

History 2124B
History of Canadian Popular Culture
Winter 2026

Instructor: **Monda Halpern, Professor**

Email: **halpern@uwo.ca**

Office: **Department of History, Lawson Hall 2266**

Office Hours: **Wednesday, 2:00 PM-3:30 PM**

This is a **draft** outline. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for a final version.

Course Description

This course will examine the history of popular culture in Canada, with a focus on the twentieth century. As distinct from high culture that has historically been reserved for elites, popular culture is generally created, disseminated, and consumed by the people, and ostensibly represents their collective mindset and sensibilities. High culture has denoted superior, polished, and influential artistic production; however, the often-stellar quality, mass appeal, and ubiquitous impact of popular culture challenges this limited perception. Arguably, due to these attributes, state and corporate elites have routinely appropriated, regulated, commodified, commercialized, and/or exploited popular culture in order to promote a nationalist agenda, garner profits, and/or, exert power and social control; these objectives have had both positive and negative outcomes on artists, cultural industries, the public, and Canada as a whole. This course will explore these issues by examining the successes and hardships of selected artists and fields (including literature, television, film, music, and sports) and their interplay with the state, the public, and societal artifacts, events, and trends. The course will also consider the ways in which popular culture, and the extent to which it has been “Canadian,” has helped shape the persona of a country that has struggled to claim an identity.

Antirequisite(s): Interdisciplinary Studies 2100A/B.

Course Syllabus

Learning Outcomes:

Students should be able to

-describe the ways in which Canadian popular culture has been shaped from “below” and “above” (that is, by both the masses and elites, respectively) and the ways in which it has influenced, and has been influenced by, various societal events and trends.

-identify the ways in which Canadian popular culture has intersected with issues of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality, creating an environment that both includes and excludes.

This is a draft outline. 2025-26 version. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for a final version.

-explain the ways in which Canadian popular culture has been utilized to promote Canadian identity, unity, and nationalism.

Expectations:

Students will complete the prescribed weekly readings. Some of the assessment questions will incorporate this material.

Students will complete the three multiple-choice assessments: TEST 1 (January 28); TEST 2 (March 4); Final Exam (TBD).

Students must complete all course assignments in order to pass this course. Students who submit fewer than the three required assessments will not qualify for a passing grade in the course, regardless of marks received.

Methods of Evaluation

TEST 1, January 28, 30 questions (WEEK 1-3, inclusive), 30 minutes	25%
TEST 2, March 4, 40 questions (WEEK 4-8, inclusive), 40 minutes	35%
FINAL EXAM, TBD, 60 questions (WEEK 9-14, inclusive), 60 minutes	40%

Make-up tests, midterms, and exams can only be approved by Academic Advising. Please see https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for department procedures and requirements involving make-up tests and exams.

Course Materials

The required readings include all of the online articles cited below (most of the articles are on JSTOR and can be accessed by using your Western credentials; the other cited online resources are also accessible for free).

Course Schedule and Readings

Class Schedule:

WEEK 1, JANUARY 7 – INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS THE MEANING OF CANADIAN? POPULAR? CULTURE?

WEEK 2, JANUARY 14 – WHAT’S THE BIG IDEA?: NATIONALISM, REGIONALISM, IDENTITY, AND IMAGINED COMMUNITIES

WEEK 3, JANUARY 21 – BACKGROUND -- PLACE AND PEOPLES: EMPIRE, COMMUNITY, AND INDIGENOUS INFLUENCES

WEEK 4, JANUARY 28 – TEST 1; 1920s: “MODERNIZATION” AND LEISURE TIME

WEEK 5, FEBRUARY 4 – 1930s: DEPRESSION AND DISTRACTION

This is a draft outline. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for a final version.

WEEK 6, FEBRUARY 11 – 1940s: WARTIME AND POST-WAR ADJUSTMENT

WEEK 7, FEBRUARY 18 – NO CLASS (SPRING READING WEEK)

WEEK 8, FEBRUARY 25 – 1950s: SUBURBS, TEENAGERS, AND COMING INTO OUR OWN

WEEK 9, MARCH 4 – TEST 2; 1960s: CONFLICT AND COUNTER-CULTURE

WEEK 10, MARCH 11 – 1970s: CHALLENGING THE ISMS

WEEK 11, MARCH 18 – 1980s: CONSERVATISM AND MUCH

WEEK 12, MARCH 25 – 1990s: WELCOMING THE DIGITAL AGE

WEEK 13, APRIL 1 – 2000s: THE NEW MILLENIUM AND COMMEMORATION

WEEK 14, APRIL 8 – TODAY: PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

TBD - FINAL EXAM

Additional Statements

1. Students must complete all course assignments in order to pass this course. Students who submit fewer than the three required assessments will not qualify for a passing grade in the course, regardless of marks received.
2. During the writing of tests and exams, the use of course lectures, readings, and online (and offline) resources and communication, including AI, is strictly prohibited.
3. The use of cameras and recording devices for the purpose of replicating/distributing any course content, whether spoken or written, is strictly prohibited except in cases where the course instructor specifically grants permission.
4. During all class lectures, discussions, and presentations, the recreational use of laptops and cell phones (web browsing, texting, etc.), is discouraged and could adversely affect your participation mark.

Please review the Department of History's shared policies and statements for all undergraduate courses at:

https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for important information regarding accessibility options, make-up exams, medical accommodations, health and wellness, academic integrity, plagiarism, and more.