writing and presenting it as your own writing (that is, without quotation marks or footnotes). If you commit plagiarism, you can receive a zero on the assignment and I may report you to University authorities.

How Can I Avoid Plagiarism? As a professor, I've noticed that students often resort to plagiarism when they run out of time or don't understand an assignment. If you find yourself drifting toward plagiarism, visit my office hours or send me an email. I can help you get through the assignment or calculate the (modest) late penalty. You will be much better off taking a small late penalty than committing plagiarism.

The best way to avoid plagiarism is to learn the rules of how and when to cite and quote. Here are two good websites:

- <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/plagiarism/>
- <http://calstatela.libguides.com/content.php?pid=669390&sid=5542610>

BRIEF WRITING GUIDE

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

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.

WEAK: The late 1960s saw a decline in optimism. "The government never cared for us."

[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.

PASSIVE VOICE: By 1942, the unemployment problem was solved.

ACTIVE: By 1942, military spending solved the unemployment problem.

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.

Oral Presentation: Your presentation will introduce the class to an artifact of popular culture that you find particularly enjoyable or interesting. This artifact (e.g. a song, a dance, a comic book, a movie, a fashion style, a video game) can be either historical or contemporary. Your work and grade will be largely your own, but your presentation will be part of a team effort. I will help students organize teams later this semester.

Step 1. Team members should **consult** with each other before they start their research to ensure that they share at least a basic thematic connection.

Step 2. Oral Presentation Research Paper: This 2-3 page paper (typed, double-spaced, plus references) will be due via Canvas three weeks before your presentation date. This paper should begin by selecting one of the core class questions (or a different question, with my approval). Then present a thesis that explains how your research helps answer that question. Provide a formal bibliography for all primary and secondary sources that you cite. This paper is an individual assignment.

Step 3. Within a week of their submission, read your teammates’ research papers and provide **written comments via Canvas**. Also schedule a time to **meet outside of class to discuss common patterns or interesting differences**. As a team, develop a single “big picture” argument that you want to teach to the rest of the class.

Step 4. As a team, prepare a **3 minute team introduction** for your team oral presentation. Each team member should speak during this introduction.

Step 5. As an individual, prepare a **6-7 minute individual presentation** on your artifact of pop culture. Your individual presentation will have two parts. Begin with a **2-3 minute explanation** of why you find this piece of pop culture so appealing or interesting. Also explain some of the social and cultural context surrounding your piece of pop culture. Most importantly, 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 or PowerPoint slides. For the second part of the presentation, **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.

Tech notes: You should not use PowerPoint or any other presentation software to summarize your lecture. If you use PowerPoint, it should only be to show important images or to embed internet URLs (e.g. YouTube links). If you plan to use any computer materials, **upload your files to Canvas before the start of class**. 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.

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.
- Raise your hand often and share ideas on a regular basis.
- Ask questions, no matter how broad or small.
- Get to know your classmates. Start a casual conversation while waiting for class to start, or right after class ends.
- 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 a leader. 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:

21 January • Class Intro

No Readings

23 January • What is Popular Culture? What Agency Do Audiences Have?

Lawrence Levine, "The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences," *American Historical Review* 97 (December 1992): 1369-99.

James L. Watson, "China's Big Mac Attack," *Foreign Affairs* 79 (May/June 2000): 120-34.

Printing Levine is mandatory. Printing Watson is optional. Levine's article will be like our class' unofficial textbook.

Response Essay 1 due. *Your first response essay should focus on core class questions 1 or 2. Your essay can refer to just Levine if you want, or you can draw on both Levine and Watson. Definitely write about Levine.*

28 January • How Should We Interpret Blackface Minstrelsy?

Bring Levine's article to class.

30 January • How Did Coney Island Help Invent Mass Culture and Modernity?

Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, whole book

Response Essay 2 due

4 February • What was the Frankfurt School's Critique of the Culture Industry?

Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in Juliet B. Schor and Douglas B. Holt, ed., *The Consumer Society Reader* (New York: New Press, 2000), 3-19.

Alex Ross, "The Naysayers: Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, and the Critique of Pop Culture," *New Yorker*, 15 September 2014 (excerpts).

Printing Adorno and Horkheimer is mandatory. Printing Ross is optional.

Response Essay 3 due. This response essay can focus on just Adorno and Horkheimer if you prefer. Ross might help you understand Adorno and Horkheimer, but you do not need to write about Ross.

