

# English 2264: Reading Popular Culture

Wednesdays, Fridays 11:10-12:30  
0375 Journalism Building

Meg LeMay  
mailbox: 421 Denney Hall  
office: 569 Denney Hall  
office hours: WF 9:30-11 am  
e-mail: [lemay.15@osu.edu](mailto:lemay.15@osu.edu)

English 2264: Reading Popular Culture is designed to introduce you to a variety of critical approaches used in the study of the “popular.” While this class will draw on your familiarity with pop culture examples, we will be focusing on various philosophical approaches in order to understand the role that popular texts have in our world. Every day we engage with popular images, sounds, spaces, and stories that we take to be natural. However, these representations are far from natural. Rather, they reflect how popular culture is both the manifestation and producer of shared worldviews.

The focus of our study will be identity such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability as they inform and are informed by pop culture. The overall objective is to explore how popular culture, in its various forms, not only reflects dominant worldviews, but also how it influences the way we perceive our own identities and the identities of others. Additionally, while popular culture provides scripts for understanding ourselves and our communities, communities of readers may potentially resist or alter these scripts in unanticipated ways. We will examine this complicated interplay between production and reception in various pop culture forms (such as television, film, music, subcultures, fashion, etc.). We will likewise pay close attention to their narrative and textual patterns. Using a wide range of critical approaches (such as semiotics, political economy, genre theory, feminism, critical race studies, queer theory, reception theory) we will explore how the “popular” is a rich and complex site for thinking about identity, power, and cultural anxieties. Additionally, we will spend several classes after the midterm exploring these intersections in J. Jack Halberstam’s book, *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal*.

## **Goals and Objectives for the General Education Curriculum (GEC)**

General Goals: Students evaluate significant writing and works of art. Such studies develop capacities for aesthetic and historical response and judgment; interpretation and evaluation; critical listening, reading, seeing, thinking, and writing; and experiencing the arts and reflecting on that experience.

General Expected Learning Outcomes:

1. Students develop abilities to be informed observers of, or active participants in, the visual, spatial, performing, spoken or literary arts.
2. Students develop an understanding of the foundations of human beliefs, the nature of reality, and the norms that guide human behavior.
3. Students examine and interpret how the human condition and human values are explored through works of art and humanistic writings.

## Required Texts

- Articles posted to Carmen\*
- *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Critical Reader* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2011) by Gale Dines and Jean M. Humez
- *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender and the End of Normal* by J. Jack Halberstam

\*Always bring the assigned readings to each class meeting. This includes both assignments from the textbook and hard copies of articles posted to Carmen. Your Buck-ID allows you to print 50 free pages each semester at university computer sites, with additional pages costing ten cents each.

Additionally, I have placed the Dines and Humez Reader on 2 hour reserve at SEL (Science and Engineering Library) near Denney Hall. Printers and photocopiers are available at SEL.

## Resources

The **OSU Writing Center** is available to provide free, professional writing tutoring and consultation. You may set up an appointment by calling 688-4291 or by dropping by the center at 475 Mendenhall Laboratories. If you are interested in on-line writing advice, visit the OWL (On-Line Writing Lab) at [www.cstw.osu.edu](http://www.cstw.osu.edu).

**The Office for Disability Services** offers services for students with documented disabilities. The Office for Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>.

## Policies and Procedures

**Attendance** is important to the success of this class and to your performance. Therefore, each unexcused absence after **three** will result in the lowering of your final grade by a third of a grade. Excused absences, such as those for documented illness, family tragedy, religious observance, or travel for inter-collegiate athletics, will not affect your grade. **Seven unexcused absences will automatically result in failure of the course!**

**Tardiness** is disruptive to the classroom environment, and prevents you from fully participating and assimilating the information and materials discussed in class. It is your responsibility to inform me of your attendance on tardy days. Excessive tardiness will lower your participation grade.

**Plagiarism** is the unauthorized use of the words or ideas of another person. It is a serious academic offense that can result in referral to the Committee on Academic Misconduct and failure for the course. Please remember that at no point during the writing process should the work of others be presented as your own.

