

E-Reader Teacher Academy 2010: “Teaching Popular Culture”

History

Jeremy D. Stoddard and Alan S. Marcus

More Than “Showing What Happened”: Exploring the Potential of Teaching History with Film

The High School Journal, Volume 93, Number 2, January–February 2010, pp. 83–90

In a world where students and the general public are likely to access historical information from a television program, film, or even video game, it is important to equip students with the ability to view historical representation critically. In this essay we present arguments for using film to engage students in rigorous and authentic social studies pedagogy and support these arguments with data and examples from our research over the past ten years. Our goal is not to promote film as the ultimate classroom source or as a replacement for a teacher, but to highlight how effective the use of film can be in engaging students in authentic intellectual work with important content and issues. If we have learned anything from our research on using film to teach about the past, it is that it is important to have a clear purpose for selecting a film, both justifying the use of time and presenting the perspective that the teacher wants to portray.

http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/high_school_journal/v093/93.2.stoddard.html

Film

Ernest Stromberg

Out of the Cupboard and up with the *Smoke Signals*: Cinematic Representations of American Indians in the Nineties

Studies in Popular Culture. A publication of the Popular Culture Association in the South (24.1: 2001)

From Kevin Costner’s lieutenant Dunbar waltzing with wolves to Disney’s warbling Pocahontas, the final decade of the twentieth century saw a profusion of silver screen American Indians. In sheer numbers, the ‘Nineties rivaled the 1940s and ‘Fifties, heyday of the cinematic Western, in on-screen Indians. But unlike the Western’s tendency toward stereotypical depictions of bloodthirsty “Injuns” ready to swoop upon innocent settlers or ride down the passing stagecoach, recent films featuring American Indians have generally provided a more complex and sympathetic perspective.

<http://pcasacas.org/SIPC/sipcindex.htm>

John Mihelich

Smoke or Signals? American Popular Culture and the Challenge to Hegemonic Images of American Indians in Native American Film

Wicazo Sa Review, Volume 16, Number 2, Fall 2001, pp. 129–137.

American popular culture has historically been an arena where hegemonic structures and ideas could be challenged and where the status quo could be questioned, often through humor and satire. Continuing this tradition in one of the most refreshing recent contributions to American popular culture, *Smoke*

Signals, Sherman Alexie challenges hegemonic and stereotypical images of American Indians through portraying a complex, humanizing, and contemporary image of American Indians.

http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/wicazo_sa_review/v016/16.2mihelich.html

Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr.

Muzing New Hoods, Making New IdentiTies : Film, Hip-Hop Culture, and Jazz Music

Michelle Wallace

Callaloo, Volume 25, Number 1, Winter 2002, pp. 309-320.

The medium of film has communicated, shaped, reproduced and challenged various notions of black subjectivity in 20th century America since D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* appeared in 1915. Writing in 1949, Ralph Ellison argued that *Birth of a Nation* "forged the twin screen image of the Negro as bestial rapist and grinning, eye-rolling clown--stereotypes that are still with us today" (Ellison 275). Such depictions in cinema had already existed in print media; and they have persisted in all mass-mediated contexts in varying degrees throughout the century. Film, however, has provided a most salient medium for the visual representation of African American subjects. If, as Manthia Diawara has argued, the camera is, "the most important invention of modern time," then it becomes an even more powerful tool when its technology is combined with the powers of music. Indeed, when filmmakers combine cinematic images and musical gestures they unite two of our most compelling modes of perception: the visual and the aural.

Below I consider two films produced during the Age of Hip Hop: Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989) and Theodore Witcher's *Love Jones* (1997).

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/callaloo/v025/25.1ramsey.html>

Michelle Wallace

The Celluloid Cabin: Satirical Distortions of Uncle Tom in Animated Cartoon Shorts, 1932-1947

Studies in Popular Culture, A publication of the Popular Culture Association in the South, 24.1, 2001.

