

## **DST 503—Freaks and Bodily Difference: Using Disability History as a Lens July 5-16, 2010**

Using the history of the freak show, this course will explore ways in which bodily difference has been named freakish over time and how people who have been named freaks --- disabled people, people of color, fat people, bearded women, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender / transsexual) people, among others --- have both benefited from and been exploited by that naming. Through reading, film, discussion, and small group work, we'll explore the freak show in the U.S. with detours to England, France, and Germany through the lens of race, colonialism, and disability (as well as gender, sexuality, and bodily difference in general). We will focus particularly on three questions:

- Who were the people who worked as freaks in the freak show, and how did they become freaks?
- What can we learn about bodily difference, exploitation, and resistance by studying the freak show?
- How does the freak show of the 1840s to 1940s manifest today?

### **Logistics**

- **Eli's Office:** SHE 528
- **Office Hours:** 8:30 - 9:15 am, 3:30 - 4:30 pm, M - Th, exceptions announced in class
- **Classroom:** SHE 554
- **Class Hours:** 9:30 am - 12:30 pm with a half hour break, 1:30 - 3:00 pm, exceptions noted below.

### **Required Reading**

- *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*, Robert Bogdan, The University of Chicago Press (1988) (referred to below as **FS**). **Note:** You will be reading most of this book and can buy it through the Ryerson bookstore.
- You can find all other readings on-line at the Ryerson Blackboard site.

## Reading and Assignments by the Day

**Notes:** This class will center on discussion, and for our time together to work, you need to come prepared with your questions and thoughts about the readings. You are responsible for all the required reading and are strongly encouraged to do the recommended reading.

Because the material for this course is exciting and dense, **I'd encourage you to come to the first day of the intensive, July 5, having started the reading.** I'd suggest at minimum that you read the first four assigned chapters of *Freak Show* and two or three of the articles assigned for the first week.

For details about assignments, see "Assignments" below.

### Monday, July 5—Introduction/Overview

#### Class Hours Exception:

- **General Welcome and Orientation** (5th floor Atrium, SHE Building): 9:30 – 10:30 am.
- **Class:** 11:00 am – 12:30 pm, 1:30 – 3:00 pm.

#### Required Reading:

- FS, Chapter 2, "From Tavern to Madison Square Garden: A Chronicle of the Freak Show in America," p. 25-68.
- FS, Chapter 4, "Exotic and Aggrandized: Modes of Presenting Freaks," p. 94-116

#### Recommended Reading:

- FS, Chapter 3, "Step Right Up: The World of Popular Amusement," p. 69-93.

### Tuesday, July 6—Ableism as a Context of the Freak Show

#### Required Reading:

- "Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History," Douglas C. Baynton, p. 33-57.
- "Tiny Tims, Super Crips, and the End of Pity," Joseph P. Shapiro, p. 12-40.

### Wednesday, July 7—Racism and Colonialism as a Context of the Freak Show

#### Required Reading:

- "Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body," Siobhan B. Somerville, p. 21-29.
- "Aztecs, Aborigines, and Ape-People: Science and Freaks in Germany," Nigel Rothfels, p.158-172.

#### Recommended Reading

- "Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body," Siobhan B. Somerville, p. 15-21, 29-38.

#### Assignment:

- Start small group project #1 in class.

**Thursday, July 8—Construction of “Freaks”**

**Class Hours Exception:**

- **Class:** 9:30 am – 12:30 pm, 1:30 – 4:30 pm.

**Required Reading:**

- FS, Chapter 5, “The Exhibition of People We Now Call Mentally Retarded,” p. 119-127, 134-146.
- FS, Chapter 6 “Illusions of Grandeur,” p. 147-175.

**Recommended Reading**

- FS, Chapter 5, “The Exhibition of People We Now Call Mentally Retarded,” p. 127-134.

**In Class Film:**

- *Freaks.*

**Assignment:**

- Reflection #1 due.
- Continue small group project #1 in class.

**Friday, July 9—More on Construction of “Freaks”**

**Required Reading:**

- FS, Chapter 7, “Cannibals and Savages,” p. 176-187.
- FS, Chapter 8 “Respectable Freaks,” p. 200-233.

**Assignment:**

- Presentations of small group project #1 in class.