**Student Work** must be completed and submitted on time. All written assignments should be turned in by the specified deadlines. Late submission of a final graded assignment will result in the deduction of **one full letter grade** for each day past the due date (for example, B+ to C+). I

do not provide make-up options for students who miss class on the day of a quiz or the midterm.

A grade will not be affected when a written assignment or exam is missed for reasons that would result in an excused absence. Documentation of excused absence is required. Students who know they will miss class when work is due must contact the instructor as soon as possible in advance of class to arrange for submission of the assignment.

**Class Cancellation Policy:** In the unlikely event due to emergency, I will contact you via email and request that a note be placed on the door. In addition, I will contact you as soon as possible following the cancellation to let you know what will be expected of you for our next class meeting.

**Cell Phone and Laptop Policy:** Cell phones are both distracting to your peers and disrespectful to the class. Make sure that at the beginning of each class, your phone is off and put away. As useful as laptops can be, they are not conducive to class discussion and collaboration. In a class of our size it is important that we keep our space as intimate as possible and laptops are to be put away except when needed for documented disabilities.

**Course Values:** Our classroom will be a space for honest and thoughtful discussion. Therefore, we will work together to create an environment that fosters safe and respectful educational opportunities. We represent a multitude of different personalities and diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and opinions. All students are encouraged to be open about their questions and thoughts as they relate to the goals of the course. While discussing controversial topics, our comments will be mindful and conscientious about the complexities of our communities and the diversity of the classroom. Additionally, it is important to stay on topic. Please understand that personal anecdotes are discouraged as they redirect the class away from the material at hand.

## Course Requirements

During the semester, you will complete several major assignments designed to build on each other intellectually and conceptually. These assignments are:

Participation	15%
Quizzes	20%
Midterm	25%
Presentation	10%
Final Project	30%

### **Participation (10%)**

**Skills:** Active participation in classroom discussion and in-class writing activities, productive and thoughtful collaboration, respect for classmates, formulation of critical questions on the Discussion Forum found on our class blog: <http://www.readingpopcultureosu.wordpress.com>

Participation is essential as a successful class requires that all of the students come prepared to engage and ask questions, not only of the instructor but of their peers. While I stress that there are no “experts” in our class, I recognize that not all students are comfortable asking questions

about what they do not understand. To that end, *all* students will post questions and ideas about the reading **five** times throughout the semester. You may choose which weeks to post your questions and whether to post on Wednesday or Friday, however, you *must* post an hour before class—at 10:10 a.m.—on the class blog. In other words, you must post your question before our class discussion. It is important that you raise questions about the readings as we are exploring them. Therefore, questions posted after we have completed our discussion will not count. This not only allows all students' voices to be heard, particularly the less vocal, but also allows the instructor to have a stronger sense of what interests students for purposes of directing class discussion. The questions or comments each week must refer to *a specific section of the text and cite the page number*. Any other additional comments or questions may be in response to the comments of peers or speak to other issues relating to the topic of the week and will serve to improve your participation grade and are encouraged!

### **Quizzes (20%)**

**Skills:** Reading comprehension, class preparation

There will be short, unannounced quizzes at the beginning of six random classes. Your lowest quiz grade will be dropped. You will not be able to make up missed quizzes due to tardiness or unexcused absences.

### **Midterm (20%)**

**Skills:** Reading comprehension, conveying central arguments through concise written responses, performing thoughtful analysis

The midterm will be a series of questions requiring written answers to some of the most pressing questions presented by our readings and class discussion. The quizzes will begin to prepare students for the types of questions that will be asked on the midterm.

### **Presentation (5%)**

**Skills:** Making appropriate rhetorical decisions to reframe written questions, directing classroom discussion, producing thoughtful questions

Every student will take responsibility for one reading over the course of the semester. Students will give a 3-5 minute commentary about the article that focuses our class discussion for that day. The presentation will identify the most compelling claim about the reading, which part of the reading was puzzling or confusing, and a question that will guide how the class explores the article.

### **Final Project (25%)**

*Option 1: Analytical Paper*

**Skills:** Identification of appropriate popular culture text for analysis, production of a thoughtful critical question, application of analytical frameworks from in-class material, analysis of synthesis of multiple critical viewpoints into new interpretations, thesis development, composing process, style and grammar.

