

Hist. 446: U.S. Popular Culture Since 1930

SGC 127, M/W 10:30-11:45

“The first step to controlling your world is to control your culture. To model and demonstrate the kind of world you demand to live in. To write the books. Make the music. Shoot the films. Paint the art.”—Chuck Palahniuk

“Popular culture matters because it reflects, expresses, and validates the spirit of our epoch.”—Marcelline Block

“Pop culture is like our subconscious.”—Hanna Rosin

Professor: Dr. A. Canfield
Email: aecanfield@lsc.edu
Phone: 792-2362

Office: Spalding 218
Student office hours: Mondays 8-8:45 am
Tuesdays 9-10:15 am
or by appointment

Course Description

This class will explore how popular culture both reflects larger trends in history as well as how it shapes these trends. We will trace changes in the forms of entertainment since 1930, paying particular attention to important themes and events in U.S. history and how popular culture (such as books, films, television, radio shows, sports, advertising, and music) mirrored these. We will also study the impact of popular culture in questioning aspects of society and its values. As such, we will use popular culture as a lens through which to view society and culture. This will not be an exhaustive study of all aspects of popular culture; rather, we will deal with larger historical themes and use examples from popular culture to illuminate changing views and perceptions, as well as key theme/eras/events in U.S. History. As a class, we will seek to provide new perspectives on and answers to a multitude of questions, including: How has popular culture shaped our national memory? How has it served as a venue for debates over national, group, and individual identities? What role do audiences have in examining popular culture? What can we learn about history from popular culture? How are different views and diverse voices reflected in popular culture? Why are there conflicting messages in popular culture, and what does this reveal about history?

Objectives

- Recognize the connections between history and popular culture, identifying ways in which popular culture reflected trends in society and ways in which popular culture shaped society.
- Understand and interpret primary and secondary sources relating to the history of popular culture.
- Define the major political, social, and economic changes in U.S. history since 1930 and explain their influences on popular culture.
- Research, write, and present on a topic or theme within popular culture, demonstrating an understanding of both content and analysis.
- Improve your critical analysis skills for primary and secondary documents.

Readings

- Articles and primary documents, available on Canvas

Canvas component

We will utilize the Canvas component of this course in a few ways. All of your out-of-class assignments will be submitted through Canvas, and everything is due by 11:59 pm on the date noted in the schedule. Canvas will also serve as a repository for additional material for the course: examples of various assignments for your final research paper, primary documents and articles, questions for the documentary film review, writing tips, and the syllabus. I use Canvas for announcements about the class, so make sure you update your settings to get email alerts when I post those. I will also keep the grade book on Canvas, but bear in mind some scores might be dropped (see below) so the running tally isn't always accurate. Pay

attention to the scores for individual assignments and not the total. Points for attendance and participation will only be entered right before midterms and after the last day of class.

Course Requirements and Assignments

In-class quizzes: Over the course of the semester, I will give nine in-class quizzes, worth ten points each. These will be short-answer questions, based on that day's topic/lecture. They are worth ten points each, and I will drop your three lowest scores. There are no make-ups on these quizzes, except for in the case of document absences (see below). These quizzes are worth 60 points total for the semester.

Documentary review: We will watch two documentaries in class. The first, *To Be Somebody*, examines how the career of boxer Joe Louis reflects racial conflicts and tensions in the United States, especially during the Great Depression and World War II. The second, *Respect Yourself: The Stax Records Story*, focuses on how race, social changes, and violence affected a major recording studio in Memphis and the music it produced in the 1960s and 1970s. We will watch these in class, and together discuss their content and the analysis of history and popular culture. Students are required to write a response paper to **ONE** of these documentaries. On Canvas you will find specific questions to answer that will guide your paper, and help you analyze it. One of the goals of this paper is to help you learn how others have approached a topic in history, using popular culture to reveal larger issues and make deeper connections. This 2-3-page paper is worth 60 points. The paper on *To Be Somebody* is due **Feb. 9**, and the paper on *Respect Yourself* is due on **April 20**.

