

Fall 2005  
207 Palmer, MWF 2:00-2:50  
Office Location: 303 Clough

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Office Hours: TTh 10:00-11:00  
and by appointment



### History 105.06: From *Superman* to *Sin City*: A Cultural History of Comic Books

“From *Superman* to *Sin City*” analyzes the medium’s history from its precursors in nineteenth-century “Penny Dreadfuls,” the first comic strips and early pulp fiction to the birth of comics as an independent genre in the 1930s. It examines the culture from which Golden Age comics creators emerged. It tracks the comics explosion caused by the success of Superman in 1938 and the global popularization of American-style comic books, especially in Asia, and the post-World War II backlash that resulted in comics’ censorship in the 1950s. It considers the rebirth of American comics in the “Silver Age” of the 1960s and concludes by tracing the history of the medium into the early 1990s. Particular emphasis in the latter part of the course will be placed on the influential work of Neil Gaiman, Frank Miller and Alan Moore and the impact of Japanese comics and animation.

## REQUIRED TEXTS:

Steve Darnall and Alex Ross, *Uncle Sam*.

Gerard Jones, *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters and the Birth of the Comic Book*.

Frank Miller, *The Dark Knight Returns*.

Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen*.

Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*

All other assigned readings indicated below are either available online or have been scanned and made available in my Public folder on the Academic Departments and Programs server at:

\\fileserv1\Acad\_Dept\_Pgm\History\Pruitt\_Dwain\Public\From Superman to Sin City

## COURSE GOALS:

“From *Superman* to *Sin City*” has four goals. Understanding the course’s stated aims will give you insight into why certain readings and assignments have been chosen.

1. This course seeks to introduce first- and second-year college students to the academic study of history.
2. In addition to a general introduction to academic history, the course will also introduce students to the study of cultural history.
3. The course will work to improve students’ academic reading and writing skills through writing exercises based on assigned readings. The course will culminate with an original, primary source-based research project assessing students’ progress with historical writing and analysis.
4. This course will introduce students to the history of comic books from the 1930s to the present day. Students will learn about major creators, characters and developments.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

**All work turned in for this course is to be completed in accordance with Rhodes’ Honor Code. Students are expected to be familiar with the requirements of the Code and to conduct themselves accordingly.**

Final grades will be determined by the following:

1. **EXAMS:** Students will take **FOUR** examinations. The first examination will be a short, in-class response to a single question drawn from an assigned reading or set of lectures. The second examination will be a midterm examination covering all assigned readings and lecture materials through midterm. The third examination will be similar to the first, focusing on a single reading or set of lectures. The final examination will be a group project inspired by the Bradford Wright text.

2. **SHORT PAPERS:** Students will also submit **TWO** essays of approximately five pages in length in response to one of several possible essay prompts offered by the instructor.
3. **ORIGINAL COMICS-BASED PAPER:** Students will submit an original, primary source-based paper of approximately 10 pages drawn from their reading of comics as primary sources and relevant secondary sources. This project will be completed in stages. Students will be required to submit a preliminary research statement on **MONDAY, OCTOBER 10**. On **FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 4** students will submit a progress report indicating additional secondary sources to be used in the paper and establishing their paper's preliminary statement of thesis. A complete first draft of the paper is due on **MONDAY, NOVEMBER 21**. The final paper will be due on **WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7**. **Each individual component of this project will receive a grade. These grades will be averaged to compute your final grade on the paper. The preliminary research statement and progress report will each be worth 10% of the research paper grade. The first draft will be worth 30% of the final grade and the second draft's grade will be worth 50% of the final paper grade.**
4. **CLASS PARTICIPATION:** Class participation will account for 25% of the final course grade. Class participation will be assessed in a number of ways and is discussed more fully below. Be aware of two things of daily importance, however. Students may be chosen randomly to present the day's reading and launch class discussions. To prepare for this, students should prepare short daily responses to each reading assignment. These short responses need not be formal. They may simply be outlines. If they are written out, they should be no more than one page. Each response should include: the author's central argument, the evidence used to make the argument, the student's response to the argument (Is it clear? Convincing? If so, why? If not, why not?) and any questions or comments that the student would like to pose to the instructor and class. The student selected to introduce the reading will be called upon to read or present his or her short response. The instructor reserves the right to take up the short responses without prior warning to assign a daily grade. **The instructor also reserves the right to administer unannounced reading quizzes in any format that he deems appropriate.**

