

Now & Then*

1990s Popular Culture & its 21st Century Return

MWF 10-10:50am

Peterson 110

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Office Hours: Wed @ 11am at Mandeville Coffee Cart

Friday @ 9am at My Office (Catalyst 162)



From the contemporary rise of flannel to the return of bootcut jeans and teenage luddite clubs, 1990s fashion, television, and culture reboots abound. This CAT 1 course will take a cultural studies approach to the decade of the 1990s to explore the formative technological, political, and mass media shifts and trends that have shaped contemporary American culture. Bookended by the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall and Y2k and then 9/11, this decade saw landlines give way to cell phones, and the internet move from the dulcet tones of dial up to DSL. The 1990s were the decade of the East Coast/West Coast hip hop rivalry, the rise of Nirvana and Seattle grunge, the star-making *Titanic*, TGIF on TV, the OJ live car chase and trial, and some of the first mentions of climate change (then, called global warming). Using popular media (music, film, television, press), this course will explore the artistic, technological, and political shifts of the 1990s, with particular attention to thinking through its

effects on our contemporary culture and examine our current nostalgia for the era. Assignments will focus on developing critical reading skills, reflection, and responding to the texts we read, watch, and listen to.

*Also, the name of a popular 1995 movie!

Course Learning Objectives:

- Understand writing as a process (i.e. that includes, brainstorming, drafting, peer review, revision, reflection)

- Develop metacognitive and critical reading and thinking skills (including learning the parts of an argument)
- Learn how to ask constructive questions
- Practice writing as a learning strategy (this entails developing the ability to critically read, summarize, and begin to respond to arguments)
- Learn how to read critically across a variety of genres and identify disciplinary discourse.

Core Concepts:

By the end of CAT 1, students should be able to understand and define the following terms/ideas.

- Ideology
- History as narrative
- Production of Knowledge (Culture, Art, Technology)

Core Writing Skills Fostered:

- Critical curiosity (active reading & asking productive questions)
- Summary (including identifying the parts of an argument when applicable)
- Analysis of a text
- Paragraph structure
- Reflection & metacognition

For all general CAT policies and specific attendance policies, click the following link:

[☰ CAT 1_Fall 2023_Course & Program Policies](#)

For all the assignments and policies related to assignments, AI, and assignment submission, click the following link: [☰ CAT 1_Fall 2023_Assignments](#)

Course Calendar:

- I reserve the right to change the course calendar (including changing a screening or reading) as the course evolves.
- *Please note that some of the screenings/songs/assigned content contain violence, sex, and depictions of racism, homophobia, and sexism. Before committing to this course, look through the following readings and screenings to make sure you are comfortable and willing to engage with the course material with an open and critical eye/mind.*
- Readings are all linked from the syllabus below or in *They Say, I Say* CAT Edition (TSIS on the syllabus), which you can purchase from the bookstore. All the required TV shows and films are either linked below or available to stream through UCSD Library's Course Reserves. You log in with your active directory.
- The weekly pattern is more or less the same each week, with some variations: reading for Mondays, screenings for Wednesdays, Freewrites & revision on Fridays.

Week 0: Welcome to CAT 1 & the 1990s

Friday: Class Intro

Watch (recommended): *The Lion King* (1994)

Read: [Russell P. Johnson, "On Chat GPT"](#)

VHS, Teens, and Keanu Reeves becomes a star!

Week 0 Reflection by 11:59 pm Friday (Complete/Incomplete)

- What is your relationship to writing? How do you think about writing and its purpose, both in school and in your potential career? What have you struggled with (in the past) in writing classes and what are you concerned about heading into Fall?
- What do you think the purpose of a class like this is?
- What are your impressions of the 1990s? Be specific! 300-400 words total)

Week 1: Welcome to the 1990s

Monday: [Raymond Williams, "Structure of Feeling"](#) (pgs 128-135) + [Chuck Klosterman, "The Structure of Feeling"](#)

Class Policies, Syllabus, Etc.

