

# GAH 2256-001

## American Popular Culture and Folklife

T/TH 8:30-10:20am, K101

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**Instructor:** Dr. Kristin Jacobson

**Office phone:** (609) 626-5581

**Office Location:** J-236

**Email:** Please use our WebCT email

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:30am-12noon; and by appointment

**Mailbox:** Arts and Humanities, K-150

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**Trip Itinerary (Course Description):** This course, structured like a road trip, surveys American popular culture and folklife, synthesizing material from a variety of popular and folk genres. Issues of location will help us navigate this diverse interpretive terrain. By locating popular and folk cultures within specific geographies—gendered, raced, ethnic, sexualized, and class contexts—we will map a clearer understanding of the roles of a range of popular and folk texts in American culture. Additionally, we will be concerned with locating and exploring the various connecting points among rural, urban, “extreme”, and virtual cultures, which compose the four major units or “stops” of this class. We will also closely inspect the vehicles (or genres) of popular and folk cultures—literature, media, entertainment, music, and film. By the end of this semester, students should be a competent “driver” of—and maybe even a bit of a “mechanic” for—several different popular and folk vehicles.

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### **Required Road Maps (Texts):**

- ***Bastard Out of Carolina***, Dorothy Allison
- ***Jazz***, Toni Morrison
- ***Into the Wild***, Jon Krakauer
- **Class Handouts:** some readings will be distributed in class and/or via WebCT. (designated as CH in the syllabus below)
- **WebCT:** If you have questions about using WebCT, consult a lab assistant or your instructor. See also: <http://gannet.stockton.edu/cts/publish/WebCT.pdf>

### **Recommended Road Map (Text):**

- **MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition**

### **Additional Resources:**

- **Stockton Libraries:** <http://library.stockton.edu/>
    - **Periodical Databases:**  
[http://library.stockton.edu/Library\\_Databases/Dbases\\_table.html](http://library.stockton.edu/Library_Databases/Dbases_table.html)
    - **Language and Literature links:**  
[http://library.stockton.edu/Web\\_Resources/lang.html](http://library.stockton.edu/Web_Resources/lang.html)
  - **See also the links posted in WebCT**
  - **Podcasting:** <http://www.podcasting-tools.com/>
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### **Emergency Road Assistance (Email & Office Hours Policy):**

1. Use WebCT email for all course-related correspondence.
  2. I check my email each day in the morning. Please plan your email questions accordingly.
  3. Visit my office hours with specific questions about course material. Contact a classmate if you are absent and then visit my office hours if you need further clarification about missed material.
  4. I will not discuss or disclose grades over email. Grades should be discussed in person during office hours or other arranged meetings.
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**Accommodation for Students with Special Needs:** Stockton College complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students with disabilities who seek accommodations should contact the Learning Access Program located in the West Quad Building, Suite 110 or by call 652-4988. Additional information on the program may be obtained from Stockton web site <http://www2.stockton.edu/wellness/lap.html>.

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**Academic Dishonesty:** Dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. Dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. Students who are found to be dishonest will receive academic sanctions and risk failing the course. Other sanctions may also apply.

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**Milestones (Course Requirements):** You will be expected to:

- (1) **Attend class meetings and be prepared.** That means DO THE READING; this is a discussion-based class and if you haven't done the reading, you won't be able to contribute and the class (as well as your grade) will suffer accordingly. Additionally, the majority of material viewed or introduced in class is not available in the library or other outlets. I do not loan my personal video collection to students, but you are welcome to schedule a viewing during my office hours. (This may not always be possible.)
    - a. **Attendance**—you are allotted four absences during the semester for fatigue, burnout, illness, cocktail flu, personal reasons, malfunctioning alarm clocks, etc. (Note I do not distinguish between excused or unexcused absences. If you miss four days and then get the flu and miss another day, you will lose 5 percentage points for the fifth absence.) For each absence after your first four, your final grade **will be reduced five percentage points per additional absence**, down to and including "F."
  - (2) **Participate in large and small group class discussions.** This course is what you make of it and will work *only* if everyone participates;
  - (3) **Complete all assignments.** Passing the course requires timely completion of ALL of the assignments, long and short, in-class and out-of-class. No assignments will be accepted after the last day of classes.
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**Odometer (Grades)**

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| • WebCT Quizzes (Best 4 out of 5, 100 points each)                    | 400 |
| • Local Folk/Popular Culture Report (20 minute podcast w/ transcript) | 200 |
| • Analysis Paper (6-8 typed pages)                                    | 300 |
| • Class participation   | 100 |