Major Hollywood production studios such as Disney, Warner Brothers, and M-G-M, as well as such less-venerated institutions as Walter Lantz and Terrytoons, have developed a convoluted and often controversial legacy of animating race and ethnicity. From the glib zip-a-dee-doo-dah of *Song of the South* to the politically bowdlerized *Pocahontas*, the cartoon canon has galvanized the racial zeitgeist with unprecedented mobility and voice. More importantly, these archives also serve to reflect, to exaggerate, and to manipulate those very fantasies in (often painfully) revealing ways. One of the most salient—if, to the contemporary viewer, least accessible—examples of such racial distortion remains the conspicuousness of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as both a narrative template and comic fodder. From 1932 to 1947, at least four cartoon shorts have appropriated Stowe's text: *Uncle Tom and Little Eva* (Van Beuren, 1932), *Uncle Tom's Bungalow* (Warner Brothers, 1937), *Eliza On Ice* (Terrytoons, 1944), and *Uncle Tom's Cabana* (M-G-M, 1947).

<http://pcasacas.org/SiPC/sipcindex.htm>

Gary Hoppenstand

Dinosaur Doctors and Jurassic Geniuses: The Changing Image of the Scientist in the Lost World Adventure

Studies in Popular Culture, A publication of the Popular Culture Association in the South, 22.1, 1999.

John G. Cawelti argues in his landmark study of popular fiction, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (1976), that one of the major characteristics of popular literary formulas is their ability to "affirm existing interests and attitudes by presenting an imaginary world that is aligned with these interests and attitudes" (35). Since popular fiction is written for a wide readership, a mass-mediated audience if you will, then it logically must follow that the author of popular fiction must design his or her work to meet the social expectations of that wide readership. This means that the popular story can offer a metaphoric "gaze" into the past and present, a gaze that permits the student of culture to examine the way a particular society perceives itself. Popular fiction can allow us to investigate a society's larger worldview, as well as a detailed self-view of its belief system, so that the examiner can make educated assumptions and perhaps draw some conclusions about the way a particular readership may think and behave today (or yesterday).

<http://pcasacas.org/SiPC/sipcindex.htm>

Roy Schwartzman

Engenderneered Machines in Science Fiction Film

Studies in Popular Culture, A publication of the Popular Culture Association in the South, 22.1, 1999.

The fear that human creations might backfire and attack their creators has been a mainstay of science fiction at least since Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The misgivings become particularly acute when human-engineered imitations of human beings (i.e., robots and cyborgs) raise questions regarding how humans can be distinguished from machines. Assumptions about gender also infuse the ways humans conceive and react to their mechanical progeny (i.e., robots and cyborgs). Whenever human-like creations are embodied, they encounter the fundamental bodily quality of sexuality. The cinematic exploration "fleshes out" how posthuman technological innovations are engendered in their engineering. By problematizing the roles that gender can play in the very conceptions of what counts as human or machine, gender constructions infuse technological innovation in various challenging ways.

<http://pcasacas.org/SiPC/sipcindex.htm>

Hugh H. Davis

A Weirdo, A Rat, and A Humbug: The Literary Qualities of *The Muppet Christmas Carol*

Studies in Popular Culture, A publication of the Popular Culture Association in the South, 21.3, 1999.

Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* has been a popular story since it was first published in 1843. In the years that have followed, its story has been repeated countless times, with the film industry especially fond of telling the tale. Film versions of Ebenezer Scrooge's redemption have varied from straight attempts to show Victorian England, such as *A Christmas Carol* (1938) and *Scrooge* 1951, to modern adaptations, such as *An American Christmas Carol* (1979) and Bill Murray's *Scrooged* (1988), to so-

called "alternative" versions, such as the recent western version, *Ebenezer* (1997), and those with Mr. Magoo and Mickey Mouse. Scrooge has been brought to life in these countless adaptations, played by such notable actors as Reginald Owen, George C. Scott, Alastair Sim, and Patrick Stewart, as well as having been reformatted for other venues (e.g., Lionel Barrymore's Mr. Potter of *It's a Wonderful Life* [1946], or Boris Karloff's famed Grinch).

<http://pcasacas.org/SiPC/sipcindex.htm>

Television

Lynn Spigel

Entertainment Wars: Television Culture after 9/11

American Quarterly, Volume 56, Number 2, June 2004, pp. 235-270.