Annotation #1 Due by 8am (Complete/Incomplete)

Wednesday: Read: [Carolyn Finney, "Bamboozled"](#)

Friday: Watch: *Titanic* (1996)

Possible Clips (in class): *Dazed and Confused* & *Far & Away*

Read: "[Hollywood's 80s Obsession, Gives Way to the 90s](#)" + Free Write Friday

& Read TSIS Ch. 2 "Her Point Is"

Response #1 DUE by 11:59 pm Friday

Week 2: Listening to the '90s

Monday: Read: [Chuck Klosterman, "Introduction"](#) + [Ta Nehisi Coates, "Keeping it Unreal"](#) & [bell hooks, "Sexism and Misogyny"](#) + Cheo Hadari-Coker, "[Chronicle of a Death Foretold](#)"

Recommended: "[How to Mark a book](#)" & Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop* (Chpt on reserve)

Due: Annotations + Observations #2

Wednesday: Listen/Watch: Tupac, "[Dear Mama](#)," "[California Love](#)" and Biggie, "[Big Poppa](#)"

Recommended: *Dear Mama*, Episode 1 & 2 (Hulu)

Friday: Read: [Harmeet Kaur, "Latin artists once had to cross over ..."](#)

Listen/Watch: Ricky Martin, "[Livin' La Vida Loca](#)" and [Selena, "Dreaming of You"](#)

+ Free Write Friday

Read: TSIS, Chapter 3

Response #2 DUE by 11:59 pm Friday

Week 3: The 1990s Blockbusters

Monday: Read: Chuck Klosterman, "[The Movie Was about a Movie](#)"

Due: Annotations + Observations #3

Wednesday: UCSD Librarian Guest Lecture

Watch: *Jurassic Park* (1993)

Friday: Watch: *Men in Black* (winning vote!) + Free Write Friday

Response #3 DUE by 11:59 pm Friday

Week 4: Must See TV (NBC & ABC), Part I

Monday: Listen: "[When Will Met Grace](#)" & Read: [Alfred R. Martin](#), "[Negotiating the Generic Closet](#)" and "[Will & Grace](#)"

Due: Annotations + Observations #4

Wednesday: Watch in class: *Ellen* ("The Puppy Episode")

Watch: *Friends* (Pilot), *Will & Grace* (Pilot) (if possible, watch these back to back in the evening)

Thursday: CAT Conversations @ 12:30pm → Canvas for more info! → Please RSVP!

Friday: Watch: [Margaret Cho, Stand Up](#) (1993); [Margaret Cho PBS Clip](#); [Indigo Girls, "Galileo"](#) + Free Write Friday

Recommended: [B. Ruby Rich, New Queer Cinema](#)

Response #4 DUE by 11:59 pm Friday

Week 5: Must See TV (Fox), Part II

Monday: Read: Krystal Brent Zook, "*Living Single* and the 'Fight for Mister Right: Latifah Don't Play'" (from *Color by Fox*) (course reserves)

Due: Annotations + Observations #5

Wednesday: Watch (in class): *Fresh Prince of Bel Air* (Pilot)

Watch: *Living Single* (Pilot)

Friday: Free Write Friday

Response #5 DUE by 11:59 pm Friday

Week 6: Teen Girls, Consumer Capitalism, and Technology

Monday: Read: [Alice Leppert](#), "[Can I Please Give You Some Advice?](#)" *Clueless* and the [Teen Makeover](#)"

Watch: Watch: *Clueless* (1995)

Recommended: "[Beanie Baby Mania](#)"

Due: Annotations + Observations #6

Friday: No Class/Veterans' Day

Response #6 DUE by 11:59 pm Friday: What is ONE thing you have learned so far that has struck you? What is your impression of the 1990s now? Has it changed from what you wrote in Week 1? Be specific in your response! (200-300 words)

Week 7: Amber Alerts, Moral Panics, and Girl Power

Monday: Read: [Elena Levine, "Buffy and the 'New Girl Order'"](#) & ["Polly Klaas's Murder Fueled 90s Tough Crime Panic"](#)

Recommended: ["Violently Inclined"](#)

Due: Annotations + Observations #7

Wednesday: Watch: *Twin Peaks* (Pilot, 1990)

Friday: Watch: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Pilot) + Freewrite Friday

Recommended: *Xena, Warrior Princess* (Pilot)

Listen: Britney Spears, ["...Baby One More Time"](#)

Response #7 DUE by 11:59 pm Friday (Close Reading)

Week 8: Re-Narrating the 90s: "If the glove doesn't fit ..."

