Cultures and Politics in Comparative Perspective

Course Description
MC230 is the first course in the sophomore sequence in the Comparative Cultures and Politics major. This course aims to introduce students to the study of culture/s and politics in comparative perspective, to multiple and integrative paths of inquiry that fuse the social sciences and humanities, and to the practice of interdisciplinary analysis in the study of public affairs. It raises the following kinds of questions: What is ‘culture’ and ‘cultures’? What is ‘politics’? How does culture/s interface with contemporary politics and policies across the globe? Why do some cultural sites, practices and representations become arenas of political contestation? How are nations and national/transnational identities imagined?

Throughout the semester, the course will explore these questions in light of influential theories of culture in the social sciences and humanities and through sustained case studies of Great Britain and France. We begin with an overview of interdisciplinary scholarship on culture/s, cultural production, and the nation. We then examine the ways in which visual media construct Britain and British national identity in the film The Queen. We next turn to two distinct ethnographic studies: Signs of War and Peace, which examines social and cultural practices such as parades function to build cultural and political identities in Northern Ireland, and Lives in Translations, which examines the lives of Sikh youth in contemporary Britain. Our third and final case, Muslim Girls and the Other France, examines the cultural politics of gender and religion within contemporary France. In each instance, we focus on cultural identities, practices, and productions and their relationship to the politics of nation, citizenship, and belonging in Europe.

Course Objectives
MC230 has four specific objectives: (1) to introduce central theoretical approaches to culture and cultural analysis; (2) to cultivate an understanding of and an ability to apply key concepts in the study of cultural politics, such as culture, representation, identity, difference, otherness, and nation; (3) to foster an understanding how a range of humanistic and social scientific texts and textual analyses help illuminate the relationship between culture and politics; and, (4) to recognize the importance of comparative analysis to the study of culture and public affairs and recognize the challenges entailed in such analysis.

Required Texts:
Frears, Stephen, director. The Queen. Miramax, 2006. [you may share this with peers]
Santino, Jack. Signs of War and Peace: Social Conflict and the Use of Public Symbols in Northern Ireland. Palgrave, 2001 (available for purchase as a course pack at Collegeville on Grand River)
Course Pack (available for purchase at Collegeville on Grand River)

Requirements and Grading
This course will be primarily a discussion course, with a relatively small lecture component. It takes as its grounding principle learning is both a solitary activity and a communal process. Reading, one of our most solitary activities, presumes a personal engagement with the text, but it also presupposes a social connection – an effort to convey understanding to others in spoken or written ways. Similarly, learning presupposes personal thought about the subject matter but inevitably brings us into the world and into discussions, analysis, shared findings, and collaborative work with others. So, this course will include a range of assignments to draw on and develop your ability to read, to interpret, to discuss, to explain, to research, to write – and to practice these abilities in solitude and in collaboration.
To receive a passing grade, you must, at minimum, attend class regularly, complete the assigned readings prior to class, participate in class discussions, and complete all assignments at an adequate level. Extensions on written assignments will be granted only with prior permission and only for substantial reasons (e.g., major illness, family loss). All other late assignments will be penalized. You must complete all assignments and attend class (missing no more than 3 sessions) to pass the course.

Final grades will be determined as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informed Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance is a necessary but not sufficient criterion for informed participation; you will also be evaluated on the following: sustained engagement with readings, films, and other texts; sustained contribution to small group discussion; sustained contribution to class discussion.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading commentaries portfolio [3 total for semester—dates TBD]</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural ‘Artifact’ Analysis [5-7 page essay]</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Politics and Policy Project [7-10 page paper or alternative format]</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Honors Option:** Participation in an h-option provides an interesting and fun opportunity for students who are interested in receiving honors credit for this course or who would simply like to enrich their studies of culture and politics. If you would like to earn an "H" on your transcript for this course, you will need a final grade of at least 3.5 in all of the normal course requirements and write an additional short paper (5-7 pages). This semester honors option text is Tvetzian Todorov’s *Conquest of America*. Please contact me during the second week of class to express your interest.

**Academic Honesty**

In an era in which papers can be easily purchased on the internet and polls of student behavior indicate a relatively high tolerance for ‘borrowing’ the work of others, academic honesty often seems to be honored in the breach. So, we want to underscore that in MC 230, we will adhere to College and university policies on academic integrity for all work in the course. As we examine the work of others and as we engage in our own work, we will discuss the nature of academic integrity, the reasons for it, and the ways to insure it. To provide some useful background, we refer students to Sources, an excellent project on academic honesty developed by the faculty at Dartmouth College [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~sources/contents.html](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~sources/contents.html). In addition, we refer you to the policy of the JMC Faculty: “The Faculty Assembled recommend that in cases involving proven academic dishonesty, the student should receive, as a minimum, a 0.0 in the course and that a record of the circumstances, sanctions, and any appeal, be placed in the students confidential file. The individual faculty member or the Dean may recommend further action, including dismissal from the University, to the Student-Faculty Judiciary. If a second case of academic dishonesty should occur, the recommendation is that the faculty, through the Office of Director of Academic and Student Affairs, should seek the student’s dismissal from the College and the University.” [James Madison College Student Handbook on the College website](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~sources/contents.html).

**Technology Protocol/Policy:** No laptops allowed unless required for class session unless prior permission is given. Please bring written or printed notes when necessary. Also, no cell phones or texting allowed—you will be asked to leave class if you engage in these activities.
Course Schedule
Please note: course pack readings are designated CP; ANGEL readings are designated A.

I. What is “culture”? What is a “nation”?

September Th 2 Introduction into course—The World Cup, head scarves, and cultural politics?

Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?” in Nation and Narration, edited by Homi Bhabha. Pages 8-22. (CP)

II. Cultural Production and the Nation
A. Representations, Narratives, and Myths

Th 9 Film: The Queen (Frears); view before class.
www.prnewswire.co.uk/cgi/news/release?id=47983.
Recommended reading: Daniel Chandler, “The ‘Grammar’ of Television and Film” (A)

T 14 Film: The Queen (Frears)


Th 23 Readings: Roland Barthes, “Novels and Children (pages 50-52); “Toys” (pages 53-55); “Wine and Milk” (pages 58-61); “Steak and Chips” (pages 62-64); “The Great Family of Man” (pages 100-102), in Mythologies (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972). (A)
### B. The Case of Northern Ireland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Readings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

#### October T 5

**Readings:**

### III. Conceptualizing Culture/s in Comparative Perspectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Readings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Th 28</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mid-term exam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4
IV. Cultural Politics and Policies

A. The Case of Sikh Youth in Britian

November

2

Th
4

T
9
Due: Topics for cultural politics/policy project.

Th
11

B. Transitions

T
16
Politics, Video and Film: YouTube clips on Sikh youth; They Call Me Muslim (2004), directed by Diana Ferrero (documentary); etc.
Homi Bhabha, “Introduction,” to Narrating the Nation (London: Routledge, 1993). Pages 1-7 (CP)

Th
18
Politics, Video and Film: YouTube clips on Muslim women in France; cartoons, etc.

C. The Case of Muslim Girls in France

T
23

Th
25
Thanksgiving – no class.

T
30

December

Th
3
V. Epilogue: Cultures and Politics in Comparative Perspective?

T  7   Workshop day: Rough drafts of cultural politics/policy project due.

Closing comments

T  14   Final Exam Period – 10:00am – Noon
Final draft of cultural politics/policy project due.