Primary document analysis: There are six different primary documents (available on Canvas) dealing with different aspects of popular culture we will discuss together in class. You need to read and analyze all of these, and be prepared to discuss them with the class, but you only have to write an analytical paper on **ONE** of them. These papers are due one week after we discuss the documents in class. One of the goals with this paper is to work on analyzing different types of primary documents. On Canvas you will find assignment instructions that will guide your paper and help you analyze the document, as well as larger issues to consider when writing the paper. This 2-3-page paper is worth 60 points. See the course schedule for due dates.

Article response: There are five articles/secondary readings required for this class, all available on Canvas. While you are required to read and analyze all of them, and be prepared to discuss them in class, you are only required to write an essay on **ONE** of them. One of the goals with this paper is to help students learn how to identify the authors' argument (thesis) and their evidence, and evaluate the authors' effectiveness in proving the argument. See the assignment instructions on Canvas, as well as specific areas to consider for this paper. This 2-3-page paper is worth 60 points. See the course schedule for the due dates.

Film response paper: We will watch three films in class: *The Great Dictator* (1940), *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), and *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964). You are required to write a 2-3-page response to **ONE** of these. One of the goals with this paper is to help you analyze another form of a primary document. See the assignment instructions on Canvas, as well as specific areas to consider for this paper. This paper is worth 60 points. See the course schedule for due dates.

Participation and attendance: Participation from everyone is required and is worth 100 points. Your attendance is worth an additional 100 points. This class will have lectures to give each student an overview of specific subjects, but it will also include class discussions on the films, documentaries, articles, and primary documents assigned. Come to class with the readings completed, as they will provide a foundation for discussions. In an upper-division course, I expect a high degree of critical discussion from everyone, so don't just skim the readings quickly; read carefully and thoughtfully. The better prepared you are to discuss what you have read, the better the discussion. For any primary documents, make sure you are clear with who wrote/said/created it, when it was created, its historical context, and its larger point and significance.

For the articles, make sure you know the thesis (argument) and the main pieces of evidence. Be able to discuss whether you agree or disagree with the author's conclusions. If it appears that students aren't completing the readings, or are just not engaging in discussion, I reserve the right to make students email me 7-10 discussion questions in advance of each class. Let's avoid this and just come to class prepared!

Final research project: A final research paper is the major project for the course and is worth 300 points. The topic is of your own choosing, but whatever your topic, you need to have a clear thesis, good supporting evidence, and strong writing. You are making an argument with this paper, using both primary and secondary sources to justify your conclusion. Primary sources can include films, TV episodes, songs, comics, speeches, letters, ads, etc. This is not just a review of the work already completed on a topic; you should use secondary works only to help you analyze the primary sources (whether those are films, TV shows, songs, radio programs, written documents, etc.) and to guide you to your own conclusions. You are going to spend a considerable amount of time researching this, so make sure it is a topic in which you are interested. Please see the assignment overview in Canvas (in the "Final Research Project" module) for details on this larger project. There are four assignments associated with this project: a topic proposal, a source review/research question, an oral presentation, and the final paper itself. You can't skip any of these assignments and you can't hand in a subsequent assignment without completing the one before it. Meaning: you cannot skip the topic proposal and head straight to the source review/research question assignment. You will have to go back and do the first assignment (although, with my late policy, this might mean receiving no actual points for the assignment). There are examples for the topic proposal and the source review/research question available on Canvas. The **topic proposal** is due **February 23**, and is worth 25 points. Next, you will hand in a **source review/research question**, due on **March 23** and is worth 100 points. Each student will also give a **ten-minute formal presentation** on his or her topic, and this presentation is worth an additional 50 points. Student presentations are scheduled for **May 4**. Your 8-10-page **final paper** is due **May 10** and is worth 300 points. No late work will be accepted on the final paper.

Miscellaneous class information

Late assignments: Assignments are due on the day noted on the course schedule and in the Canvas calendar. All work will be submitted through Canvas. Late work will be accepted on all work except for the final research paper and the oral presentation, but late work will lose 5% for each day late, including weekends. Late work won't receive any feedback. Late assignments also have a one-week deadline, after which I will no longer accept them without documentation demonstrating why you could not get your assignments in on time.