After the attacks of September 11, traditional forms of entertainment had to reinvent their place in U.S. life and culture. The de rigueur violence of mass media—both news and fiction—no longer seemed business as usual. While Hollywood usually defends its mass-destruction ethos with claims to "free speech," constitutional rights, and industry-wide discretion (à la ratings systems), in the weeks following September 11 the industry exhibited (whether for sincere or cynical reasons) a new will toward "tastefulness" as potentially trauma-inducing films like Warner's *Collateral Damage* were pulled from release. On television, violent movies also came under network scrutiny. USA canceled its prime-time run of *The Siege* (which deals with Arab terrorists who plot to bomb New York). At TBS violence-packed films like *Lethal Weapon* were replaced with family fare like *Look Who's Talking*. TNT replaced its 1970s retro lineup of *Superman*, *King Kong*, and *Carrie* with *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Grease*, and *Jaws* (although exactly why the blood-sucking shark in *Jaws* seemed less disturbing than the menstruating teen in *Carrie* already begs questions about exactly what constitutes "terror" in the minds of Hollywood executives).

http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/american_quarterly/v056/56.2spigel.html

Consumer Culture

Marissa O'Connell

CANDY SHOP CULTURE: HOW ADULTS CAN AFFECT TWEEN CONSUMERISM (July 2010)

In today's consumption-oriented society, marketers of myriad products seek to imitate the appeal of the candy shop. Old-fashioned sweets will always hold a special allure, and in fact food remains one of the primary categories of products marketed to children. But today, many kids want to go to the Apple store as often as the candy store. Swap the jelly beans for iPods that come in colors just as delectable, and you'll understand the position of the modern kid. How can he indulge when the objects of desire are priced at 99 dollars rather than 99 cents?

<http://www.americanpopularculture.com/emerging.htm>

Sandra L. Calvert

Children as Consumers: Advertising and Marketing

The Future of Children, Volume 18, Number 1, Spring 2008, pp. 205-234.

Marketing and advertising support the U.S. economy by promoting the sale of goods and services to consumers, both adults and children. Sandra Calvert addresses product marketing to children and shows that although marketers have targeted children for decades, two recent trends have increased their interest in child consumers. First, both the discretionary income of children and their power to influence parent purchases have increased over time. Second, as the enormous increase in the number of available television channels has led to smaller audiences for each channel, digital interactive technologies have simultaneously opened new routes to narrow cast to children, thereby creating a growing media space just for children and children's products.

http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/future_of_children/v018/18.1.calvert.html

Courtney Bailey

Supersizing America: Fatness and Post-9/11 Cultural Anxieties

The Journal of Popular Culture, Volume 43, Issue 3, Pages 441-462

Published Online: 25 May 2010

At the 2004 summit on obesity, sponsored by time and abc news, US Surgeon General Richard Carmona made the following observation: "As we look to the future and where childhood obesity will be in 20 years ... it is every bit as threatening to us as is the terrorist threat we face today. It is the threat from within."¹ Although Carmona's analogy may seem hyperbolic, it nonetheless suggests that similar anxieties underlie both the "war on obesity" and the "war on terrorism." The film *Super Size Me*, also released in 2004, provides a particularly interesting articulation of these anxieties, which revolve around American expansion and American vulnerability in a post-9/11 world. *Super Size Me* follows filmmaker Morgan Spurlock's month-long experiment in fast food consumption and charts the gradual deterioration of his physical health. Made for US\$60,000, the film brought in US\$11 million at the domestic box office, making it one of the highest grossing documentaries in US history. Along with the requisite DVD release,

the film has also spawned a book by Spurlock, two TV series, and a counterdocumentary called *Downsize Me*. Nominated for a Best Documentary Feature Oscar, the film enjoyed considerable critical acclaim in the popular press, and Spurlock himself has become something of a celebrity. The film's financial and critical success suggests that it has tapped into cultural anxieties pervasive in post-9/11 America, manifested in America's "moral panic" over fatness ([Campos](#) xxiv).