## GRADING SUMMARY:

First exam	5%
First paper	5%
Midterm exam	10%
Second exam	5%
Second paper	5%
Final exam	20%
Original comics-based paper	25%
Class participation	25%

**GRADES:** Students will receive numeric grades based on Rhodes' grade point system as represented below:

A	4.0	C	2.0
A-	3.7	C-	1.7
B+	3.3	D+	1.3
B	3.0	D	1.0
B-	2.7	D-	0.7
C+	2.3	F	0.0

**ATTENDANCE:** Students will be allowed three absences without any form of explanation required. **The fourth and any subsequent absences must be excused.** Valid excuses for missing class include but are not limited to religious observances, College-sanctioned academic or athletic travel, personal illness or injury, family illness or injury or bereavement. **The instructor will decide what constitutes an acceptable excuse.** Infrequent class attendance will negatively impact class participation grades. **Students will not receive a class participation grade higher than the percentage of classes that they attend except under extremely mitigating circumstances.**

**CLASS PARTICIPATION:** Simply coming to class, however, will not be deemed sufficient evidence of class participation. **Regular class attendance with little to no active involvement in day to day activities will result in a participation grade no higher than a C.** Students should come to class having read all assigned readings at least in part and ready for discussion or prepared to ask questions for clarification. Students are not necessarily expected to understand everything before they come to class, so there should be no shame in admitting to being confused. Talking in class is, of course, the easiest way to demonstrate engagement with the course material. No one should feel obligated, however, to babble incessantly to prove engagement. Quality is better than quantity. The instructor is aware, however, that some students are uncomfortable with speaking in class and wishes to respect that (though such students are strongly encouraged to attempt to speak in class in order to grow in confidence). Stopping by during office hours to discuss course materials or submitting rough drafts of papers and acting on the instructor's comments, for example, also demonstrate interest in the subject and course participation.

**SUBMITTING PAPERS:** Papers may be submitted either as hard copies or electronically as file attachments. Electronically submitted papers, however, must arrive on time. Date and time are recorded on all incoming e-mail messages and the time recorded by the system will be considered the official time at which your paper was submitted. See course policies on late papers below.

**PAPER FORMATTING:** Papers should conform to the following standards. Each paper should have a title page that includes all of the following information: the student's name, the paper's title, the course title, the date, the Honor Code pledge and the student's signature. For electronically submitted papers, students should "sign" by typing their name or scanning in their signature. Papers must be double-spaced in 11- or 12-point font. Use the default margin settings in your word processing software. No margin should be less than 1 inch or greater than 1.5 inches. Pages should be numbered. Students are expected to use footnotes when citing sources. A handout

on proper citation form is attached to this syllabus. **Papers that do not conform to these standards will be penalized.** Grades on papers will be assigned using the following criteria: 60% of the grade will be based on the content and analytical quality of the paper. The remaining 40% will be assigned based on stylistics (grammar, spelling, punctuation, use of appropriate fonts, margins, citation forms, etc.). **PROOFREAD** your work carefully!

**PAPER GRADES:** Grades are not negotiable. The instructor will not discuss grades on any assignment for at least 24 hours after the paper is returned. Discussions after this time period has elapsed will be limited to computational errors that the instructor might have made and ways in which a student's performance might have been improved.

**LATE PAPERS:** Unexcused late assignments will be penalized by one letter grade for each day late. A paper due on Monday that is turned in on Wednesday, for example, would be penalized twenty points (10 points for Monday and 10 points for Tuesday). A paper due Monday at 5 PM that is turned in at 5:01 PM is **LATE** and will be penalized accordingly. Late work will be accepted in accordance with the above policy outlining acceptable excuses for missing class meetings. Late papers will be required at the beginning of the next class period.