The analytical paper, following the research proposal, will be an analysis of a popular culture text of your choosing completed in 5-7 pages. In this paper, you will identify a unique question about your text and explore it by engaging with one or two essays from our course material. You will synthesize the central arguments of the essays in a discussion about your text and develop your own thesis, or answer to, the question that you pose.

*Option 2: Final*

**Skills:** Reading comprehension, conveying central arguments through concise written responses, performing thoughtful analysis

The final will be a cumulative series of questions requiring written answers to some of the most pressing questions presented by our readings and class discussion. The quizzes, presentation, response, papers, blog posts, and classroom discussions will prepare students for the types of questions that will be asked on the midterm.

## Schedule

WEEK 1	INTRODUCTIONS
WEDNESDAY 1/9	<p><b>WHAT IS POPULAR CULTURE AND WHY DO WE STUDY IT?</b></p> <p><u>In Class:</u> Introductions</p> <p>“High” versus “Low” Culture</p>
FRIDAY 1/11	<p><u>In Class:</u> Introduction to the blog &amp; presentation sign-ups</p> <p><u>Reading:</u> Selections from <i>Everything Bad is Good for You</i> by Stephen Johnson. xv-14, 72-78. (Carmen)</p>
WEEK 2	HISTORIES OF POPULAR CULTURE
WEDNESDAY 1/16	<p><b>THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL</b></p> <p><u>Reading:</u> “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” by Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer (Carmen)</p>
FRIDAY 1/18	<p><b>“AURA”</b></p> <p><u>Reading:</u> “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” by Walter Benjamin” (Carmen)</p>
WEEK 3	THE BIRMINGHAM SCHOOL AND THE CULTURAL STUDIES APPROACH
WEDNESDAY 1/23	<p><b>CULTURAL STUDIES/HEGEMONY</b></p> <p><u>Reading:</u> “Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, and Media Culture” by Douglas Kellner. <i>GRCM</i>. 7-19.</p>

	<p>“Hegemony” by James Lull. <i>GRMC</i>. 33-35.</p> <p>“Notes on Deconstructing ‘the Popular’” by Stuart Hall (Carmen)</p> <p><u>Glossary terms</u>: Class, social class (632), Cultural Studies (624), Hegemony, hegemonic (627), Ideology (627), Marxism (628), Resistance (630), Text, media text (631)</p>
FRIDAY 1/25	<p><b>CULTURE JAMMING</b></p> <p><u>Reading</u>: “Political Culture Jamming: The Dissident Humor of <i>The Daily Show with Jon Stewart</i>” by Jamie Warner. <i>GRMC</i>. 145-153.</p>
WEEK 4	<b>SUBVERSION &amp; SUBCULTURES</b>
WEDNESDAY 1/30	<p><b>THE SEMIOTICS OF SUBVERSION</b></p> <p><u>Reading</u>: Selections from <i>The Practice of Everyday Life</i> by Michel De Certeau (Carmen)</p>
FRIDAY 2/1	<p><b>SUBCULTURES</b></p> <p><u>Reading</u>: “Subculture” by Dick Hebdige (Carmen)</p>
WEEK 5	<b>THE AMERICAN CITIZEN ON TV</b>
WEDNESDAY 2/6	<p><b>AMERICAN DREAMS AND MASCULINITIES</b></p> <p><u>Reading</u>: “<i>Extreme Makeover: Home Edition: An American Fairy Tale</i>” by Gareth Palmer <i>GRCM</i>. 37-44.</p> <p>““Take Responsibility for Yourself””: Judge Judy and the Neoliberal Citizen” by Laurie Ouelette. <i>GRCM</i>. 487-496.</p> <p>“Ralph, Fred, Archie, Homer, and the King of Queens: Why Television Keeps Re-Creating the Male Working-Class Buffoon” by Richard Butsch. <i>GRCM</i>. 101-110.</p> <p><u>Glossary terms</u>: Neoliberalism (628)</p>
FRIDAY 2/8	<p><b>TELEVISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF RACE</b></p> <p><u>Reading</u>: (Read 1<sup>st</sup>) “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” by Peggy McIntosh (Carmen)</p> <p>“The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media” by Stuart Hall. <i>GRMC</i>. 81-86.</p> <p>“What Does Race Have to Do with <i>Ugly Betty</i>?”: An Analysis of Privilege and Postracial(?) Representations on a Television Sitcom” by Jennifer Eposito. <i>GRMC</i>. 95-99.</p> <p><u>Glossary terms</u>: Race, racism (630), Critical Race Theory (624)</p>

