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GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF CONTINUING STUDIES  
FALL 2010  
TIME AND LOCATION: TUESDAYS, 6:15-8:55 PM, TBA

## AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE BLHV-200

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### *Overview*

What is popular? How does it become so? In this course students examine themes and topics central to American popular culture through various media and selected readings in history, the humanities, and the social sciences. The course unfolds historically—often highlighting important technological changes that have led to shifts in popular culture. The role of nostalgia and recursive popular culture is examined closely. Students will explore the cultural significance of popular American literature, art, music, film, food, amusement, commentary, and fashion. Case studies cover a broad range of developments including the rise of amusement parks, burlesque and vaudeville, tabloid journalism, the evolution of the sitcom, the role of refrigeration and the microwave in American home cuisine, and the emerging influence of online social networks and gaming. Analyses of trends are made sociologically and critically.

### *Faculty*

Mark M. Gray, Ph.D., Research Associate Professor  
Georgetown University and the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA)  
Office Hours: Thursday 5-6 p.m. and by appointment  
Telephone: 202-687-0885  
Email: mmg34@georgetown.edu  
Website: <http://cara.georgetown.edu/staff/webpages/markgray.html>

### *Textbooks (required)*

1) *Popular Culture: Introductory Perspectives (The R&L Series in Mass Communication)*

Marcel Danesi

Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. (September 28, 2007)

# Language: English

# ISBN-10: 074255547X

# ISBN-13: 978-0742555471

2) *With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture since 1830 (Hardcover)*

LeRoy Ashby

The University Press of Kentucky (May 12, 2006)

ISBN-10: 0813123976

ISBN-13: 978-0813123974

3) *Popular Culture in American History (Blackwell Readers in American Social and Cultural History)*

Jim Cullen (Editor)

Wiley-Blackwell (October 26, 2000)

ISBN-10: 0631219587

ISBN-13: 978-0631219583

### ***Grading***

The final grade will be determined as follows:

- 93% to 100% = A, 90% to 92% = A-
- 87% to 89% = B+, 83% to 86% = B, 80% to 82% = B-
- 77% to 79% = C+, 72% to 76% = C, 68% to 71% = C-
- 57% to 67% = D, Below 57% = F

Grades for this course will be based on your performance on five in-class assignments, two quizzes and a final project.

### ***Quizzes***

Two quizzes will be given during the semester gauging your grasp of the material. Each is worth 15% of your final grade (collectively **30%** of your grade).

### ***In-class Assignments***

Five assignments to be completed in class, individually or in groups, will each account for 5% of your final grade (collectively **25%** of your grade).

### ***Case Study***

Each student will research their own American Popular Culture Case Study. The specific topic will be of the student's choosing. However, each student will need to have their topic approved by the instructor before the eighth meeting of the class (Nov. 2). In addition to documenting and exploring the significance of the aspect of popular culture chosen, the paper should engage the readings of the course and place itself within the broader discussion of popular culture. The paper should be approximately 2,500 words. Grades will be based on the quality of research and analysis. The paper is worth **35%** of your grade. On the final day of classes (Dec. 7), students will summarize their paper in a brief PowerPoint presentation (of at least 6 minutes in length). This presentation is worth **10%** of your grade. The paper will be due Dec. 17 (electronic submissions suggested).

### ***Incompletes***

Incompletes are not available in this course

### ***Attendance***

If you need to miss class, it is your responsibility to make sure any assignments are submitted on time. It is also your responsibility to get the lecture notes, handouts, etc., from a classmate. If one is unable to submit an assignment before its due date students should seek the prior approval of the instructor.

### ***Plagiarism & the Georgetown Honor System***

The sources for all information and ideas in your papers must be documented using the style followed by the American Psychological Association (APA). In addition, all quotations must be identified as quotations, using quotation marks and documentation of the source of the quotation. Anything less than these standards is plagiarism and will be treated as such. Plagiarized work will be reported to Georgetown's Honor Council (see below). If the council finds that the work has been plagiarized, the work will receive an F for a first offense; a second plagiarism will earn an F for the course.

All students are expected to follow Georgetown's honor code unconditionally. We assume you have read the honor code material located at [www.georgetown.edu/honor](http://www.georgetown.edu/honor), and in particular have read the following documents: Honor Council Pamphlet, "What is Plagiarism?", "Sanctioning

Guidelines”, and “Expedited Sanctioning Process.” Papers in this course will be electronically checked for plagiarism. Submitting material in fulfillment of the requirements of this course means that you have abided by the Georgetown honor pledge:

*In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.*

### **Disabilities**

If you are a student with a disability who requires accommodations or if you think you may have a disability and want to inquire about accommodations, please contact the Academic Resource Center at 202-687-8354 or arc@georgetown.edu.

### **Snow and other emergencies**

During inclement weather or other emergencies, check <http://preparedness.georgetown.edu> or call (202) 687-7669 for information on whether the university is open.

### **Course Schedule**

#### Class and topic

- **Sept. 7:** Introduction to the class and each other. What is Culture?
- **Sept. 14:** Defining and Modeling Popular Culture, Trends and Nostalgic Feedback, The Importance Technology
- **Sept. 21:** Pre-Mass Media: Early American Popular Culture
- **Sept. 28:** Culture in Print: from the Comics to “The Great American Novel.” Film Clips from *The Great Gatsby*.
- **Oct. 5:** The Birth of Broadcasting. What is American Music? Overseas Influences: From Immigration to “Making” the Foreign Band. Evolution of Music through Radio, Television, & the Internet. Film clips from *A Song is Born*.
- **Oct. 12:** Amusement in “Bad Times.” The Rise of American Sporting Culture. Early American Film
- **Oct. 19:** Star and Studio Are Born. Content analysis of themes from AFI’s top 100. Film clips from *Citizen Kane* and *The Wizard of Oz*.

#### Readings

Readings provided in class by instructor

- Danesi, Ch. 1-2 What is Pop Culture? & Explaining Pop Culture
- Ashby, Prologue Popular Culture on the Brink
- Cullen, Ch. 1 In the Beginning
- Cullen, Ch. 3 The Racy Appeal of the Minstrel
- Ashby, Ch. 1-2 Blackface, Barnum, and Newspaper Ballyhoo & Taming Rough Amusements
- In-class Assignment #1
- Danesi, Ch. 3 Print
- Ashby, Ch. 3-5 Building an Entertainment Industry, The Billion Dollar Smile, The ‘Leisure Problem’ at the Turn of the Century
- Danesi, Ch. 4-5 Radio & Music
- Cullen, Ch. 5 The Romance of the Dance Hall
- Ashby, Ch. 6 Popular Culture and Middle Class Respectability in the Early Twentieth Century
- In-class Assignment #2
- Cullen, Ch. 2,4,6 The World of the Stage, Literature for the Million, Moving Images
- Ashby, Ch. 7 Battling the Great Depression
- Danesi, Ch. 6 Cinema and Video
- Ashby, Ch. 8 Building a Wartime Consensus in the 1940s and 1950s
- Cullen, Ch. 8 The Firmament of Stardom

- **Oct. 26, Quiz 1:** Print is So Passe: How In-Home Video Transformed American Popular Culture. Film clips from *The Apartment* and *Pleasantville*.
  - Danesi, Ch. 7 Television
  - Cullen, Ch. 9 The Age of Television
  - Ashby, Ch. 9 Counterpoints to Consensus
  - Readings provided in class by instructor from Postman (2005), *Amusing Ourselves to Death*
  - In-class Assignment #3
- **Nov. 2:** Transforming the American Kitchen and Farm. America through the Eyes of Advertising Illustrators, Film clips from *The Corporation* and *Food, Inc.*
  - Cullen, Ch. 7 Waves of Selling
  - Danesi, Ch. 8 Advertising, Branding and Fads
  - Readings/advertising materials provided in class by instructor
- **Nov. 9:** American Popular Counter-Culture. Film clips from *The Graduate* and *Planet of the Apes*.
  - Ashby, Ch. 10-11 Popular Culture and 1960s Ferment & Up for Grabs: Leaving the 1960s
  - Danesi, Ch. 9 Language
  - In-class Assignment #4
- **Nov. 16:** Lifestyles in Suburbia and SUVs: The Me Culture. Emerging Counter-Cultures: The Greening of America and Others.
  - Ashby, Ch. 12 A Pop Culture Society
  - Cullen, Ch. 10 Hip-Hop Nation
- **Nov. 23:** The Virtual American Popular Culture: Social Networks and Gaming
  - Ashby, Epilogue Pop Culture in a Post 9-11 world
  - Danesi, Ch. 10 Forever Pop
- **Nov. 30:** American Popular Culture of the Future: Where will iPods, gaming, and the Internet take us? Is it back to Narrowcasting? Project workshop and review.
  - Readings provided in class by instructor
  - In-class Assignment #5
- **Dec. 7, Quiz 2.**
  - Presentations; Papers** due Dec. 17 (electronic submissions suggested)