**PLAGIARISM AND THE HONOR CODE:** Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course. There are two forms of plagiarism, direct and indirect. Direct plagiarism refers to copying another person's language without placing it in quotation marks and without appropriate citation. This is the easiest form of plagiarism to recognize and most students avoid it fairly well. Indirect plagiarism, however, is somewhat more difficult to identify for some. Indirect plagiarism refers to those instances in which students paraphrase or take major ideas from another person's writing without citing the original inspiration. Using another person's ideas without attribution also constitutes plagiarism! Students who attempt to use others' work as their own will receive a failing grade for any offending paper and be referred to the Honor Council for further sanction. **Ignorance can only explain academic dishonesty; it cannot excuse it.** Students are advised to refer to the Rhodes Writing Center's web page on plagiarism located at: [http://www.rhodes.edu/writingcenter/group\\_b/plagiarism.html](http://www.rhodes.edu/writingcenter/group_b/plagiarism.html).

**MISSED TESTS:** Students should endeavor never to miss a scheduled test. Make-up examinations are possible for students who miss class for an excusable reason as outlined above. Such students should contact the instructor and arrange a mutually convenient time within seven days of the student's return. Make-up examinations are **NOT** possible for students who miss exams for unexcused reasons.

**LEARNING CHALLENGES:** Rhodes College makes provisions for students who face learning challenges. The instructor will honor reasonable accommodations needed by students once they have been approved by Student Disability Services. Request for accommodations that do not come through Student Disability Services will not be honored.

**ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT:** Students owning cell phones, pagers or any other electronic devices that could prove to be disruptive during class are asked to either turn them off upon entering class or simply leave them at home.

## PRELIMINARY CLASS SCHEDULE

W Aug 24: Introduction to the course, discussion of methods, expectations and goals. Why study comic books?

For F AUG 26: Read Richard Marius and Melvin E. Page, *A Short Guide to Writing About History*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., Chapter 2. (Marius 1.doc in Public Folder)

F Aug 26: What is History and Why Should You Care? Discussion of Marius and Page reading.

For M AUG 29: Read Marius and Page, Chapters 1 and 3 (Marius 2.doc )

M Aug 29: Argument Templates: Reading and Writing for History 105.06. Discussion of Marius and Page reading

W Aug 31: Library tour and orientation.

For W SEP 7: Review the information on Victorian publishing and readership at: <http://www.bl.uk/collections/early/victorian/intro.html>

## UNIT ONE: HEROES AND THE HUMAN PSYCHE

F Sep 2: Understanding Heroes: Jung, Campbell and Nietzsche

M Sep 5: Labor Day Holiday

## UNIT TWO: LITERACY AND THE BIRTH OF THE MODERN PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

W Sep 7: Readership and publishing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

F Sep 9: Early American publishing and readership

## UNIT THREE: BUILDING AMERICANS: IMMIGRATION IN THE NINETEENTH- AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

M Sep 12: American immigration in the nineteenth- and twentieth centuries

For M SEP 19: Read Gerard Jones, *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters and the Birth of the Comic Book*, Prologue, Chapters 1-2

W Sep 14: Building Ghettos: American immigrant life and politics

F Sep 16: Building Americans: Whiteness and the American immigrant

For F SEP 23: Read Jones, Chapter 4

M Sep 19: Gerard Jones, Part One: The World of the Golden Age Comics Creators

For M SEP 26: Read Jones, Chapters 5-9

## UNIT FOUR: THE BIRTH OF SUPERMAN AND THE MODERN COMICS INDUSTRY

W Sep 21: Pulp fiction, men's magazines, "Scientifiction" and comics strips: The imaginary world of boys in the 1920s and 1930s

For W SEP 28: Read Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, Introduction and Chapter One

F Sep 23: Gerard Jones, Part Two: Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster

For F SEP 30: Read selected *Superman*, *Batman*, *Wonder Woman* and *The Spirit* comics

M Sep 26: Gerard Jones, Part Three: The Golden Age Comics Industry

W Sep 28: "Superheroes for the Common Man": The first generation of American superheroes

For W OCT 5: Read Wright, Chapter 2

F Sep 30: Comics heroes of the 1930s and 1940s

**TOPICS FOR FIRST PAPER DISTRIBUTED TODAY**

M Oct 3: First Exam

## UNIT FIVE: COMICS IN THE 1940s

W Oct 5: "Race, Politics and Propaganda: Comic Books Go to War, 1939-1945"