Monday: Read: Linda Williams, "Trials of Black and White" (up to pg. 267) (Course Reserves)

Recommended: Elizabeth Hinton, ["Los Angeles Had a Chance to Build a Better City After the Rodney King Violence in 1992. Here's Why It Failed"](#)

Due: Annotations + Observations #8 (Williams)

Wednesday: Watch (Over the weekend): *The People vs. OJ Simpson* (Ep. 1 and 2)

Wednesday-Friday: *If you are going home for break, ask your family/parents/grandparents/family friends what is ONE thing/moment/feeling they remember from/about the 1990s?*

Week 9: Re-Narrating 90s Scandals: Tonya, Anita, & Monica

Monday: Read: Sarah Marshall, ["Remote Control: TONYA HARDING, NANCY KERRIGAN, AND THE SPECTACLES OF FEMALE POWER AND PAIN"](#)

Watch: *I, Tonya*

Due: Annotations + Observations #9

Wednesday: Watch: *Confirmation* (2016)

Friday: Watch: *American Crime Story: Impeachment* (Pilot)

Recommended: Emma Spencer, ["The Decades-Long Shaming of Monica Lewinsky Wasn't Just Sexist—It Was Fatphobic Too"](#) + Freewrite Friday

Response #8 DUE by 11:59 pm Friday (Close Reading)

Week 10: The Dawn of the Internet: Y2K and 9/11

Monday: Watch: *The Net* (1995)

Wednesday: Watch: *The Matrix* (1999)

Review: Raymond Williams, "Structure of Feeling" (pgs 128-135) and read: [NYT Article on Teen Luddite Clubs](#)

Watch/Listen: Outkast, "[Ms Jackson](#)"

Friday: No Class!

Final Portfolio Due Friday of Week 10 by 11:59pm

For this final assignment you will respond to each of the below prompts (please label 1-4) and then attach your TWO responses (1-8) from the course that you are most proud of and/or that display the most growth. You will turn these responses in as a SINGLE PDF, with your reflection/answers to the questions below on pg. 1. Each reflective response #1-4 should be 200-300 words.

Part 1: Consider your experiences with reading, writing, discussing, and listening over the course of the quarter. In what ways have your communication strategies--especially writing--changed? What were you worried about at the beginning of the term? How do you feel now? How have you improved? You can use examples from your 2 reflections here. What have you learned about your own processes for writing/reading/listening/speaking? What goals do you have for yourself in CAT 2 regarding your development as a thinker? You do not need to answer all of the above questions, but rather they are here to help you think through your work in the course.

This reflection is not an evaluation of the course, but rather an opportunity to examine your self-expectations and your strategies for accomplishing your goals. The most successful reflections will use and analyze specific examples from your assignments this term along a particular theme (i.e. you worked on revision or analysis, etc.).(200-300 words)

Part 2: What is ONE concept, idea, word, historical event (or something else) that you learned this term that most impacted you and/or your understanding of concepts of the 1990s? And, why? (200-300 words)

Part 3: What is ONE idea/concept/etc. that you struggled with most with this term and why? What made it difficult for you? Keep in mind that intellectual struggle can be a good thing! (200-300 words)

Part 4: Given the historical timeframe of the 1990s, what is ONE reading or screening that you would replace? Why and with what? (I.e. is there something you can think of that would be a better fit for future classes) (200-300 words)

Recommended Movies:

Note: feel free to recommend things to add to this list!

Office Space (1999)

White Men Can't Jump (1992)
A League of Their Own (1992)
Reservoir Dogs (1992)
Clerks (199?)
Pulp Fiction (1994)
Baz Luhrman's Romeo and Juliet (1996)
But, I'm a Cheerleader (2000)
Rent (2006)
Angels in America (2003)
Men in Black (1996)
A League of their Own ()