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1540-5931.2010.00752.x/pdf>

Politics

Neil Earle

What Price Progressivism? (May 2010)

In the immediate aftermath of the hopeful election that swept President Barack Obama into office in 2008, media critics on the far right wing of the political spectrum appeared disoriented. This was evident from the language used to describe the new administration. FOX-TV's pundit Sean Hannity, for example, tried to tag "Fascism" to the new administration. The economic stimulus and the continuing bank bailout plan triggered an opposite descriptor as the label "socialist" began to appear. Here was evidence of a slight ideological disarray in pundit-land.

<http://www.americanpopularculture.com/politics.htm>

Henry Jenkins

When Dora the Explorer Met INS: Playing with Popular Icons (June 18, 2010)

based on a lecture, Jenkins briefly discusses "images of contemporary activist groups which drew upon images and icons from popular culture as 'resources' which help them to capture the imagination and motivate the engagement of broader publics." The website includes sample cartoons and photos.

<http://civic.mit.edu/blog/henry/when-dora-the-explorer-met-ins-playing-with-popular-icons>

The audio of Jenkin's complete lecture "'Technostruggles' Revisited: Participation, Resistance, Digital Media and Cultural Politics," is available at <http://www.fiskematters.com/conference/>

Music

Fiona Mills

Rap and Young, White Males: Masculinity, Masking and Denial (December 2001)

Throughout American history, white Americans have expressed fascination with black culture. This fascination has often manifested itself within the entertainment industry. Through the voyeuristic mechanisms of radio, film and television, white Americans have been able to safely regard African Americans without having to make intimate contact with them. In order to maintain this distance, according to Ralph Ellison in his controversial essay "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," white Americans have forced African Americans to don masks which conceal their true identity while, at the same time, allow white Americans a safe glimpse of the exotic black Other. Notably, these masks are most often worn for the sole purpose of white entertainment. A deeper purpose, however, lies beneath this mask.

http://www.americanpopularculture.com/archive/music/rap_white_men.htm

Michael T. Spencer

Rockin' the Right-Wing Blogosphere: John J. Miller's Conservative Song Lists and Popular Culture after 9/11

The Journal of Popular Culture, Volume 43, Issue 3, Pages 600-621.

Published Online: 25 May 2010

On May 26, 2006, right-wing political reporter John J. Miller published an article for the *National Review* titled "[Rockin' the Right: The 50 Greatest Conservative Rock Songs](#)" wherein he identified some of the more "liberal" rock songs according to popular memory from the 1960s to present day as actually "convey[ing] a conservative idea or sentiment." The Beach Boys' "Wouldn't it Be Nice," he says, stands as a "pro-abstinence and pro-marriage" tract, Paul Revere and the Raiders' "Kicks" is an "anti-drug song that is also anti-utopian," and Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Who'll Stop the Rain?" is "pessimistic about activism and takes a dim view of both Communism and liberalism" ("Rockin' the Right").¹ Shortly after its publication, mainstream media outlets, conservative news websites and online message boards were inundated with reactions—postings of similar lists as well as left-wing responses—which either decried or reaffirmed the practice of claiming rock as a conservative political mouthpiece. In my view, the curiousness of these events and the discourses arising in their wake warrants a renewed examination of the ways in which popular conservatism connects with popular culture and a consideration of the rhetorics of interpretation.

Games

Brian Cowlshaw

Playing War: The Emerging Trend of Real Virtual Combat in Current Video Games (January 2005)

While video games have been around for some time now, they have emerged, in recent years, as a major player on the profit scene. Indeed, for the past two years, the video game market has made more money than the motion picture business. Perhaps that's why filmmakers often release video game versions of their films months before theatrical release – in order to heat up the marketplace for their film.

http://www.americanpopularculture.com/archive/emerging/real_virtual_combat.htm

Tom Henthorne

Cyber-Utopias: The Politics and Ideology of Computer Games

Studies in Popular Culture, A publication of the Popular Culture Association in the South, 25.3, 2003.

In his *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, Paul Ricoeur argues that utopia's "most basic function" is its "development of new, alternative perspectives" (16). In his view, "Utopia introduces imaginative variations on the topics of society, power, government, family, religion." These variations, he suggests, have "a *constitutive* role in helping us *rethink* the nature of our social life": "Is not utopia – this leap outside – the way in which we radically rethink what is family, what is consumption, what is authority, what is religion, and so on? Does not the fantasy of an alternative society and its exteriorization 'nowhere' work as one of the most formidable contestations of what is?" (16; Ricoeur's emphasis). If Ricoeur is correct, then utopia's function is essentially subversive: utopia challenges the social order by positing an alternative to it. Rather than "legitimate a system of authority" as ideology does, utopia contests it, addressing "the problem of power itself": "What is ultimately at stake in utopia is not so much consumption, family, or religion but the use of power in all these institutions" (17). Utopia subverts the social order by exposing its arbitrariness in distributing, exercising, and legitimating power. It can only transform the social order, however, when it presents a realistic alternative to it. . . . Utopian fictions, he suggests, do not have the power to effect social change.

Ricoeur, of course, never played PC-based strategy games.

<http://pcasacas.org/SiPC/25.3/Henthorne.htm>

Websites

Library of Congress American Memory site: “American Memory provides free and open access through the Internet to written and spoken words, sound recordings, still and moving images, prints, maps, and sheet music that document the American experience. It is a digital record of American history and creativity. These materials, from the collections of the Library of Congress and other institutions, chronicle historical events, people, places, and ideas that continue to shape America, serving the public as a resource for education and lifelong learning.” <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>

History Matters. The U.S. Survey Course on the Web : Designed for high school and college teachers and students, *History Matters* serves as a gateway to web resources and offers other useful materials for teaching U.S. history. <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/>

The History of American Popular Entertainment from Minstrelsy to Madonna maintained by John W. Frick (updated until 2003) at the University of Virginia: The site provide background materials on American musical trends, among the Vaudeville, Wild West Shows, Minstrels, etc. <http://people.virginia.edu/~jwf8f/507.html>

Digital History, an online interactive, multimedia history of the United States from the Revolution to the present, is designed for teachers of history and their students. It contains texts, trailers for historically significant films, flash movies, historical music, teacher handouts, e-lectures, etc. <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/>

CulturalPolitics.net is a not-for-profit matrix of sites written and managed by T.V. Reed, with technical and design support from Jeff Kuure.

The website provides resources for the critical analysis of popular culture in the US, including the impact of that culture beyond national borders. Resources include sites on various *forms* of popular culture, including music, film, television, advertising, sports, fashion, toys, magazines and comic books, and the medium in which this message moves, cyberculture. http://culturalpolitics.net/popular_culture

University of Virginia xroads website:

The serious, scholarly study of mass or popular culture is a fairly recent phenomenon, although sociologists have long found the materials with which Americans amuse themselves fascinating for what they reflect about the people and the world around them. Popular culture therefore serves as a mirror wherein society can better see itself. This directory is a handbook for study of several major areas of popular culture.

General url: <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~YP/yppop.html> with a special issue of the e-journal **CULTURAL OBJECTS: THE ELECTRONIC JOURNAL FOR AMERICAN STUDIES AT VIRGINIA (1995-2002)** [American Popular Culture](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~AS@UVA/student2.html) vol VII, Spring 2001. <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~AS@UVA/student2.html>

Example of student produced website:

“IDENTITY CRISIS: The Many Faces of the Man of Steel” website created by Erin Barnes, Dave Hendrick, Chris Yeung at <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~UG02/superman/home.html>. Includes radio clips, links to articles, and a lot of information on Superman in a pop culture context.

Post World War II American Literature and Culture Database sponsored by the English department at the University of California, Berkeley with links to movie and T.V. databases, popular fiction, authors, journals and newspapers. <http://english.berkeley.edu/Postwar/pop.html>

Lone Star College website on American Cultural History 1960 - 1969

“The purpose of this web and library guide is to help the user gain a broad understanding and appreciation for the culture and history of the 1960s. In a very small way, this is a bibliographic essay. While there is no way we can link to everything, we have attempted to find areas of special interest and to select information that we hold dear today – movies we watch, songs we sing, events that move us, people we admire.” <http://kclibrary.lonestar.edu/decade60.html>