

HIST 204.303 Culture and Crisis

Spring 2007
Wednesdays, 2-5
MacNeil Center for Early American Studies 105

Prof. Kathy Peiss
peiss@sas.upenn.edu
College Hall 315C
Office Hours: Tues/Thurs. 2-3 and by appointment

How have Americans created and used culture as a way of handling and interpreting periods of economic, social, and political crisis? Do these periods spark crises in cultural representation and practices, or do they further an impetus to preserve culture and invent tradition? How are the emotions evoked at such moments—whether trauma, insecurity, fear, or other feelings—given cultural form? And how are such periods remembered and commemorated? This course focuses on Americans' cultural responses to the experience of the Great Depression and World War II. We examine a wide range of individual and collective cultural expressions, including the WPA programs, the 1939 World's Fair, war photographs and radio broadcasts, the zoot suit and swing culture, and the military's effort to preserve culture in European war areas. The course concludes with a consideration of 9/11 and its aftermath.

Readings:

The following books are available at the Penn Book Center and are on reserve in Rosengarten:
William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1986)
James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (Mariner Books, 2001)
Tillie Olsen, *Yonnonidio: From the Thirties* (Bison Books, 2004)
George H. Roeder, Jr. *The Censored War: American Visual Experience During World War II* (Yale University Press, 1993)
Barbara Savage, *Broadcasting Freedom: Radio, War and the Politics of Race, 1938-48* (Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1999)
Chester Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (Thunder Mouth Press, 2002)
Art Spiegelman, *Maus, a Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History* [vol. 1]. (Pantheon, 1986)

Articles marked "CR" in the syllabus will be available in a course reader (bulk pack) from Campus Copy Center, 3907 Walnut Street. Articles marked "BB" and links to external websites are on Blackboard [*courseweb.upenn.edu*] under "Course Documents." Please note that articles on Blackboard are not in the bulk pack.

Requirements:

***In Class:** Attendance is mandatory, except in cases of illness or emergency. Close reading of assignments and participation in class discussion—quality, not quantity—is expected of everyone. (Attendance and participation will be 10% of final grade.)

***Short Exercises:** These are intended to help you develop specific research and analytical skills. Assignments are described in the syllabus and will be discussed in class. Maximum length 3 pages, due the day of class. Be prepared to present your findings in class.
Due: 1/17, 1/31, 2/14, 2/28, 3/28 (50% final grade).

***Research Project:** The research project may be on any topic related to the subject of the course, and will be developed in close consultation with me. The project must use primary sources, which include printed texts, archival works, manuscripts, visual and sound materials. (Projects may not use Internet sources exclusively.) My aim is to introduce you to “doing” history, following roughly the procedures historians follow as they identify historical issues to study, develop a research plan and bibliography, conduct research, write up their findings, and receive feedback from colleagues. Thus I take a ‘hands on’ approach to research, and you will be required to follow a step-by-step process for developing your project and writing a 15-page paper:

- initial “musings” about possible topics (due 2/21)
- statement of research plans and preliminary bibliography (3/14)
- first draft (4/4)
- a reading/critique of the first draft of a “writing partner” (4/9)
- brief presentation on research project to class (4/18)
- final paper due (4/23)

Meeting these deadlines is crucial for your success! (Research process 10% of final grade; final paper 30%)

Other Matters:

Communication: I hold office hours because I’d rather speak to you in person; if you have a schedule conflict, we can make an appointment at another time. Please write email using accurate and appropriate language, as if you were in working in a business rather than texting your friends. I will respond to email but not always immediately; if your question requires a lengthy reply or a conversation, I will ask you to see me during office hours.

Written work: All written work should be double-spaced, with 1" margins and fonts set at 10-12 points. No email attachments or faxes please. Late papers may be marked down.

Evaluations: In evaluating your work, I look for how well you have understood the material and formulated a thoughtful, engaging, and persuasive response; how well you back up your statements with evidence and offer an argument, not simply an opinion; how coherent, clear,

and well organized your paper is; how you use language, with a preference for writing that is vivid, precise, and grammatically correct.

Students are required to complete all assignments to pass the course. Improvement over time will be taken into consideration in determining course grades.

Academic honesty: Plagiarism, fabrication, and facilitating the academic dishonesty of others are grounds for failure in this course. Plagiarism is the representation of the words or ideas of another as your own work. You may not copy another writer's exact words without using quotation marks around them and citing their source. Nor may you use the ideas or information of another without citing their source in a reference (a footnote or endnote). You may not submit the already written papers of another or the research of another. Although you are encouraged to discuss the readings and your ideas with your classmates, you must develop, outline, and write your papers alone. Please ask if you are unsure about how to cite sources.

Course Outline

1/10 **Introduction**

Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman, "The Appeal of Experience, The Dismay of Images: Cultural Appropriations of Suffering in Our Times," in A. Kleinman, et al, eds., *Social Suffering*, 1-23 [BB]

In class: Dorothea Lange, "Migrant Mother" and related photographs

1/17 **Documenting a Crisis**

William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*, 1-189

Elspeth Brown, "Reading the Visual Record" (handout)

The Great Depression to World War II: Photographs from the FSA-OWI, Library of Congress, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/fsowhome.html>

Exercise: Analyze one photograph of your choice from the FSA-OWI collection, discussing it in terms of the idea of "documentary" and the crisis of the 1930s. Be sure to include a link or copy of the image.

