

**WHAT'S SO FUNNY ABOUT NEW YORK?**

**H28.0632.00**

**Summer Session II 2007--TWTh: 10:00-12:00**

**Cornelia Cody**

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**Office Hours: Tuesday 12:15 to 1:30**

<b><u>GRADING:</u></b>	Attendance, class participation, quizzes:	25%
	There is a zero absence policy for this class.	
	Response papers:	25%
	Final presentation:	25%
	Final paper:	25%

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

1. Weekly readings:
  - make sure to note when readings are due;
  - most readings are in Course Packet to be purchased at Advance Copy Center, 522 La Guardia Place (212.388.1001);
  - additional purchases:  
Neil Simon, *Brighton Beach Memoirs* (to be purchased anywhere)  
E. B. White, *Here is New York* or *Essays of E. B. White* (to be purchased anywhere)
2. Weekly response papers:
  - Students must see one relevant live performance, current film, or exhibit a week.
  - 2 to 3-page papers (TYPED) reacting to/analyzing a live performance, current film or exhibit seen that week (due each Thursday);
  - points to focus on:
    - Is the performance a NYC performance? Is it funny?
    - Why? What does it tell you about NYC? About humor?
    - How does/do the performer(s), film, exhibit, etc. speak to the NYC aesthetic, mythology, culture?
    - How is NYC performed in that particular performance?
    - How does the performance speak to, address, affirm or negate issues and points brought up in class?
    - Papers are graded on a 1-5 scale (5=A).
    - Papers are required for Weeks 1, 3, 4, and 5.
    - Papers must be turned in on time.
3. *The Big Bang* (7/18)
  - Actors to be assigned: two groups
  - To be performed
4. *Mongrel: The Life and Words of Dorothy Parker* (7/19)

- Round Table characters to be assigned:
 

S. J. Perelman	Edna Ferber
H. L. Mencken	Robert Sherwood ( <i>The Petrified Forest</i> )
Harold Ross	James Thurber
Robert Benchley	Tallulah Bankhead
Alexander Woollcott	Anita Loos
George Kaufman	Franklin Pierce Adams

5. Personal experience narrative:
  - In order to get a feel for the ethnographic, each student will collect (by taping) and transcribe a personal experience narrative from an informant.
  - Students will be provided with a standard release form.
  - Three pages, maximum; typed, double-spaced.
  - Subject: New York City.
  - Due: Thursday, July 5 (Week 2).
6. Required movies/TV (films may be at Bobst or checked out of any video store):
  - *The Producers* by Mel Brooks
  - *Annie Hall* by Woody Allen
  - *When Harry Met Sally* by Rob Reiner
  - at least one episode of *Seinfeld*
7. Stand-Up New York (not required but **STRONGLY** urged):
  - the opportunity to perform 3 minutes of standup at Stand-Up New York (78<sup>th</sup> and B'Way);
  - Monday, July 23 at 7:00;
  - attendance required even if you are not performing;
  - no cover charge, two-drink minimum (except for comics);
  - please bring many friends.
8. Final Paper
  - Pick a NY topic of choice.
  - Research and write a 7 to 10 page paper on topic.
9. Final oral presentation on “New York Humor” topic of choice:
  - 10 minute lecture presented to the class on final paper topic;
  - **MUST** include slides or video or other supporting materials;
  - written version of the lecture should be in coherent, finished form and handed in immediately after presentation;
  - presentations will follow an academic conference format;
  - see below for some topic suggestions.

**WEEK ONE: What Is the Course About?**

READINGS (due Thursday, 6/26):

Walker, Nancy, ed.: "Introduction: What Is Humor? Why American Humor?," *What's So Funny?: Humor in American Culture*. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1998.

Mintz, Lawrence: "Introduction, Theory and Methodology," *Culture and Society in American Humor*. University of Maryland, Department of American Studies, Course Packet 629K, Spring 2003.

Friend, Tad: "What's So Funny?" *The New Yorker*, 11/11/02

Gopnik, Adam: "The City and the Pillars," *The New Yorker*, 9/24/01

Schechner, Richard. "What is Performance?" *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

### 1. TUESDAY, JUNE 27

- Introductions
- Distribute and review syllabus.
- Discuss course requirements and goals.
- Discuss the types of performances, films, exhibits that students should see. Those of you who will be performing standup should go see some.
- Begin looking at these questions:
  - What is so funny about NYC?
  - Is NYC, in fact, funny? Why? How is this expressed?
  - Is there a NYC aesthetic, mythology, culture?
  - If so, what is it? How do we recognize it?
  - How do different parts of NYC fall into this discussion? Why, for example, is Brooklyn funnier than Queens? Or is it?
  - What role does ethnicity play? Race? Class? Gender?
  - What effect have the events of September 11, 2001 had on the city? On performances?
  - And so on: We will discuss more thoroughly in class.
- View *212* segment.
- View *After Hours* by Martin Scorsese.

### 2. WEDNESDAY, JUNE 27

- In-depth discussion of *After Hours*.

### 3. THURSDAY, JUNE 28

- View *Borat* segment.
- Discuss Mintz, Walker, Friend, Gopnik, and Schechner.
- Establish some essential points of humor theory: What is funny and why? Establish some NYC "reference points." How do we identify something as New York? Discuss what is performance?
- First response paper due: Analyze a New York "performance." Why was it New York? Was it funny? How? How was NYC performed?