**Monday, July 12—Issues of Resistance, Exploitation, and Consent**

**Class Hours Exception:**

- **12th Annual DST Activist Lecture** (POD 250): 10:00 – 12:00 pm.
- **Class:** 1:30 – 4:30 pm.

**Required Reading:**

- “Ethnological Show Business: Footlighting the Dark Continent,” Bernth Lindfors, p. 207-218.
- “Colonialism, Dysfunction, and Disjuncture: Sarah Bartmaan’s Resistance (Remix),” Yvette Abrahams, p. 12-26.

**Recommended Reading**

- FS, Chapter 7, “Cannibals and Savages,” p. 187-199.

**Assignment:**

- Short paper due.

**Tuesday, July 13—Museums, Zoos & Today’s Freak Show**

**Class Hours Exception:**

- **Class:** 9:30 am – 12:30 pm, 1:30 – 4:30 pm.

**Required Reading:**

- “Freaks of Culture: Institutions, Publics, and the Subjects of Ethnographic Knowledge,” Rachel Adams, p. 25-59.

**In-Class Film:**

- *The Couple in the Cage.*

**Assignment:**

- Reflection #2 due.

**Wednesday, July 14—More on Today's Freak Show & Thinking About Rubes**

**Class Hours Exception:**

- **Class:** 9:30 am – 12:30 pm, 1:30 – 4:30 pm.

**Required Reading:**

- "Public Stripping," Lisa Blumberg, p. 73-77.
- "Public Stripping Revisited," Lisa Blumberg, p. 18-21.
- "Finding My Voice," David Roche, p. 1-7.
- Start "P.H.\*reaks: The Hidden History of People with Disabilities," Doris Baizley and Victoria Ann Lewis, p. 63-84.

**Recommended Reading:**

- "The Other History of Intercultural Performance," Coco Fusco, p. 37-63.

**In-Class Film:**

- *Juggling Gender*.

**Assignment:**

- Start small group project #2 in class.

**Thursday, July 15—Working the Freak Show Today**

**Reading:**

- Finish "P.H.\*reaks: The Hidden History of People with Disabilities," Doris Baizley and Victoria Ann Lewis, p. 85-108.
- FS, Chapter 10, "Conclusion: Freak Encounter," 267-281.

**In-Class Film:**

- *Born Freak*.

**Assignment:**

- Reflection #3 due.
- Continue small group project #2 in class.

**Friday, July 16—Wrap Up**

**Class Hours Exception:**

- **Class:** 9:30 am – 12:30 pm.

**Assignment:**

- Presentations of small group project #2 in class.

## **Assignments**

You will be responsible for the following. See below for descriptions.

- all the above required readings
- class participation and attendance
- 3 short reflections about the readings and films
- 2 small group presentations
- a short 3-4 page paper
- a longer 8-10 page paper

### Short Reflections on Readings and Films (3 total)

**Description:** We will start each class by doing 15 or 20 minutes of journaling about the assigned readings and films. This journaling will not be graded nor read by others. From your journal, choose three entries to expand upon. These expanded reflections can include analysis of the readings, questions you have, connections between readings, and/or other thoughts/feelings about the material we're studying. You can complete this assignment in a variety of media: writing, photos, drawing, video, audio-recording, etc. If in writing, the reflections should be 1-2 pages long; however, you are encouraged to use other media. You will be expected to turn in a total of three reflections.

**Due Dates:**

- Reflection #1—Thursday, July 8
- Reflection #2—Tuesday, July 13
- Reflection #3, Thursday, July 15

**Grading:** The content of your reflections will not be graded. You will automatically get full credit if you turn them in, and no credit if you don't.

**% of Grade:** 15% for all three reflections

### Small Group Project #1

**Description:** In groups of four, choose a person who worked the freak show from 1840 to 1940. We'll be brainstorming possibilities in class. You can find initial information about many people in *Freak Show*, but whomever you choose, expand your research beyond that book. I am glad to help you find other resources. Ideally each group will pick a different person.

As a group, design a 10-15 minute presentation that addresses at least one of the following questions:

- What are the forces, factors, and cultural beliefs that turned this person into a freak?
- What role did disability and ableism, race and racism, and/or colonialism play in this process?
- How did the issues of exploitation, self-chosen performance, and resistance play out in her/his work and/or life as a freak?

Think about the questions from at least two of these perspectives: 1) your own, 2) the person you've chosen, 3) her/his boss or the showman who ran the show, and 4) the rubes (the people who paid to see exhibits at the freak show).

Use your creativity when putting the presentation together. You could write a letter to the showman, have the person you've chosen write a letter to you, stage a debate about exploitation and self-chosen performance, act out a skit. These are just a few ideas. Use your imagination.

**Due Date:** Friday, July 9

**% of Grade:** 15%

### Short Paper

**Description:** Pick something from popular culture today that reminds you of the freak show. It could be a TV show, *People Magazine*, a news story, a movie, a song, a music video, an advertisement, a comic strip, a cartoon, or any other kind of pop culture. Write a 3-4 page paper about what you've chosen and how it's connected to the freak show. This paper isn't meant to be a research project but

rather a reflection on the connections between an example of pop culture today and the freak show as popular entertainment between 1840 and 1940.

I welcome papers in alternative formats—audio, video, creative writing, for instance—as long as they include the critical thinking that the assignment requires. Be in touch with me if you want to complete this assignment in an alternative format.

**Due Date:** Monday, July 12

**% of Grade:** 15%

### **Small Group Project #2**

**Description:** This project focuses on a present-day manifestation of the freak show. In groups of four, choose an example of today's freak show or a person who works today's freak show. We'll be brainstorming possibilities in class. The only limitation on this project is you can't choose a reality TV show. Ideally each group will pick a different example.

As a group, design a 10-15 minute presentation that addresses at least two of the following questions:

- What are the forces, factors, and cultural beliefs that make your chosen example a present-day manifestation of the freak show?
- What role does disability, gender, sexuality, race, and/or imperialism/colonialism play in your example?
- How is your example connected to the freak show from 1840 to 1940?
- How is it different?

As with your earlier small group presentations, use your creativity when putting the presentation together: write a letter, perform a skit, stage a debate, etc.

**Due Date:** Friday, July 16

**% of Grade:** 15%

### **Long Paper**

**Description:** This paper is a longer (8-10 page) research project. Pick two aspects of—or people from—the freak show (thinking of both today's freak show and the freak show of 1840 to 1940) to compare and contrast. One aspect/person needs to be connected to dynamics around disability and ableism; the other around race and racism/colonialism. Of course in some instances, these dynamics are overlapping and/or difficult to distinguish. It's fine to choose aspects/people that reflect this overlapping and/or blurring.

Whomever or whatever you choose, include critical thinking about 1) how people become freaks, 2) bodily difference, exploitation, and resistance, and 3) race, disability, and colonialism as they relate to freak show. Your paper needs to include at minimum two references to material we've studied in class and two from outside of class.

I welcome papers in alternative formats—audio, video, creative writing, for instance—as long as they include the critical thinking that the assignment requires. Be in touch with me if you want to complete this assignment in an alternative format.

You'll be e-mailing your assignments to me after I've left campus. E-mail them as attached Microsoft Word documents. Let me know if this is a problem for you.

**Due Date:** Friday, August 13

**% of Grade:** 25%

## **Access & Accommodations**

I want this class to be as accessible as possible. You can bring up access concerns and challenges in class, one-on-one with me, and/or through the Access Centre. The contact information for the Access Centre is:

- [accessfrontdesk@ryerson.ca](mailto:accessfrontdesk@ryerson.ca)
- <http://www.ryerson.ca/student-services/accesscentre>
- Telephone: 416-797-5290

## **Grading**

- Class participation and attendance—15%
- Short reflections about the readings (total of 3)—15%
- Small group project #1—15%
- Short 3-4 page paper—15%
- Small group project #2—15%
- Long 8-10 page paper—25%

## **Attendance**

You are expected to attend all sessions of the class. Attendance and participation count for 15% of the final grade.

## **Late Assignments**

I'll accept one late assignment without penalty. A second late assignment will NOT be accepted without prior approval from me, barring extraordinary circumstances (death in the family, major illness). If you need an extension on a deadline, e-mail me at least 24 hours BEFORE the due date. I won't negotiate extensions after the due date, except in the above-mentioned extraordinary circumstances.