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**Total: 1000**

**Grading Scale**

100-95: A	89.9-87: B+	79.9-77: C+	69.9-67: D+
94.9-90: A-	86.9-83: B	76.9-73: C	66.9-63: D
	82.9-80: B-	72.9-70: C-	62.9-60: D-
			59.9 & below: F

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**Assignments:**

- **WebCT Quizzes** (5 total; 100 points each; lowest score dropped): All quizzes will take place in WebCT on the designed day and time listed in the syllabus. All quizzes are “open book” (books & notes allowed). They may contain multiple choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, and short answer responses. This is a *reading and discussion intensive course*. The best preparation for the quizzes will include close readings of the texts on your own and regular class attendance. If you know you will not be able to take a quiz, you must consult with the instructor **in person prior to the quiz period** to make alternative arrangements. **NO MAKE UP QUIZZES OR EXAMS WILL BE OFFERED AFTER THE DESIGNATED QUIZ PERIOD.** Each quiz is worth 100 points.
- **Local Folk/Popular Culture Report** (200 points; 20 minute podcast with typed transcript): This researched group report will explore a local folk and a local popular culture. See Assignment Description for more details.
- **Analysis Paper or Podcast** (300 points; 6-8 typed pages or 15-20 minute podcast with typed transcript): This individual research paper or podcast will expand one of your group reports and analyze the cultural significance of a particular artifact or aspect of the folk or popular culture. See Assignment Description for more details.

**Late Assignment Policy:**

I understand that life is full of surprises and sometimes those surprises influence your coursework and your ability to complete assignments. As a community of learners, we also recognize that we have a responsibility to the group, to our instructor, and to ourselves. We understand that every action has a consequence—even when circumstance may limit our power to act. To balance individual and community needs, we have the following guidelines for late assignments.

**Papers & Podcasts:** *Papers and podcasts are due at the beginning of class.* Late assignments will be docked 5 percentage points per day late. So, if a B (85%) paper due on Tuesday at 8:30am were passed in on Tuesday at 10:30pm, the recorded grade would be B- (80). If it were passed in on Wednesday, the paper/podcast would earn a 75. And so on and so forth.

**Assignment Extensions:** Any student who asks me *before the assignment's due date* may receive a 2-day extension from the due date listed on the syllabus. After 2 days the late paper penalty will go into effect. No exceptions.

**WebCT Quizzes:** No quizzes may be taken after the designed quiz period without prior approval by the instructor. **NO MAKE UP QUIZZES OR EXAMS WILL BE OFFERED AFTER THE DESIGNATED QUIZ PERIOD.**

## Syllabus—GAH 2256—Spring 2008<sup>1</sup>

### Week 1: Introduction to Folk and Popular Cultures—Definitions, or Where's the Map?

- Jan 22 Hit the Road:** Introduction to course, WebCT, assignments, students and instructor. View & discuss short film *Urban Scrawls*.
- Jan 24 Popular Cultures:** CH: Fiske "Popular Culture." Bring a definition (write it down or print it out) and an example of American popular culture to class. Be prepared to explain why this artifact can be considered "popular culture." Read syllabus and assignment descriptions. Introduction to Local Popular Culture Report. (Begin Allison, Chapter 1-3.) **DUE: Take Practice Quiz** (available 8:30am Sunday-8:30am Tuesday)

### Stop 1: Rural Folk and Popular Geographies

#### Week 2: Rural Folk and Popular Cultures—The Roots of Roots Music

- Jan 29 Folk Cultures:** CH Carney "A Geography of Folklife." Bring a definition (write it down or print it out) and an example of American folk culture to class. Be prepared to explain why this artifact can be considered "folk culture." Introduction to Local Folk Culture Report. (Continue Allison, Chapters 4-6.)
- Jan 31 American Roots:** American Roots Music Video, episode 1 Screening. Allison, Chapters 1-8.

#### Week 3: Rural Folk and Popular Cultures—"Ya'All Ain't From Around Here, Are Ya?" Insiders & Outsiders

- Feb 5 Rural Folk:** *Songcatcher* Screening. Allison, Chapters 9-18.
- Feb 7 Rural Family and Music:** Allison, Chapter 1-22. *Songcatcher* and Allison Discussion. Focus the portrayal of the rural American family & identify examples of popular and folk cultures. **DUE: WebCT QUIZ 1** (available 8:30am Sunday-8:30am Tuesday)

#### Week 4: : Rural Folk and Popular Cultures—Twang, Twang: The Politics of Country Music

- Feb 12 Folklorists:** American Roots Music, episode 2 Screening and Discussion. Continue discussion of the portrayal of the rural American family & identifying examples of popular and folk cultures.
- Feb 14 Podcasting Workshop:** Instruction for Group Work.