WEEK 6	<b>IDEOLOGIES OF POST-RACISM</b>
WEDNESDAY 2/13	<p><b>THE PROBLEM WITH A POST-RACIAL AMERICA</b></p> <p><u>Reading:</u> “Is <i>30 Rock</i> Racist?” by Zeeshan Aleem (Carmen)</p> <p>“What <i>The Office</i> Does Right that <i>30 Rock</i> Does Not” – Racialicious (Carmen)</p> <p>“<i>The Help: Why Hollywood Keeps Whitewashing the Past</i>” by Matt Zoller Seitz (Carmen)</p>
FRIDAY 2/15	<p><u>In Class:</u> Screening of <i>30 Rock Episode</i></p> <p><u>Reading:</u></p> <p>“<a href="#">The Help: Why Hollywood Keeps Whitewashing the Past</a>” by Matt Zoller Seitz (Carmen)</p>
WEEK 7	<b>IDEOLOGIES OF POST-FEMINISM</b>
WEDNESDAY 2/20	<p><b>NEW” FEMINISM/POST-FEMINISM</b></p> <p><u>In Class:</u> The Bechdel Test</p> <p><u>Reading:</u> Selections from <i>Enlightened Sexism</i> by Susan Douglas (Carmen)</p> <p><u>Glossary terms:</u> Feminism (626), Postfeminism (629)</p>
FRIDAY 2/22	<p><b>REPRESENTING WOMEN</b></p> <p>Pairing: “<a href="#">I can have it all”: Liz Lemon Negotiates Power One Sandwich at a Time</a>” by A. Vesey and K. Lambert with “<a href="#">Emmy’s Week 2011: Leslie Knope</a>” – <i>Bitch Flicks</i></p> <p>Pairing: “<a href="#">Mad Men’s Very Modern Sexism Problem</a>” by Sady Doyle with “<a href="#">Why Mad Men is TV’s most Feminist Show</a>” by Stephanie Coontz (Carmen)</p>
WEEK 8	<b>GENDERS AND GENRES</b>
WEDNESDAY 2/27	<b>MIDTERM</b>
FRIDAY 3/1	<p><b>ROMCOMS AND BROMANCES</b></p> <p><u>Reading:</u> “Can Romantic Comedy Be Gay?: Hollywood Romance, Citizenship, and Same-Sex Marriage Panic” by Debra Modellmog (Carmen)</p> <p>“Enlightened Teenage Masculinity” by Robert C. Bulman and Nicole S Mccants (Carmen)</p> <p><u>Glossary terms:</u> Heteronormativity (626), Heterosexism (627)</p>

