

HI282-15 The Formation of American Culture, 1876-1929

20/21

Department

History

Level

Undergraduate Level 2

Module leader

J.E. Smyth

Credit value

15

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

The Formation of American Culture explores the history of the United States (1876-1929) through the rise of the culture industries, including the production, censorship, and consumption of literature, theater, music, film, radio, television, sport, fashion, and advertising -- and the ways in which individuals have sought to resist or reformulate dominant national discourses through cultural production.

Topics include the incorporation of culture as an integrated big business in the late nineteenth century, the early history of baseball, the creation of the Western, the emergence of working-class culture in dime novels and vaudeville, blackface and the erasure of African American history, Hollywood's attitudes toward working women in the 1920s, and the rise of the gangster as a media hero.

[Module web page](#)

Module aims

Students will learn not only about the history and theory of culture, national identity, and "modernism" in America, but also about the ways in which cultural history is developed, contested, and reconstructed via race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Week 1: The Feminization of American Culture

Week 2: Virginians and Dudes: Selling the West

Week 3: Reading Topic: Making Baseball White

Week 4: Vaudeville and Theatrical Culture

Week 5: Immigrants and Tramps

Week 6: Reading week

Week 7: The New Woman

Week 8: Silent Hollywood and Screening of *It*, 1927

Week 9: Hardboiled Fiction

Week 10: The Dark Side of Modernism

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate a detailed knowledge of the formation of American culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
- Communicate ideas and findings, adapting to a range of situations, audiences and degrees of complexity.
- Generate ideas through the analysis of a broad range of primary source material.
- Analyse and evaluate the contributions made by existing scholarship related to the history and theory of culture.
- Act with limited supervision and direction within defined guidelines, accepting responsibility for achieving deadlines.

Indicative reading list

- Carl Becker, *Everyman His Own Historian* (1935)
- Nina Baym, *Women's Fiction* (1978/1993)
- Suzanne Bost, *Mulattas and Mestizas* (2003)
- Lisa Botschon and Meredith Goldsmith, eds., *Middlebrow Moderns* (2003)
- Cynthia and Sara Brideson, *Ziegfeld and His Follies* (2015)
- Paula Marantz Cohen, *Silent Film and the Triumph of the American Myth* (2001)
- William F. Cody, *The Life of Buffalo Bill* (1994)
- Vine Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1970)
- Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (1995)
- Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper* (1995)
- F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925)
- David Forgacs, *A Gramsci Reader* (1988)
- David Goldberg, *Discontented America* (1999)
- Dashiell Hammett, *Red Harvest* (1929)
- Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *Josephine Baker in Art and Life* (2007)

- M. Alison Kibler, Rank Ladies: Gender and Cultural Hierarchy in American Vaudeville (2009)
- W.T. Lhamon Jr., Raising Cain: Blackface Performance... (2000)
- Robert and Helen Lynd, Middletown (1929)
- Eric Lott, Love and Theft, Blackface Milstrely and the American Working Class (rev. 2013)
- Roland Marchand, Advertising the American Dream (1986)
- April Masten, Art Work: Women Artists and Democracy (2008)
- Jean Matthews, The Rise of the New Woman (2003)
- Walter Benn Michaels, Our America: Modernism, Nativism, Pluralism (1995)
- Krystyn Moon, Yellowface (2005)
- Fred Pasley, Al Capone: Biography of a Self-Made Man (1930)
- Kathy Peiss, Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York (1986)
- Michael Rogin, Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Imigrants and the American Melting Pot (1996)
- Rubin, Joan Shelley, The Making of Middlebrow Culture (1992)
- Robert Rydell, Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World (2010)
- Gilbert Seldes, The Seven Lively Arts (1928)
- Robert Sklar, Movie Made America (1975)
- Richard Slotkin, The Fatal Environment (1985)
- Richard Slotkin, Gunfighter Nation (1992)
- Alan Trachtenberg, The Incorporation of America (1982)
- Alan Trachtenberg, Reading American Photographs (1989)
- Louis Warren, Buffalo Bill's America (2005)
- G. Edward White, The Eastern Establishment and the Western Experience (1989)
- Harold Wilson, McClure's Magazine and the Muckrakers (1970)
- Owen Wister, The Virginian (1902)

[View reading list on Talis Aspire](#)

Subject specific skills

See learning outcomes.

Transferable skills

See learning outcomes.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	9 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Total	153 hours

Type	Required
Seminars	9 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Tutorials	2 sessions of 1 hour (1%)
Other activity	2 hours (1%)
Private study	131 hours (86%)
Total	153 hours

Private study description

History modules require students to undertake extensive independent research and reading to prepare for seminars and assessments. As a rough guide, students will be expected to read and prepare to comment on three substantial texts (articles or book chapters) for each seminar taking approximately 3 hours. Each assessment requires independent research, reading around 6-10 texts and writing and presenting the outcomes of this preparation in an essay, review, presentation or other related task.

Other activity description

Film screenings

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A2

	Weighting	Study time
Seminar contribution	10%	
Presentation and 500 word source reflection	40%	
3000 word essay	50%	

Feedback on assessment

Written feedback provided via Tabula; optional oral feedback in office hours.

Availability

Courses

Course availability information is based on the current academic year, so it may change.

This module is Optional for:

- Year 2 of UENA-VQ32 Undergraduate English and History
- Year 2 of UHIA-V102 Undergraduate History (Renaissance and Modern History Stream)
- Year 2 of UHIA-V1V5 Undergraduate History and Philosophy
- UHIA-VM11 Undergraduate History and Politics
 - Year 2 of VM11 History and Politics
 - Year 2 of VM11 History and Politics
 - Year 2 of VM11 History and Politics
- Year 2 of UHIA-VM13 Undergraduate History and Politics (with a term in Venice)
- Year 2 of UHIA-VL13 Undergraduate History and Sociology
- Year 2 of UHIA-VL15 Undergraduate History and Sociology (with a term in Venice)

This module is Option list A for:

- Year 2 of UHIA-V1V7 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with a term in Venice)

This module is Option list B for:

- UHIA-V100 Undergraduate History
 - Year 2 of V100 History
 - Year 2 of V100 History