### Stop 2: Rural Popular and Folk Cultures of the Twisted & Extreme

#### Week 5: Rural Popular and Folk Cultures—The Popular Folk of *Shrek*

- Feb 19 Twisted Fairy Tales Do Come True:** *Shrek* Screening.
- Feb 21 Playing with Folktales:** *Shrek* discussion. Follow-up on Podcasting Lesson.

#### Week 6: Rural Popular and Folk Cultures—Roots Today

- Feb 26 Folk Revival & Modern Folk:** American Roots Music, episodes 3 & 4 Screening. (Begin Krakauer, Author's Note-Chapter 4)
- Feb 28 Contemporary Medicine Men:** *White Shamans, Plastic Medicine Men* Screening and Discussion. (Continue Krakauer, Chapters 5-9.) **DUE: WebCT QUIZ 2** (available 8:30am Sunday-8:30am Tuesday)

#### Week 7: Rural Popular and Folk Cultures—*Deliverance* from Rural Stereotypes & Rural Cultures of the Extreme

- Mar 4 Rural Stereotypes:** Discussion of rural stereotypes in relation to gender, sexuality, race, & class. (*Nota Bene:* This class period may contain depictions of graphic violence, including depictions of sexual assault.) (Continue Krakauer, 10-14)
- Mar 6 Forget Culture, Forget Your Roots:** Krakauer Discussion, Author's Note-Epilogue.

<sup>1</sup> Schedule subject to changes with notice. Readings and assignments are listed on the day they are due. Readings in parenthesis should be completed but discussion of the material will take place at a later date.

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### Stop 3: Urban Folk and Popular Geographies

#### Week 8: Urban Popular and Folk Cultures—Movin' On Up!

**Mar 11 City as Text:** CH Kouwenhoven "What's 'American' About America."

**Mar 13 Jazz 101:** CH Szwed "Defining Jazz"; "Elements" and "Forms." Morrison, pages 1-10. Introduction to Morrison's *Jazz*. **DUE: Local Folk/Popular Culture Podcast and WebCT QUIZ 3** (available 4:30pm Thursday-4:30pm Saturday)

#### Spring Break

#### Week 9: Urban Popular and Folk Cultures—Jazz and The Politics of Popular Urban Music

**Mar 25 Urban Violence:** Morrison, pp 1-51. What role does violence play in the novel?

**Mar 27 Rural Roots:** Morrison, pp 52-87.

#### Week 10: Urban Popular and Folk Cultures—Wild Women Don't Get the Blues

**Apr 1 Preceptorial Advising (No Classes)** Continue Reading Morrison, pp. 88-114

**Apr 3 Wild Women:** Morrison, pp 88-183.

#### Week 11: Urban Popular and Folk Cultures—Jazz Transformations

**Apr 8 Jazz Form & Variation:** Morrison, pp 184-229. Think about the ways Morrison's text functions like a jazz composition.

**Apr 10 Strange Fruit:** *Strange Fruit* Screening and Discussion. Conclude *Jazz* discussion. **DUE: WebCT QUIZ 4** (available 8:30am Sunday-8:30am Tuesday)

#### Week 12: Urban Popular and Folk Cultures—Chronic Issues in Hip-Hop

**Apr 15 Rockin' the Suburbs:** ER Taylor "Funky White Boys and Honorary Soul Sisters."

**Apr 17 Booty Call? Hello, Hip-Hop:** ER Morgan "From Fly-Girls to ...."

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### Stop 4: Popular and Folk Virtual Geographies

#### Week 13: Virtual Communities and Cultures—Virtual Identities, Fictional Lives

**Apr 22 Virtual Communities:** CH Turkle, "Introduction: Identity in the Age of the Internet"

**Apr 24 Analysis Paper Workshop:** Bring a copy of your rough draft to class.

#### Week 14: : Virtual Cultures of the Extreme—Fan Cultures

**Apr 29 Extreme Fans:** *Trekkies* Screening. (Begin CH Jenkins "Welcome to Bisexuality.") **DUE: Analysis Paper.**

**May 1 Fanatics:** CH Jenkins "Welcome to Bisexuality." *Trekkies* & Jenkins discussion. **DUE: WebCT QUIZ 5** (available 8:30am Sunday-8:30am Tuesday)

#### Week 15: End of the Road?

**May 6 Cultural Criticism for Fun:** Where do we go from here? Share group podcasts.

