

**ETHNIC STUDIES 189:
RACE AND ETHNICITY IN POPULAR CULTURE
WINTER 2006**

Professor Michele Goldwasser

Office Hours: Monday (1:30-2:30); Tuesday (1:30-3:30); and by appointment

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Popular culture has been described as modern mythology, and it has also been called a vast wasteland. Why should we study topics ranging from urban murals to hip hop music, from minstrel shows to carnival masquerade, or from *The Simpsons* to *Bamboozled*? As modern mythology, popular culture reflects, affects, and even creates patterns of social behavior. Far from being a vast wasteland, popular culture is profoundly political. As an expressive form, popular culture engages in a dialectic with “culture,” an often contentious dialogue between the populous (the people) and the powerful. Stuart Hall describes popular culture as “an arena of consent and resistance.” In the era of globalization, this becomes even more significant. Popular culture dominates the global arena. Yet commodification increasingly shapes today’s popular culture. Will popular culture continue to be a voice of the people and an arena of consent and resistance in the twenty-first century?

This course addresses that question by examining the significance of popular culture as a means of constituting cultures and negotiating social relationships. To do this, we will address the following: a) the emergence of popular culture as a means of differentiating the populous from the elite; b) theoretical approaches to the analysis of popular culture; and c) the impact of globalization, commodification, and transnationalism on cultural productions. In the process, we will analyze a wide range of cultural forms, including Spike Lee’s *Bamboozled*, Caribbean carnival, music, film, and the World Wide Web.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Dave, Shilpa et al, eds. *East Main Street: Asian American Popular Culture*. New York University Press, 2005. (EMS)

Ho, Christine and Keith Nurse, eds. *Globalisation, Diaspora and Caribbean Popular Culture*. Ian Randle, 2005. (GDCPC)

Garcia Canclini, Nestor. *Transforming Modernity: Popular Culture in Mexico*. University of Texas Press, 1993. (TM)

Additional readings are on electronic reserve at Geisel Library. These have an asterisk (*) before them in the Schedule of Readings below.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

CLASS PARTICIPATION (10%): Active participation will enhance both your learning experience and your enjoyment of this class. Please come to class prepared to discuss the readings and films assigned for that day. Attendance may be taken at the discretion of the instructor, and poor attendance may affect your grade.

ANALYSIS PAPER (10%): A short analysis paper will be due on Tuesday, January 24. It should be approximately 3 pages in length, typed and double-spaced. Analyze an example of popular culture in terms of its expression, contestation, or negotiation of racial and/or ethnic identity. The paper should: (a) describe the item of popular culture; (b) discuss its social, cultural, historical, and/OR individual context; and (c) analyze its significance using a methodology presented in class.

For example:

- a) analyze an item of popular culture that best describes who you are;
- b) analyze an item of popular culture that contests existing stereotypes;
- c) analyze the importance of a song, television character, film, or website to you and/or your friends.

ESSAY QUESTION (10%): Write an essay question based on course materials, AND write an outline of your expectations for an “A” answer (1-2 pages, typed, double-spaced). Due Tuesday, March 7.

MIDTERM EXAM (30%). A midterm will be given in class on Tuesday, February 7. Please bring bluebooks.

FINAL EXAM (40%): A final exam will be given in class on Monday, March 20, from 7:00-10:00 p.m. Please bring bluebooks.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

WEEK 1: Introductions

Tuesday (1/10): Introduction to the Course.

Thursday (1/12): The Emergence of Popular Culture

Reading: *Lipsitz (“Popular Culture: This Ain’t No Sideshow”)

WEEK 2: Popular Culture as Political Expression

Tuesday (1/17):

Reading: *Hall (“Notes on Deconstructing ‘the Popular’”);

*Hall (“What is this ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture”)

Thursday (1/19):

Reading: *Hall (“The Work of Representation”)

In-class video: *Representation and the Media*

WEEK 3: Stereotypes and Masquerades

VIEW BAMBOOZLED

Tuesday (1/24): DUE: ANALYSIS PAPER

Reading: *Hall (“The Spectacle of the ‘Other’”)

In-class video: *Ethnic Notions*

Thursday (1/26):

Reading: EMS (Davé; Chung);

**Cineaste* articles (Crowdus and Georgakas; Lucia; Landau; White; Rogin; Tate; Davis)

WEEK 4: Hybrid Identities

Tuesday (1/31):

Reading: *Hall (“Who Needs Identity?”); EMS (Perez)

Thursday (2/02):

Reading: EMS (King-O’Riain; Nishime; Nakamura)

WEEK 5: Transforming Modernity

Tuesday (2/07): **MIDTERM**

Thursday (2/09):

Reading: TM (vii-xi; 1-19)

WEEK 6: Globalizing the Local

Tuesday (2/14):

Reading: TM (21-68)

Thursday (2/16):

Reading: TM (69-114)

WEEK 7: Transnational Identities

Tuesday (2/21):

Reading: GDCPC (Hintzen; Miller; Balliger)

In-class video: *Chutney in Yuh Soca*

Thursday (2/23):

Reading: GDCPC (Scher; Alleyne-Dettmers; Brown; Ho)

WEEK 8: Cosmopolitan Reinterpretations

Tuesday (2/28):

Reading: EMS (Maira; Manur)

Thursday (3/02):

Reading: EMS (Desai; Oren)

WEEK 9: Cinema and Globalization

VIEW *DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST*

Tuesday (3/07): DUE: ESSAY QUESTION

Reading: *Yearwood (“Narration as a Cultural Process in Black Film”)

Thursday (3/09):

Reading: GDCPC (Warner; Bryce)

WEEK 10: The Future of Popular Culture

Tuesday (3/14):

Reading: GDCPC (Green; Nurse; Dunn)

Thursday (3/16): Conclusions and Review