## **WEEK THREE: Different New York Voices**

READINGS (due Thursday, 5/24):

Whitehead, Colson: first two chapters from *The Colossus of New York*. New York: Doubleday, 2003.

E. B. White: *Here is New York*. New York: Pub Group West, 1999.

Franklin, Nancy: "The Thing About this City," *The New Yorker*, 2-3/99

McCourt, Frank: "New in Town," *The New Yorker*, 2-3/99

Hoch, Danny: "Introduction," *Jails, Hospitals and Hip-Hop & Some People*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1998.

4. TUESDAY, MAY 22

- View *Some People* by Danny Hoch.

5. WEDNESDAY, MAY 23

- View *Mambo Mouth* by John Leguizamo.

6. THURSDAY, MAY 24

- Discuss Hoch, Leguizamo, and readings.
- Second response paper due.

**WEEK THREE: More NYC in Performance**

READINGS:

Deavere Smith, Anna: "Not So Special Vehicles," *Modern Drama*, ed. W. B. Worthen, New York: Harcourt, 1994.

Camp, Jennifer: *The Big Bang*

Cody, Cornelia: *Mongrel: The Life and Words of Dorothy Parker*

MOVIE:

*Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle*

7. TUESDAY, MAY 29

- View and discuss *Fires in the Mirror*.

8. WEDNESDAY, MAY 30

- Master Class: Playwright Jennifer Camp
- Volunteers needed for a reading of Jennifer Camp's play.

9. THURSDAY, MAY 31

- Presentations on the Algonquin Round Table folks.
- Discuss *Mongrel*.
- Third response paper due.

**WEEK TWO: Personal Experience Narratives**

READINGS (due Tuesday, 7/3):

Oring, Eliot: "Appropriate Incongruity," [finish citation]

Cody, Cornelia: "Only in New York," *Journal of Folklore Research*, August 2005.

"Metropolitan Diary" from *The New York Times*

Sedaris, David: "Santaland Diaries" from *Barrel Fever: Stories and Essays*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1995.

Brown, Mari and Deanna Pacelli: *There Goes the Neighborhood*, 2003

#### 4. TUESDAY, JULY 3

- Continue discussion of humor theory.
- Discuss *Metropolitan Diary*, Sedaris, and "Only in NY."

#### NO CLASS ON WEDNESDAY, JULY 4

- Personal experience narratives workshop.
- Personal experience narratives due.
- Final presentation topics due.

#### 5. THURSDAY, JULY 5

- Guest performer/speaker: Deanna Pacelli (ETW Grad): *There Goes the Neighborhood*.
- Performance space: TBA
- Hand out: Order of final presentations.

### **WEEK FIVE: Standup Comedy and Those Funny New York Jewish Guys**

READINGS (due Wednesday, 6/13):

Oring, Eliot: "The People of the Joke: On the Conceptualization of a Jewish Humor," *The Humor Prism in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century America*. Edited by Joseph Boskin. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997.

Hoch, Danny: "Danny's Trip to L.A." from *Jails, Hospitals and Hip-Hop & Some People*.

Mintz, Lawrence: "Ideology in the Television Situation Comedy," *What's So Funny?: Humor in American Culture*. [hand out]

Mintz, Lawrence: "Stand-Up Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation," *What's So Funny?: Humor in American Culture*. [hand out]

Simon, Neil: *Brighton Beach Memoirs*. New York: Samuel French, Inc. 1984.

MOVIES (see by Wednesday, 6/13):

*The Producers*

*Annie Hall*

*The Out-of-Towners*

TELEVISION:

Watch at least one episode of *Seinfeld* before 6/13.

#### 13. TUESDAY, JUNE 12

- View Lenny Bruce.

14. WEDNESDAY, JUNE 13

- Discuss Lenny Bruce, Jerry Seinfeld, movies and readings.

15. THURSDAY, JUNE 14

- Rehearsal for Stand Up New York at the club (78<sup>th</sup> and Broadway) with Wayne Rada, General Manager.
- Fourth response paper due.

**WEEK SIX: Wrapping It Up**

READINGS (due Tuesday, 6/19)

Gopnik, Adam: "The People on the Bus," *The New Yorker*, 5/3/03

Gornick, Vivian: "Tales On the Street," *The New Yorker*, 9/9/96

Ozick, Cynthia: "The Synthetic Sublime," *The New Yorker*, 2-3/99

Seabrook, John: "Elegy for a Parking Space," *The New Yorker*, 2-3/99

MONDAY, JUNE 18

- 7:00 PM performance at Stand Up New York: 78<sup>th</sup> and Broadway
- Arrive early, especially comics.
- Attendance required.

16. TUESDAY, JUNE 19

- Presentations

17. WEDNESDAY, JUNE 20

- Presentations

18. THURSDAY, JUNE 21

- Presentations
- Final Wrap Up

**FINAL TOPIC SUGGESTIONS**

Brooklynese

Alternate-side of the street parking

*Sex and the City*

Fran Lebowitz

Andy Warhol

Punk music

The New York City Sports Fan

The Apollo Theatre

*Cotter*

*The New Yorker*

George Carlin

Vaudeville

*The Honeymooners*

B. Hackett

Studio 54

Music Under New York

Jules Pfeiffer

Spike Lee

Letterman

Coney Island

J. Gleason

Doormen

Juniors

Times Square

*Welcome Back*

Brown, Mari and Deanna Pacelli: *There Goes the Neighborhood*, 2003

- Guest performer/speaker: Deanna Pacelli (ETW Grad): *There Goes the Neighborhood*.

- Performance space: TBA