1/24 **The Politics of Cultural Representation**

Tillie Olsen, *Yonnandio*

Meridel LaSeuer, "Women on the Breadlines" [BB]

Stott, *Documentary Expression*, 190-257 (read 259-322 on *Let Us Now Praise* by next week)

In-class: excerpts from "Cradle Will Rock"

1/31 **Modernism Eyes Social Reality**

Walker Evans and James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*

Second half of class: presentation on research tools by Nick Okrent, Meyerson Classroom, Van Pelt 223

Exercise: Analyze a passage from Agee. What does this passages tell you about Agee's method of research and analysis, his understanding of sharecropping families and the Great Depression, and/or his responsibilities as a writer?

2/7 **The American Way**

Lary May, "The Recreation of America: Hybrid Moviemakers and the Multicultural Republic," ch. 2 in *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way*. [CR]

Roland Marchand, "Advertising in Overalls: Parables and Visual Clichés of the Depression," ch. 9 in *Advertising the American Dream*. [CR]

Lawrence W. Levine, "The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences," *American Historical Review* 97 (1992): 1369-1399 [BB]

In class: "Sullivan's Travels" (Preston Sturges, dir., 1941)

2/14 **Imagining the Future**

"War of the Worlds" (CBS, Orson Welles, dir., 1938) [BB]

Hadley Cantril, *The Invasion from Mars: A Study in the Psychology of Panic* [CR].

Official Guide Book; The World's Fair of 1940 in New York (call number: 606 N424);

OR *Official Guide Book of the New York World's Fair, 1939*, 2nd ed. (call number: T785 .A1 1939). In Fine Arts Library Locked Case (ask at desk).

Website: "The Iconography of Hope: The 1939 New York World's Fair"

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~1930s/DISPLAY/39wf/front.htm>

In class: excerpts from "The Great Dictator" (Charlie Chaplin, dir., 1940)

Exercise: Find and analyze two contemporary responses to the New York World's Fair of 1939-40 as an example of "reception." (For example, newspaper and magazine articles, letters to the editor, songs, cartoons.) Only one may come from a digital source. Include the documents with your paper.

2/21 **Wartime Conversion**

George Roeder, *The Censored War*

In class: "Casablanca" (Michael Curtiz, dir. 1942)

Research Project: Email me your musings about potential topics.

2/28 **Race and Radio**

Barbara Savage, *Broadcasting Freedom* (chapter 5 optional)

"Radio Fights Jim Crow" website: Listen to the some of the shows discussed in Savage.

http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/jim_crow/index.html

"Amos n' Andy in Black and White" <http://xroads.virginia.edu/%7E1930s/RADIO/amos/>.

Read text of website and listen to one or two shows.

Exercise: Roeder and Savage have written histories that explore how government, commercial media, and others defined what Americans could see and hear of war. Compare their approaches as historians, then offer your own conclusion about the impact of the government and media during WWII.

3/7 *Spring break*

3/14 **Homefront Vernacular**

Chester Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*

Stuart Cosgrove, "The Zoot Suit and Style Warfare,"

http://invention.smithsonian.org/centerpieces/whole_cloth/u7sf/u7materials/cosgrove.html

Lewis A. Erenberg, "Swing Goes to War: Glenn Miller and the Popular Music of World War II," in *Swingin' the Dream: Big Band Jazz and the Rebirth of American Culture* [CR]

Research Project: statement about research topic and bibliography due

3/21 **Destruction and Preservation of Cultural Heritage**

Lynn H. Nicholas, "Inch by Inch: The Launching of the Allied Protection Effort," ch. 8 in *The Rape of Europa* [CR]

Kathy Peiss, "Cultural Policy in a Time of War: The American Response to Endangered Books in World War II," *Library Trends* (Feb. 2007) [BB]

Mason Hammond, "The War and Art Treasures in Germany," *College Art Journal* 5 (March 1946) [BB]

Website: "Fighting the Fires of Hate: America and the Nazi Book Burnings,"

<http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/bookburning/index.php>

3/28 **Cultural Memory and the War**

Art Spiegelman, *Maus*

Marianne Hirsch, "Holocaust Images and the Work of Postmemory," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 14 (2001): 5-37 [BB]

In class: "History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige" (Rea Tajiri, dir., 1991)

Exercise: Write a review of Maus, discussing the use of the graphic novel form to address the memory of the Holocaust.

4/4 **9/11 Archives and Memorials**

Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, "Kodak Moments, Flashbulb Memories: Reflections on 9/11" [BB]

Marita Sturken, "Memorializing Absence," www.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/sturken.htm
September 11 Digital Archive: www.911digitalarchive.org

Research Project: First drafts of research papers due. Comments on writing partner's draft due by Monday 4/9; send copy to professor

4/11 **After 9/11: Responses**

David William Cohen, et al, "Sacred Spaces and Heretical Knowledge: National Universities and Global Publics," *Responsibility in Crisis* [BB]

Cheryl Mattingly, et al, "Narrating September 11: Race, Gender, and the Play of Cultural Identities," *American Anthropologist* 104 (2002): 743-753 [BB]

In Class: Excerpts from John Adams, "On the Transmigration of Souls," and Bruce Springstein, "The Rising"

4/18 **Presentation and Discussion of Research Projects**

Research papers due 4/23.