

CS 234 American Icons
Winter, 2003
JE 110 MW 9:30-11:18

Professor Barry Shank
Office: 5058 Smith Labs
Phone: 247-6186
Email: shank.46@osu.edu
Office hours: W 3:30-5:00 and by appointment

Required Books, available at SBX

Nell Painter, Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol Norton (1996).
Americo Paredes, With His Pistol in his Hand University of Texas Press 1958
Robert O'Meally, Lady Day: The Many Faces of Billie Holiday
David Remnick, King of the World: Muhammad Ali and the Rise of an American Hero
Plus readings packet available at SBX

Course Description

This course is an undergraduate introduction to the field of Comparative Ethnic and American Studies. We will focus our attention on selected key figures from the past and present of the United States. In this course, we will focus on how these figures function as ICONS—that is, as objects of identification, admiration, skepticism, and analysis. The significance of American icons derives not solely from their own internal qualities, but often from the qualities and ambitions that they have come to represent for others. Through a critical examination of their legacies, we will try to understand some of the variety of meanings that each of these figures has come to represent. In the process, we will ask questions about the relevance of the past for the present, the varieties of cultural representation, the impact that different forms of representation have on their content, and the coherence of American culture.

Requirements:

Your regular attendance is taken for granted. Your careful reading, listening and viewing of the required material is taken for granted. Your participation in class discussion of the course material will be an important part of your grade. There will be one in-class essay, one midterm and a final exam.

Evaluation:

15% class participation
15% in-class essay
30% midterm
40% final exam

Course Schedule:

Week One: Required Reading: Roland Barthes, “Myth Today” in reading packet.

January 6: Introduction to the course. What is American Culture? What is an icon? How do icons function to preserve, challenge and transform American culture? What is the value of discussing icons in a culture of celebrity? Are we merely reproducing some of the worst aspects of popular culture? How is a mythical hero different from a celebrity?

January 8: Discussion of Barthes reading.

Week Two: Required Reading: Raymond Williams, "The Analysis of Culture," John Berger, Chapter One of Ways of Seeing, Richard Dyer, "The Role of Stereotypes" pp.11-17, in The Matter of Images New York: Routledge (1993); Thomas Jefferson, "A Declaration by the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress Assembled," selections from Notes on the State of Virginia, selected letters [all in course packet].

January 13: Discussion of Williams, Berger and Dyer.

January 15: View portions of Ken Burns Documentary on Jefferson

Week Three: Required Reading: Begin Painter

January 20: No Class, MLK Day

January 22: Discussion of Jefferson as Icon

Week Four: Required Reading: Finish Painter

January 27: In class essay applying theoretical readings to Jefferson

January 29: View "Ain't I a Woman," and "Gospel of Wealth"

Week Five: Required Reading: Strouse on Morgan in readings packet

February 3: Discussion of Sojourner Truth

February 5: Introduction to Gilded Age and Discussion of Morgan

Week Six: Required Reading: Paredes

February 10: Film: *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*

February 12: Discussion of Gregorio Cortez as Icon

Week Seven: Required Reading: O'Meally on Holliday

February 17: **Midterm**

February 19: Film: *Wild Women Don't have the Blues*

Week Eight: Required Reading: Presley readings in Packet

February 24: Discussion of gender, race, and music

February 26: Discussion of Holiday and Presley as Icons

Week Nine: Required Reading, Remnick

March 3: Film: *When We Were Kings*

March 5: Discussion of Ali as Icon

Week Ten: Required Reading: Robert Rosenblum, "Saint Andrew", Leticia Kent, "Andy Warhol: 'I Thought Everyone was Kidding'," Paul Carroll, "What's a Warhol?" Arthur Danto, "Warhol," Cecil Whiting, "Warhol, the Public Star and the Private Self," Simon Watney, "Queer Andy" and Jennifer Doyle, "Tricks of the Trade," [all in course packet]

March 10: introduction to Warhol scene, possible Warhol films, possible slides of paintings

March 12: Discussion of Warhol as Icon