LCSC mask policy: To maximize protection from the different variants of COVID and prevent spreading, LCSC is requiring all members of the campus community – regardless of vaccination status – to wear a face covering in indoor spaces where others are present, including in classrooms and offices.

Attendance: Attendance and participation matters and will help you succeed in this class. However, we are still living in a challenging world right now, and I completely understand that we all need to be flexible. If you feel slightly sick, or someone in your household is sick, **DO NOT COME TO CLASS**. We can get you caught up and I will work with you to get lecture notes from another student. You will not lose any points for missing class if you are sick, but I will need some sort of documentation if your illness takes you away for more than two class periods in a row. If you have to miss class for more than two weeks, please communicate with me so I can work with you on deadlines. I may need to see documentation, because I will only extend due dates or excuse late points if there is a legitimate reason that you could not attend and submit assignments.

Excused absences: These definitely still include medical and family issues this semester! Just stay in communication with me if issues come up and I can be understanding since life is weird right now.

Excused absences can include jury duty, school-related activities, documented emergencies, etc. If you have a documented excused absence, let me know as soon as you can so I can work with you.

Student office hours: While I am in my office often, I reserve Mondays from 8-8:45 am and Tuesdays from 9-10:15 am just for students. These times are for students to come in and meet with me, or call me on my office phone. If you have questions about assignments or course content, or just want to discuss history, class, or even college in general, this is a great time to stop in. I will require masks in my office for the entire semester. I can also meet with students virtually. If you would like to meet on Zoom, you will need to make an appointment with me. Just email me so we can set up a time. If my office hours in general don't work for your schedule, please email me and we can find a better time.

Incomplete policy: I understand that unforeseen circumstances can arise in students' lives, especially now, making them unable to complete a course. You can request an Incomplete Grade (I) in certain circumstances; however, you will only have one semester to make up the work before the I turns into an F grade. To receive an Incomplete, you need to discuss the issues and options with me, and then make a "formal" request (an email is fine). You need to have completed at least 80% of the work for the course (including written assignments and participation). Please contact me as soon as you can if you believe you will need an Incomplete. Pay attention to the dates in the syllabus for dropping courses and withdrawals, as well. My mantra over the last year has been all about flexibility and compassion. **There is much out of control in everyone's lives right now and I am here to help you succeed in this class however I can. Just try to stay in communication with me if things change suddenly on you, as things have been prone to do these last few years.**

Accommodations: Students requiring special accommodations or course adaptations due to a disability and/or a health-related issue should contact Accessibility Services at 208-792-2677 or by visiting their office at LIB 163. The [Accessibility Services](#) webpage is a helpful place to start, as well. Official documentation may be required in order to receive an accommodation and/or adaptation. I am happy to work with you so that you can be successful. Please communicate with me and the Accessibility Services office so we can do this.

Classroom Etiquette: Basic "rules of respect" will be observed at all times in this course. Please arrive on time for class and turn off all cell phones during class. Laptops may be used for the purpose of taking notes; however, if you are using your computer for other purposes during class and distracting others, this privilege will be revoked. In addition, please refrain from talking to your neighbors while I or your fellow classmates are speaking. We will often discuss highly sensitive subject matter in this class. Since history is open to multiple interpretations, disagreement is fine—but disagreements are to be grounded in historical interpretation. They must be targeted at *ideas* and they must be delivered respectfully. Personal attacks against individuals *will not* be tolerated.

The study of popular culture often takes us into potentially controversial areas regarding class, race, gender, language, and stereotypes. We may cover material that some people might consider "offensive," vulgar, or even obscene. The goal in discussing or showing such examples is not to offend, but to provide illustrations and examples of changing popular culture. If some of the examples offend or bother you, or if you have questions on how I am either using or interpreting the material, please come and talk to me.