WEEK 9	<b>REPRESENTING SEX &amp; BODIES</b>
WEDNESDAY 3/6	<p><b>PORNOGRAPHY</b></p> <p><u>Reading:</u> “The Pornography of Everyday Life” by Jane Caputi. <i>GRMC</i>. 307-320.</p> <p>“No Money Shot?” Commerce, Pornography, and New Sex Taste Cultures” by Feona Attwod. <i>GRMC</i>. 283-292.</p> <p>Selections from <i>The Pornography of Meat</i> by Carol J. Adams (Carmen)</p> <p>(optional) “(Male) Desire and (Female) Disgust: Reading <i>Hustler</i>” by Laura Kipnis (Carmen)</p> <p><u>Glossary terms:</u> Pornography (629)</p>
FRIDAY 3/8	<p><b>POPULAR GAY ICONS &amp; QUEER PERFORMANCE</b></p> <p><u>Reading:</u> <a href="#">“Performing Glee: Gay Resistance to Gay Representations and a New Slumpy Class” by Taylor Cole Miller</a> (Carmen)</p> <p><a href="#">“Why is Joe Calderone Revolting?” by Laurie Essig</a> (Carmen)</p> <p><u>Glossary terms:</u> Queer theory, Queer Studies (630), Transgender(Carmen)</p> <p>TBA</p> <p>ARTICLE (TBA)</p>
WEEK 10 3/13 & 3/15	<p><b>SPRING BREAK</b></p> <p><b>NO CLASS</b></p>
WEEK 11	<b>POLITICAL/POPULAR MUSIC</b>
WEDNESDAY 3/20	<p><b>BLACK WOMEN’S SEXUALITY IN POPULAR MUSIC</b></p> <p><u>In Class:</u> Guest Speaker: Brendan Shaw</p> <p><u>Reading:</u> “There are Bitches and Hoes” by Tricia Rose. <i>GRMC</i>. 321-325</p> <p>“If Ya Liked It, Then You Shoulda Made a Video: Beyoncé Knowles, YouTube and the Public Sphere of Images” by Kirsten Pullen (Carmen)</p>
FRIDAY 3/22	<p><b>HIP-HOP COMICS</b></p> <p><u>In Class:</u> Guest Speaker: Ed Piskor, Comics Artist/Graphic Novelist</p> <p><u>Reading:</u> Selections from <i>The Hip-Hop Family Tree</i> (Carmen) <a href="#">“The Infamous 20/20 Segment on Rap Music”</a></p>
WEEK 12	<b>GAGA FEMINISM</b>
WEDNESDAY 3/27	<p><b>INTRO TO GAGA FEMINISM: THINKING WITH KID CULTURE</b></p> <p><u>Reading:</u> “A Note from the Series Editor.” <i>GF</i>. ix-x,</p>

	Preface and Introduction by J. Jack Halberstam. <i>GF</i> . xi-xxv “Pixarvolt – Animation and Revolt” by J. Jack Halberstam (Carmen)
FRIDAY 3/29	<b>GAGA FEMINISM</b> <u>Reading</u> : Chapter 1: “Gaga Feminism for Beginners: by J. Jack Halberstam. <i>GF</i> . 1-29
WEEK 13	<b>GAGA GENDERS, SEXUALITIES AND THE END OF NORMAL</b>
WEDNESDAY 4/3	<b>THE “END OF MEN” DEBATES AND REPRESENTATIONS</b> <u>Reading</u> : Chapter 2: “Gaga Genders” by J. Jack Halberstam. <i>GF</i> . 31-64
FRIDAY 4/5	<b>THE WEDDING INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX</b> <u>Reading</u> : Chapter 4: “Gaga Relations: The End of Marriage” by J. Jack Halberstam. <i>GF</i> . 95-129 Unraveling the Knot: Political Economy and Cultural Hegemony in Wedding Media” by Erika Engstrom. <i>GRMC</i> . 243-254. (optional) “ <i>Sex and the City</i> : Carrie Bradshaw’s Queer Postfeminism” <i>GRMC</i> . 75-80.
WEEK 14	<b>RELATIONS/ORIENTATIONS/POLITICS &amp; IDENTITIES ON THE INTERNET</b>
WEDNESDAY 4/10	<b>WHAT DO <i>THE WIRE</i> AND THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT HAVE IN COMMON?</b> <u>Reading</u> : Chapter 5: “Gaga Manifesto” by J. Jack Halberstam <i>GF</i> 131-149.
FRIDAY 4/12	<b>PLAYING OR POLICING IDENTITY WITH CONVERGENCE CULTURES</b> <u>In Class</u> : Hate Speech at OSU <u>Reading</u> : “Don’t Hate the Player, Hate the Game”: The Racialization of Labor in <i>World of Warcraft</i> by Lisa Nakamura. <i>GRMC</i> . 563-569
WEEK 15	<b>WRAPPING UP</b>
WEDNESDAY 4/17	<b>THE FANTASY OF THE FUTURE</b> <u>In class</u> : Bullying & the “It Gets Better Campaign” <u><a href="#">“In the Wake of It Gets Better” by Jasbir Puar (Carmen)</a></u>
FRIDAY 4/19	<b>EVALUATIONS</b> <u>In Class</u> : Evaluations & Review

Analytical Paper due to Carmen Dropbox entitled, “Analytical Paper” by the day of the final Wednesday, April 24 from 12:00pm-1:45pm