For M OCT 10: Read *Captain America* 1-3

For W OCT 12: Read Wright, Chapter 3

F Oct 7: Class canceled for Barret Symposium

M Oct 10: Captain America

**FIRST PAPER DUE TODAY!**

**PRELIMINARY RESEARCH STATEMENT DUE TODAY!**

W Oct 12: "Confronting Success: Comic Books and Postwar America, 1945-1950"

F Oct 14: MIDTERM EXAMINATION

**FALL RECESS BEGINS AT 5 PM TODAY**

For F OCT 21: Read Wright, Chapter 4

For M OCT 24: Read Frederic Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*, excerpts

(Wertham.pdf)

W Oct 19: Library: Using electronic databases, building bibliographies, identifying appropriate secondary sources

**TOPICS FOR SECOND ESSAY DISTRIBUTED TODAY**

For W OCT 26: Read EC Comics selections

## UNIT SIX: *SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT*: THE COMICS CRISIS OF THE 1950s

F Oct 21: "Youth Crisis: Comic Books and Controversy, 1947-1950"

For F OCT 28: Read Wright, Chapters 5-6

M Oct 24: *Seduction of the Innocent*

For M OCT 31: Read Wright, Chapter 7

W Oct 26: EC Comics and 1950s' crime and horror comics

For W NOV 2: Read Jordan Raphael and Tom Spurgeon, *Stan Lee and the Rise and Fall of the American Comic Book*, excerpts (Stan Lee.pdf)

F Oct 28: DEBATE: Should EC Comics have been censored and/or banned?

For F NOV 4: Read Silver Age Marvel Comics selections

## UNIT SEVEN: "THIS IS THE MIGHTY MARVEL AGE OF COMICS": STAN LEE, JACK KIRBY, STEVE DITKO AND THE BIRTH OF THE SILVER AGE

M Oct 31: "Great Power and Great Responsibility: Superheroes in a Superpower, 1956-1967"

SECOND ESSAY DUE TODAY!

W Nov 2: The Inner Workings of the Marvel Bullpen

For W NOV 9: Read Wright, Chapter 8

Read *Green Lantern-Green Arrow*, selected stories and *Luke Cage, Hero for Hire/Luke Cage, Power Man*, selected stories

F Nov 4: Silver Age Marvel Comics: Building the Modern Superhero

COMICS-BASED PAPER PROGRESS REPORT AND BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE TODAY BY 5 PM

M Nov 7: Second Exam

For M NOV 14: Read Will Eisner, *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories*, excerpts

## UNIT EIGHT: COMICS AND THE COUNTERCULTURE

W Nov 9: "Questioning Authority: Comic Books and Cultural Change, 1968-1979"

For W NOV 16: Read Wright, Chapter 9

F Nov 11: Rebel Comics: Radical Comics of the Counterculture

For F NOV 18: Read Frank Miller, *The Dark Knight Returns*

## UNIT NINE: THE COMICS REVOLUTIONS: COMICS IN THE 1980s

M Nov 14: 1978: Will Eisner and the Birth of the Graphic Novel

For M NOV 21: Read Frank Miller, *The Dark Knight Returns*

For M NOV 28: Read Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen*

W Nov 16: The Comics Industry in the 1980s-1990s

For W NOV 30: Read Garth Ennis, et. al., *The Pro*

F Nov 18: Frank Miller, *The Dark Knight Returns*

For F DEC 2: Read Steve Darnall and Alex Ross, *Uncle Sam*

M Nov 21: *Sin City* and the rebirth of comics pulp fiction

**COMPLETE FIRST DRAFT OF COMICS-BASED PAPER DUE TODAY!**  
THANKSGIVING RECESS

M Nov 28: Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen*

W Nov 30: *The Pro*

F Dec 2: *Uncle Sam*

M Dec 5: The Comics Industry in the Twenty-first Century

W Dec 7: Review. Last day of class

**COMICS-BASED PAPER DUE BY 5:00 PM TODAY!!!!**

**FINAL EXAM PROJECT DUE BY 8 PM ON DECEMBER 14.**

**NOTE: The instructor reserves the right to amend this syllabus as necessary.**