Email: I recommend that you use the course email in Canvas to contact me, but if that is not working for some reason, make sure you use my correct email (aecanfield@lcsc.edu). DO NOT just rely on the auto-complete feature; type it in fully yourself to make sure it is correct. I am not responsible for emails sent to an incorrect address. Do not delete any emails to me unless I have responded. I will always respond to let you know that I received your message. If I have not replied within two working days, assume that I did not

get the email. I only check my work email during work hours (Monday-Friday, 8am-5pm), so don't worry if you don't get a response from me to an email sent in the evening or on the weekend. If you are emailing me outside of the Canvas email system, please put HIST 446 in the subject line.

****When emailing me (or any professor), be sure to use basic email etiquette. Always use a polite salutation at the beginning of your message. "Hey" or "Hey Prof" is not suitable. Use correct grammar and punctuation, and proofread and spell check your message. Don't send an email until you have used your resources wisely; check the syllabus for clarification before asking when the next test is scheduled, for example.****

Academic Integrity: Academic honesty is expected of all students. Instances of academic dishonesty will result in the failure of the class. Academic dishonesty includes plagiarism (the use of someone else's words or ideas without acknowledgement), cheating on assignments, multiple submissions, and assisting someone else in committing academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty is a serious offense and will be treated as such. Violations of academic honesty will be reported to the appropriate school officials and the student will fail the course. No exceptions.

Grading guidelines and writing: Strong writing is key to success in a History course. Before I evaluate the content of any paper, I will first consider other aspects. Please see the "Writing Tips" link on Canvas before submitting any papers. Use of any font besides Times New Roman, 12 point will lose five points. Papers that are not double-spaced will lose five points. Improper use of the words [there, their, and they're]; [where, we're, and were]; and [its and it's], will lose half a point. Papers that aren't stapled (and paper-clipping doesn't count) will lose 2 points. Historians, in general, do not use first person in their writings. For this class, you will be required to adhere to this. For every contraction and use of first person (I, we, me, our, us, etc.), I will subtract half a point. I don't require title pages, nor do I require a works cited page as long as you use full and correct footnotes. All papers must conform to academic writing standards for the history discipline and be cited correctly. You must use footnotes (not endnotes) and correct Chicago/Turabian citation. No MLA (parenthetical) citation is allowed. Improper citations will lose half a point for each instance. Please come see me if you have questions on this. You can access the Turabian guide online (http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/turabian_citationguide.html).

Good dates to keep in mind:

- January 31: Last day to add classes or drop without "W" grade on transcript
- February 21: President's Day, campus closed
- March 28-April 1: Spring break
- April 7: Last day to drop from classes or withdraw from college for the semester
- May 18: Final grades posted to WarriorWeb

Grade scale:	Points:
A 920-1000 points	In-class quizzes: 60 points
A- 900-919	Documentary review: 60 points
B+ 880-899	Primary document analysis: 60 points
B 820-879	Article response: 60 points
B- 800-819	Film response: 60 points
C+ 780-799	Topic proposal: 25 points
C 720-779	Source review/research question: 100 points
C- 700-719	Oral presentation: 75 points
D+ 680-699	Final research paper: 300 points
D 600-679	Attendance: 100 points
F 599 and below	Participation: 100 points
	Total: 1000 points

Tentative Course Schedule:

Jan. 19: Introduction to course: Why do we study popular culture?

Jan. 24: Escaping the Great Depression: Sex, Horror, and Crime in the 1930s

- Discussion of online reading: [“Impact of Pop Culture on Society”](#)

Jan. 26: Soundtrack for Sadness: The Roles of Music and Radio During the Depression

Jan. 31: From Hopelessness to Optimism: Changing Responses in the 1930s

*****January 31 is the LAST day to drop class without a “W” grade on your transcript*****

Feb. 2: Documentary: *The Great Depression: To Be Somebody* (1993) 52 mins

Feb. 7: Patriotism, Tolerance, and “Villainizing” during World War II

- Primary Doc. 1: Cover of *Captain America* (1941)

Feb. 9: World War II Continues: Rallying Support on the Home Front

- Primary Doc. 2: “Radio Researcher Paul Lazarsfeld Presents Information about Women Listeners to Broadcasters and Advertisers” (1942)
- **Due:** Documentary review of *To Be Somebody*

