HISTORY 851

POLITICS AND POPULAR CULTURE IN TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICA

History 751 is an advanced graduate seminar that investigates significant problems in the history of the United States since 1900. The specific focus of the seminar changes from year-to-year and alternates between a research seminar (geared toward producing original research in primary sources) and a readings seminar (geared toward mastering the scholarship in a particular field). During Spring 2012, the readings seminar will explore current research on the relationships between politics and popular culture in the twentieth century United States.

All books are available in paperback at the Bookstore. Students can find additional assignments--those labeled with an asterisk (*) below--at the Blackboard Website. Readings are assigned from the following volumes:

Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk*
Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices*
Bradford Martin, *The Theater Is in the Streets*
Charles McGovern, *Sold American*
Steven Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right*
Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News*
George Schuyler, *Black No More*
Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, eds., *American Movie Audiences*
Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding*
Stephen Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*

ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Participation. Preparation for and participation in class discussion constitute the single most important part of the course. Thus, regular attendance and participation are mandatory. Students are required to attend every session--there will be no unexcused absences. If you are unable to attend a meeting (due to illness or family emergency) it is your obligation to contact the instructor. Class participation will account for 20 percent of your final grade in the course.

   One aspect of participation involves the preparation (and submission) of discussion questions. At least three times during the semester, each student will submit no later than 5:00PM on the day before the seminar 3-5 discussion questions about that week’s assigned readings. The questions should be provocative, rather than definitive, raising issues for class discussion.
2. Short Papers. Three times during the semester you will turn in a critical assessment of your reading before the beginning of class. These short essays of approximately 5-6 pp. should make a clear statement (in your own words) of the central thesis or theses of the book, and make an initial evaluation of the book. These essays are due in my mailbox, at 5:00PM on the Friday preceding the class for which you are assessing the readings. You must submit your first short essay by Friday, February 3, your second by March 2, and your third by April 12.

Together, the three short essays will account for 45 percent of your grade in the course.

3. Final Paper (Analytic Essay or Site Analysis). Using the literature on a given subject (e.g. consumer politics, the Harlem Renaissance, television news, the New Left, advertising and mass culture, etc.) as a starting point, students will frame an analytic problem and address it in an expository essay of approximately fifteen pages. The paper may include discussions of various texts, but you should not compose a review essay or a historiographic essay.

Your principal assignment is to reflect on the larger issues you have discussed throughout the semester and develop a question or problem. You will then answer that question—sustaining your own argument about the problem and drawing illustrative examples from the assigned texts. (Students are, of course, invited to write on a subject not appearing on the syllabus and consider works not on the reading list, as long as they clear their choice with the instructor). The final paper is due on Friday, May 4, 2011 and will account for 25 percent of your grade in the course.

During the week of Tuesday, April 3, each student will meet individually with the instructor to discuss topics for the final paper. One week later, on Tuesday, April 10, students will turn in a brief prospectus (1-2 pages), outlining their topic, its significance and the major sources they expect to consult.

4. Final Presentation. During the final two sessions of the course, students will make an oral presentation on the subject of their final essay. Each student will make a ten-minute presentation about his or her research, after which the class will join in five minutes of suggestions, questions, and analyses. Time limits will be strictly enforced. The Final Presentation will account for 10 percent of your final grade in the course.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND CLASS MEETINGS:

WEEK 1. January 17--Introduction to the Course

SUGGESTED READING:

WEEK 2. January 24--Newspapers, Commerce, and Reform in the Early 20th Century

ASSIGNED READING:

4. Chris Daly, *Covering America* (2012), Chs. 5-6.*

WEEK 3. January 31--Movies, Their Critics, and Their Audiences: The Silent Era

ASSIGNED READING:


WEEK 4. February 7--Purchasing Powers: Consumption and Politics

ASSIGNED READING:


WEEK 5. February 14--"New Negroes": African American Politics and Popular Culture in The Era of the Harlem Renaissance

ASSIGNED READING:

Cullen, “Heritage” (1925); Langston Hughes, “I Too Sing America” and “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” (1926); Langston Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (1926); Claude McKay, “If We Must Die” and Other Poems (1922); George Schuyler, The Negro-Art Hokum” (1926).*

WEEK 6. February 21 NO CLASS MEETING

MONDAY SCHEDULE ON TUESDAY


ASSIGNED READING:

2. Lawrence Levine and Cornelia Levine, The People and the President, pp. 1-24 (2002).*

WEEK 8. March 6--“Folk Traditions”: Authenticity and Nostalgia in Mid-Century American Popular Music

ASSIGNED READING:

1. Benjamin Filene, Romancing the Folk (2000)

WEEK 9. March 20-- Cold War Culture

ASSIGNED READING:


ASSIGNED READING:

2. Suzanne Smith, *Dancing In The Street*, Introduction, Chapters 4-5. (2000)*

WEEK 11. April 3--Individual Meetings on the Major Paper

WEEK 12. April 10--Hollywood and American Politics

ASSIGNED READING:


WEEK 13. April 17--The Revolution Will Be Televised:
   The New Left, the Counterculture and the Mass Media

ASSIGNED READING:


WEEK 14. April 24--Politics and Culture in the Age of Reagan

ASSIGNED READING:


FINAL PRESENTATIONS BEGIN

WEEK 15--May Conclusion

FINAL PRESENTATIONS

FINAL PAPERS DUE FRIDAY, MAY 4, 2012