

AMERICAN STUDIES 216: AMERICAN CULTURE AND EMPIRE

Section One, Fall 2009

M,W,F 2:10-3:00pm

WEBS 11

Frank King

Office: Wilson 107A

Office Hours: Open Door Policy/By Appointment

Office Phone: None Available. Email is the best way to contact me.

Email: fking1@wsu.edu

“History is a clock that people use to tell their political and cultural time of day. It is also a compass that people use to find themselves on the map of human geography. History tells a people where they’ve been and what they have been, where they are and what they are. Most important history tells a people where they still must go and what they still must be. The relationship of history to a people is the same as the relationship between a mother and her child.”—Prof. John Henrik Clarke

“You Must Learn!”—KRS-ONE

“The American people don’t know what they want until I tell them what they want.”—
Advertising executive from the 1920’s.

“They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.”—Ben Franklin

INTRODUCTION

American Culture and Empire will discuss certain historical perspectives that may not be in most contemporary history classes. We will analyze what is American “culture” and its influence on other nations/cultures. What does it truly mean to be an American and is America’s promise of freedom and equality true for all. This class will look to the past to see its connection to today. Essentially the class will be a history of the present.

REQUIRED TEXTS AND MATERIAL

Zinn, Howard. A People’s History of the United States: 1492-Present

Chomsky, Noam. Media Control

AMST 216 Course Packet (Available at Cougar Copies)

A WSU email is essential to this class. I will send many assignments by email and list any changes in class schedule as well.

POPULAR CULTURE JOURNAL: Most of our interpretations of “American Culture” are influenced by television/movies and music. On a weekly basis we will analyze how popular culture impacts our opinions on social and political issues as well as influence and maintain racial and sexual stereotypes.

1. For this weekly assignment you will record at least 1 song you listened to and 1 television show/movie that you’ve watched.
2. While watching/listening you must interpret the meaning of the particular medium.
3. Music videos or musicals can be analyzed, but you must give your interpretation of the music and visualization. This will count for only one of the submissions (ie Music or Visual).
4. Some things to think/write about while viewing/listening:
 - a. How are groups (race, gender, class, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, disability, body image) depicted and are they being stereotyped?
 - b. Why did you choose this particular song/show?
5. Each writing in your journal needs to be at least 2 paragraphs (5 full sentences in each paragraph), typed and double-spaced.
6. Please create a folder to put your submissions in. I will give 2 days notice to collect journals to give you time to print them out.
7. You can also use some of the visual/audio aids in the class for a journal submission.

THE WIRE JOURNAL: Just like the Pop Culture Journal, you will be required to watch and critique HBO’s television show *The Wire*. This show, about the rampant drug problem and the criminal justice system, addresses many of the issues we will discuss in class. There are a total of 59 one-hour episodes with the series finale being 1 ½ hours. The episodes are available on Netflix, Blockbuster, Video Quest, The Pullman Public Library.

1. After you watch each episode write a 1-2 paragraph critique/opinion of the episode.
2. Your paragraphs can go along with the overall theme of the season/entire series.
3. Some things to think/write about while watching.
 - a. How are groups depicted? Are stereotypes reinforced or dismantled.
4. If you have friends in the class, or are looking to interact with classmates, it is recommended to watch the show in groups.
5. This show has a very different dialog than other shows you’ve watched before. It is imperative that you pay full attention to what the characters are doing and saying. This is important to understand the overall theme of each season and the entire series.
6. The show has graphic language, nudity, violence, and constant use of the N-Word. If you REALLY feel uncomfortable by this, I have an alternative assignment. BUT GIVE THE SHOW A CHANCE FIRST!!!

7. Please note that you should begin this as soon as possible. Do not wait until the end of the semester for it will stress you out trying to find/watch episodes.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance is necessary for passing the class. More than five unexcused absences will result in failure of the class. Attendance will be taken randomly (or daily) and if you miss a day it is your responsibility to see what you missed and make up any assignments you missed.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

I am committed to providing assistance to help you be successful in this course. Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. Please visit the Disability Resource Center (DRC) during the first two weeks of every semester to seek information or to qualify for accommodations. All accommodations must be approved through the DRC (Admin Annex Bldg, Rooms 205). Call 509-335-3417 to make an appointment with a disability counselor.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

If you have any questions regarding academic integrity, please ask me. You are encouraged to also read your student handbook regarding the University's policy on academic dishonesty. I will follow these same guidelines which means plagiarism will result in an F for the course and I will notify the Assistant Dean of Students for University disciplinary action.

ASSIGNMENTS

Along with the Popular Culture Journal (see above) there will be several quizzes, writing assignments, a midterm, and final paper. All assignments should be double-spaced with standard margins on all sides (1" top and bottom, 1.25" left and right) and 12 pt Times New Roman font. **Sources must be documented** according to MLA format. A satisfactory site for MLA format is Purdue Online Writing Lab's Citation Resources: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/>.

I will give several quizzes throughout the semester, many will be based on your readings and others will be based on class discussion. The reading load is very heavy, but it is important to understand as much of the material as possible, therefore quizzes are a tool to test your comprehension. All quizzes and tests will be in short answer or essay form.

The midterm will be in the form of essay and you will need to purchase a blue book for the test. If you do not have a blue book you will not be able to take the test.

Discussion papers are informal but critical pieces. They should be no less than 2 double-spaced pages on subjects pertaining to this class. I may ask you to write about specific issues, but I might also leave the subject up to you, merely asking that you connect your discussion to the readings or the class discussions. I will respond to these papers with my own thoughts and ideas, according to the depth and breadth of your

thinking. I may also respond with a critique, a request for further analysis, or suggestions for future paper topics. You'll be graded on the quality of your engagement with the issues presented in class and your capacity for critical thinking. Are you struggling to find the meaning of a particular reading or to understand a classmate's comment? Are you applying what you read to your own life or to American culture or history in a way that sheds light on both? These are the things I will look for in your discussion papers.

Summaries are NOT acceptable.

The discussion papers give you the chance to reflect honestly on topics we deal with in class as well as events in your lives that you feel have a bearing on our discussions of American Cultures. They are called "discussion" papers because they're meant to be mutually beneficial, individualized discussions between student and professor. When you receive my responses, you may respond to my questions/thoughts in the next discussion paper or move on to another topic. All I ask is that you give my responses the same attention I will be giving yours.

ALL ASSIGNMENTS MUST BE SUBMITTED IN PAPER FORM. I WILL NOT ACCEPT ASSIGNMENTS SENT VIA EMAIL.

There will be a final take home exam with 1-2 questions that will incorporate materials from the entire semester.

There will also be a final paper of a topic of your choosing involving American Cultures and Empire. Basically write anything you want. We will discuss the format after the Mid Term.

LATE PAPER POLICY

Pop quizzes cannot be made up (No Exceptions), however there may be extra credit assignments that can account for some points that you have missed from pop quizzes.

If you miss an assignment, you have one week from the due date to turn it in. Exceptions must be legitimate excuses approved by the instructor.

CALCULATING YOUR GRADE

POINTS

Pop quizzes and participation	10 PTS EACH
Pop Culture Journal	100 PTS
Discussion paper	25 PTS EACH
<i>The Wire</i> Journal	100 PTS
Midterm	100 PTS
Take Home Final	100 PTS
Final Paper	200 PTS

To tally up your grade add your total points and divide by the total points for the course. This way you will know your grade throughout the semester.

PLEASE NOTE THAT ALL ASSIGNMENTS AND SCHEDULE OF MATERIALS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE.