

GENA2292 American Themes Through Creative Expression

2021-2022 Term 1 | Monday 1:30-3:15 PM | T.C. Cheng Bldg 114

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“To write, to sculpt, to paint, or to draw, is to initiate an encounter with history, bringing forth the relation between memory and all our meaningful symbolic practices and communal formations.”

— Bernard Stiegler, *On Memory*.

This course investigates topics and themes significant to the United States’ cultural horizons from a variety of artistic perspectives. By raising up cultural products as valid objects through which one can read the structures of American society and the movements of its history, we’ll explore the paradox of creative expression -- observing what art does to the world, how it generates and produces its own context, and how cultural expression brings into being the very situations to which, at one and the same time, it reacts to.

By engaging critically with works ranging from sculpture, painting, monumental architecture, photography, print, music, and cinematography; to radio, television and newer forms of digital art; we will see how cultural analysis is essential in understanding America’s economic, political, and social life.

Moving through America’s early beginnings, to its industrial revolution, to the rise of its culture industries and its current era of mass media, we will grapple with how cultural objects reflect, inform, produce, and alter our individual and communal senses of history.

Course objectives:

- I. The course will familiarize you with several of the dominant ideas and themes in American creative expression.
- II. The course will challenge you to locate these issues both within and beyond the histories of the United States, drawing connections across borders.
- III. The course will explore how creative expression and interpretation are bound up in historical ideologies, exploring their effects on aesthetic thinking, tastes, and judgments.
- IV. This course will introduce you to different methods of reading a variety of historical and contemporary forms of creative expression (oral histories, films, visual materials, literature, etc.)
- V. The course will cultivate verbal and written skills, allowing students to confidently formulate and communicate their analyses.

Course Schedule

Week	Date	Topic/Content
1	Sept 6	Intro to the Course (VC, SP)
2	Sept 13	Enlightenment, Conquest, & Pillage / American Landscape (SP)
3	Sept 20	Urban Underbelly / Enticements and Indictments of Modernity (SP)
4	Sept 27	The Imperative to Fail: William Carlos Williams's Poetry (VC)
5	Oct 4	Art of the Great Migration (SP)
6	Oct 11	The Third World Exoticism: Wallace Stevens's Post-War Poetry (VC) **Project Proposals Due on Thursday at 11:59 PM. Submit to Blackboard
7	Oct 18	Depthlessness and our Missing Past (VC)
8	Oct 25	Myth and Mass Culture / Jaws and The Godfather (VC) **Annotated Bibliographies Due
9	Nov 1	Politics of Representation / Asian Americans in Hollywood (SP)
10	Nov 8	Gender and Sexuality (SP)
11	Nov 15	Radical Difference, Utopia, and Science Fiction (VC)
12	Nov 22	Totality as Conspiracy (VC)
13	Nov 29	Class presentations on final projects

Teaching model

For in-person students:

In-person students are expected to attend class in T.C. Cheng Bldg 114. Starting in Week 2, approximately half of each class period (1:30-2:15 PM) will consist of lecture material from instructors, followed by a short break. The rest of the class period will be devoted to discussion of new materials related to the lecture.

Note that there will be no lecture during Weeks 13, though we expect that students will be present for the entire class period.

For online students:

Students who are unable to attend class in person due to travel restrictions or other extenuating circumstances will watch the lecture via Zoom during the class period. The Zoom lecture will be **live**. The [Zoom link is available here](#). We will repost the same Zoom link on Blackboard as well. Due to technological constraints, online students will not participate in the in-person class discussion. Instead, they will submit weekly written assignments based on new materials related to the lectures.

Assessment Scheme

Attendance — 10%

Participation — 10%

Response Papers (2) — 10% each, 20% total

Project Proposal and Annotated Bibliography — 25%

Final Project — 35%

Attendance — We will take attendance at every class meeting.

If you are to be absent or tardy with a legitimate excuse (sickness, family emergency, essential appointment, etc.), please email both instructors as soon as possible.

Students who miss all or part of a class are responsible for emailing us or a classmate to ask for materials and a quick class summary to catch up.

Participation — To receive full participation marks, students should share ideas, even when they are not fully developed. See [Class Participation Guidelines](#) for more details on participation expectations.

Response Papers — For each thematic week, the instructors will discuss a series of works. These works will form the basis of our in-class discussion. Students will be required to submit 2 response papers (1-2 pages double spaced, 300 words minimum) where they argue for the inclusion of works that they found outside of class as part of the discussion of the week. Students will cite 1-2 outside sources (use MLA citation) in each response paper. Note that the majority of the response paper should still be centered around the students' own ideas.

We intend this as an exercise for students to make connections to our class discussions, practice using the ideas and strategies of the course to analyze a new work of art, and craft an intentional and clear argument.

Questions that can guide their response may include:

- 1) What is happening in this work? What do I see? What do I read? What is my first reaction to the work?
- 2) Can I situate this work within the historical/aesthetic context covered in class? Based on what we've covered in class, what sort of events were happening when this work was made? Does the work make reference to any of these things?
- 3) What questions do you still have about the work?

Each response paper will make up 10% of the final grade.

Students may decide which thematic weeks they would like to submit a response paper for. All response papers must be submitted via Blackboard by Friday evening (5:00 PM) in order to count for that week. Grades and feedback on response papers will be available by the following Friday. There is an option to resubmit the first response paper. See Blackboard for more details.

Project Proposal, and Annotated Bibliography — The main aim of the course is to provide the conceptual tools to engage with various forms of artistic expression (historical or contemporary, comparative or specific). For this reason, you will submit a one-page proposal of your final project in addition to a two-page annotated bibliography to your instructors. In the proposal, you will describe your topic and the structure of your project. In the annotated bibliography, you identify at least three primary sources and two secondary sources. Details to be further discussed in class.

Final Project — Creative Historical Engagement: Students will work individually to explain a cultural period or address a question/ theme. The final project will take the form of a curated exhibition or an original work of art. Regardless of which option you choose, you will be required to write an essay and a completed annotated bibliography where you critically engage with your project through comparison, close analysis, and historical narrative. Further details will be shared in class.

Class Policies

Respect: Everyone deserves a chance to learn in an environment where they feel safe and respected. We do not tolerate disrespect of any kind in our classroom. Lively conversations and robust disagreements about the course content, however, are warmly encouraged.

Late submission: Late submission of assignments will be penalized half a grade for each day late.

Electronics: Students should refrain from using electronics for purposes other than note-taking during class time. We are happy to make accommodations for students with documented needs; just reach out to us.

Academic honesty: The University places very high importance on honesty in academic work and follows a policy of zero tolerance toward academic dishonesty. You may review its policies [here](#). Students will be required to submit midterm exams and final projects to VeriGuide. We will report plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty to the relevant bodies as necessary.

Teaching Feedback: Students will be asked to complete course evaluations for GENA2292 at the end of the term. If you have any comments or suggestions for the course, please feel free to email us or come talk to us in person. We are always interested in hearing what you think and want to help you get the most out of your experience in this course!