

English 383: Intro to Cultural Studies

Professor Christine Hoffmann, 9:30-10:20 MWF, Hodges 116

“The cultural work done in the past by gods and epic sagas is now done by laundry-detergent commercials and comic-strip characters.” –Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*

In English 383, we will try to figure out what cultural theorist Roland Barthes means by “cultural work;” how much we agree about who’s doing cultural work these days; and how much of that work we are prepared and positioned to do ourselves. Culture-making is myth-making, but not every myth acquires the same level of influence or the same aura of inevitability. So how and why do some myths—and the values attached to them—take hold? How should we study cultural mythologies in an academic setting — both the myths we believe in and the ones we want to take down?

“Experience lived, experience interpreted, experience defined” — that’s how Stuart Hall, another big name in the field of cultural studies, defines culture. In this course we will investigate our own lived experiences alongside those we can no longer, not yet, or not ever *live*, but only *interpret*, as a result of the conditions of our cultural position(s). In 15 weeks, you can expect to analyze and create a self-portrait, write entries for a collection of 21st-century *Mythologies*, curate an exhibition of material objects representing “cultural work,” and rewrite the WVU Culture and Engagement survey.

Learning Outcomes

- ❑ Situate and interpret texts within diverse literary, cultural and historical contexts.
- ❑ Draw and articulate connections between texts, genres, critical theories and historical periods relevant to the field of cultural studies.
- ❑ Practice rhetorically effective writing and communication, through both traditional, thesis-driven argumentation and creative, speculative, multimodal experimentation.



*images: Hans Holbein, *The Ambassadors* (1533); *mirror-sme* (Helene Meldahl), Instagram (2015); *Ole Worm's cabinet of curiosities*, "Museum Wormianum," (1655)