6 February • Continuation of Tuesday's Discussion

Bring Tuesday's readings to class.

11 February • How Did Queer Cultures Thrive Before World War II?

Julio Capó Jr., "Sexual Connections: Queers and Competing Tourist Markets in Miami and the Caribbean, 1920-1940," *Radical History Review* 129 (October 2017): 9-33. *Printing Capó is optional but encouraged.*

Response Essay 4 due

13 February • How Did Gangster Movies Relate to Immigrant Life & Nativist Anxiety?

Rubin & Melnick, *Immigration*, 1-6, 11-48

Production Code of 1930 (one-page excerpt)

Response Essay 5 due

18 February • What Did Zoot Suits Mean?

Rubin & Melnick, *Immigration*, 49-87

Elizabeth R. Escobedo, "The Pachuca Panic: Sexual and Cultural Battlegrounds in World War II Los Angeles," *Western Historical Quarterly* 38 (Summer 2007): 133-156. *Printing Escobedo is optional but encouraged.*

Response Essay 6 due

20 February • Continuation of Tuesday's Discussion

Bring Tuesday's readings to class.

25 February • Can "Sentimental Modernism" Explain Disney's Appeal?

Steven Watts, "Walt Disney: Art and Politics in the American Century," *Journal of American History* 82 (June 1995): 84-110. *Printing Watts is optional but encouraged.*

Viewing: Mickey Mouse videos (details on Canvas)

Response Essay 7 due

Oral Presentation Research Papers due beginning this week (three weeks before your presentation date). Actual due date depends on your team's presentation date. Submit via Canvas.

27 February • The Power of the Musical: What Did *West Side Story* Mean?

Rubin & Melnick, *Immigration*, 88-128

Response Essay 8 due

3 March • The 1960s Counterculture and the Question of Appropriation

Rubin & Melnick, *Immigration*, 129-175

Response Essay 9 due

5 March • Continuation of Tuesday's Discussion

Bring Tuesday's readings to class.

10 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.

12 March • Continuation of Tuesday's Discussion

Bring Tuesday's readings to class.

17 March • Oral Presentations

No readings

Family History Essay due

Oral Presentations start this week and continue until end of semester

19 March • Oral Presentations

No readings

24 March • 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.

26 March • Continuation of Tuesday's Discussion

Bring Tuesday's readings to class.

SPRING BREAK: No class on 31 March and 2 April

7 April • Oral Presentations

No readings

9 April • Oral Presentations

No readings

14 April • Sexuality, Liberation, and Backlash

Gillian Frank, "Discophobia: Antigay Prejudice and the 1979 Backlash Against Disco," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16 (May 2007): 276-306.

Response Essay 14 due

16 April • Continuation of Tuesday's Discussion

Bring Tuesday's readings to class.

First Oral Presentation Synthesis Essay due

21 April • How Has Music Travelled Across Borders?

Rubin & Melnick, *Immigration*, 176-184, 197-211

Alex Seago, "The 'Kraftwerk Effekt': Transatlantic Circulation, Global Networks and Contemporary Pop Music," *Atlantic Studies* 1 (2004): 86-106.

Ian Condry, "The Social Production of Difference: Imitation and Authenticity in Japanese Rap Music," in Heide Fehrenbach and Uta G. Poiger, eds.,

Transactions, Transgressions, Transformations: American Culture in Western Europe and Japan (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000): 166-84.

Printing Seago and Condry is optional but encouraged.

Response Essay 15 due

23 April • Continuation of Tuesday's Discussion

Bring Tuesday's readings to class.

28 April • What Happens to "American" Culture in a Global and Digital Age?

Rubin & Melnick, *Immigration*, 217-47

Andrew C. McKeivitt, "'You Are Not Alone!': Anime and the Globalizing of America," *Diplomatic History* 34 (November 2010): 893-921.

Printing McKeivitt is optional but encouraged.

Response Essay 16 due

30 April • Continuation of Tuesday's Discussion

Bring Tuesday's readings to class.

5 May • Oral Presentations

No readings

7 May • Oral Presentations

No readings

14 May • Finals Week (Thursday):

Take-Home Final: Second Oral Presentation Synthesis Essay due. Upload to Canvas by 12 noon on the 14th.

Potluck party in classroom 12:15 to 2:00pm