Feb. 14: Film: *The Great Dictator* (1940) 125 minutes

- Primary Doc. 3: “Federal regulator Newton Minow Criticizes Television as a ‘Vast Wasteland’” (1961)
- **Due:** Primary document analysis (Doc. 1: *Captain America*)

Feb. 16: Finish *The Great Dictator*; Post-War Consensus: Hegemony, Homogeneity, and Consumerism in the Cold War

- **Due:** Primary document analysis (Doc. 2: “Radio Researcher Paul Lazarsfeld”)

FEB. 21: NO CLASS, PRES. DAY

Feb. 23: Culture Under Attack: HUAC and the Hollywood Ten

- **Due:** Topic proposal
- **Due:** Primary document analysis (Doc. 3: “Federal regulator Newton Minow”)

Feb. 28: “Good girls” versus “Bad girls” in the Fifties

- Article 1: “Why Elvis?” by Michael Bertrand
- Primary Doc. 4: “*Time Magazine Describes Objections to Rock ‘n’ Roll*” (1956)
- **Due:** Film response to *The Great Dictator*

March 2: What’s Wrong with Kids Today?: Counterculture, Rebellion, and “Sideshows” of the 1950s

March 7: Responses to Social and Racial Tensions: “Race, Rock, and Elvis”

- Primary Doc. 5: “Fredric Wertham, Crusader against Comics, Makes His Case to Parents” (1953)
- **Due:** Article response (Article 1: “Why Elvis?”)
- **Due:** Primary document analysis (Doc. 4: “*Time Magazine Describes Objections*”)

March 9: “Cesspool-type antics”: Music, Teenage Rebellion, and the Generational Divide

March 14: Film: *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) 111 mins

- Article 2: “Boy Culture/Bad Boys,” by James Gilbert
- **Due:** Primary document analysis (Doc. 5: “Fredric Wertham”)

March 16: Finish: *Rebel Without a Cause*

March 21: “Girl Groups” and Feminism: Social Changes and Gender Roles

- Article 3: “Fractured Fairytales” from Susan Douglas’s *Where the Girls Are*
- **Due:** Article response (Article 2: “Boy Culture/Bad Boys”)
- **Due:** Film response to *Rebel Without a Cause*

March 23: Shattering the Consensus: America in the 1960s

- Primary Doc. 6: “Paul Ackerman, Journalist, discusses the political potential of music” (1956)
- **Due:** Source review/research questions

March 28 and 30: Spring Break, NO CLASSES

April 4: The Idyllic Sixties of TV or a Time of Upheaval?: Contradictory Messages in Popular Culture

- **Due:** Article response (Article 3: “Fractured Fairytales”)

April 6: Responses to Vietnam: The Countercultural Legacy of the 1960s

- Article 4: “Ivy League Jeremiad: The Struggle between Winning and Character” by David W. Zang
- **Due:** Primary document analysis (Doc. 6 “Paul Ackerman”)

*****April 7—Last day to withdraw from classes or college for the semester*****

April 11: Documentary: *Respect Yourself: The Stax Story* (2007), 155 mins.

April 13: Finish *Respect Yourself*

- **Due:** Article response (Article 4: “Ivy League Jeremiad”)

April 18: Let the Sun Shine In on Our Purple Haze: Drugs, Religion, Protest, and Music in the 1960s

April 20: A Cultural Crisis of Confidence: Disillusionment in the Late 60s and Early 70s

- Article 5: “Films of the Late 60s and Early 70s, from Counterculture to Counterrevolution (1967-1971)” by Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner
- **Due:** Documentary review of *Respect Yourself*

April 25: Film: *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) 95 mins

April 27: Finish *Dr. Strangelove*; Musical Changes in the 1970s

- **Due:** Article response (Article 5: “Films of the Late 60s and Early 70s”)

May 2: Television Comes of Age: Challenging Uniformity and Harmony in the 1970s

- **Due:** Film response to *Dr. Strangelove*

May 4: Student Presentations

**Final Research Paper due
Tuesday, May 10 by 11:59 pm (no late work accepted)**