

# American Media Culture\*

AMST 298 Spring 2026

\* The Sixties



Bob Dylan films what some music historians consider the first video, in a London alley in 1965.

## About this course

**T**his course deals with the media explosion of the 1960s, the sore-thumb decade of the 20th Century. We will look at the journalism, the films, the music and the popular culture of that era, in an effort to gain understanding and historical perspective.

That agenda makes this course into a hydra-headed experience. This course brings together entertainment, news media, literature and popular culture under one banner.

Each time we meet, I'll have stories to tell. Two times during the term, we will have exams. You will read three fabulous books.

### William McKeen

*Adjunct Professor, American Studies*

**Note:** I am a part-time faculty member at Bridgewater State University. I do not have an office. However, I am happy to linger after class and can also do conferences via Zoom.

**Email:** [wmckeen@bridgew.edu](mailto:wmckeen@bridgew.edu)

**Home page:** [williammckeen.com](http://williammckeen.com)

**X / Threads:** / **BlueSky:** / **SubStack**  
@wmckeen

You will do a semester project that will be so much fun to do that it will change your life and alter the course of the moon and stars.

The secret to success in this class is in showing up. We don't have a traditional textbook, so roll out of bed and come to class to learn about the remarkable media legacy of the 1960s.

# Grading and related issues

There will be three tests and one project.  
Since there is no textbook, you should conclude that attendance at the lectures is vital to success in the course.

The tests will have 25-30 questions from the lectures and five questions from the reading.

It should go without saying that I expect you not to talk, dance or make rude noises while I am trying to lecture.

Disruptive behavior damages your grade.

## Grading scale

- 93 and up A
- 90 to 92.99 A-
- 87 to 89.99 B+
- 83 to 86.99 B
- 80 to 82.99 B-
- 77 to 79.99 C+
- 73 to 76.99 C
- 70 to 72.99 C-
- 67 to 69.99 D+
- 60 to 66.99 D
- 0 to 59.99 F

## Attendance

**A**ttendance is critical. Come to class fully prepared. Be caught up on the readings. Be well informed.

If you don't show up, the quality of class is diminished. Remember your John Donne (and, of course, remove the gender bias from this centuries-old quote):

*"No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less.... (A)ny man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."*

In short, don't be a clod. But do be polite. There's no excuse for rudeness.

You will not be allowed to make up any missed work unless the reason for your absence is extremely grave (a death in the family or perhaps the contraction of some loathsome disease), and you call or email me *before* the class period to be missed.

I have strong feelings about attendance. It would be stupid to walk into Trader Joe's, fill your cart with yummy groceries, pay for the stuff, then tell the cashier, "Naw, you keep it." Yet that's what we often



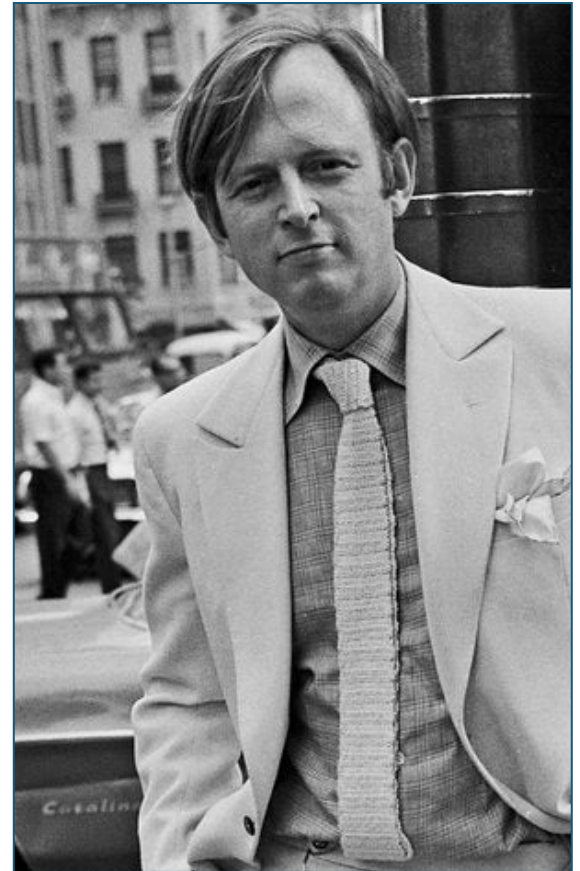
**Betty Friedan** is the author of *The Feminine Mystique*

chancellor of Indiana University (my beloved alma mater) once said: "Education is the one thing people pay for then do not insist upon receiving."

# Course outline

## Oh, the places we'll go

JAN 21	W	Introduction	APR 08	W	Bringing it All Back Home
JAN 26	M	Prelude to Weirdness	APR 13	M	Gathering No Moss
JAN 28	W	Welcome to the New Frontier	APR 15	W	Sweet Soul Music
FEB 02	M	The Making of a New World Order	APR 20	M	No Class
FEB 04	W.	ZipZamZowieSwoosh	APR 22	W	The Good, the Bad and the Ugly, Part I
FEB 09	M	Everybody Had an Ocean	APR 27	M	The Good, the Bad and the Ugly, Part II
FEB 11	W	The President and the Reporter	APR 29	W	When the Wave Broke
FEB 16	M	No Class	MAY 04	M	Third Test
FEB 18	W	First Test			
FEB 23	M	Where Have You Been, My Blue-Eyed Son?			
FEB 25	W	The Children's Crusade			
MAR 02	M	The Wall of Sound			
MAR 04	W	The Hippest Guy in the Room			
MAR 16	M	The Sound of Young America			
MAR 18	W	A Cellar Full of Noise			
MAR 23	M	A New Art Form			
MAR 25	W	The British Invasion			
MAR 30	M	Second Test			
APR 01	W	Pandemonium With a Big Grin			
APR 06	M	The Godfather of Soul			



**Tom Wolfe** is the author of *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*.

# Reading

- **Angelou, Maya.** *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (Random House, 1969)
- **Friedan, Betty.** *The Feminine Mystique* (WW Norton, 1963)
- **Wolfe, Tom.** *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968)

*These are the original publication dates. Newer paperback editions abound.*



**Maya Angelou** is the author of the autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

## Your project

**Y**ou will create a project about a celebrated figure in American popular culture in the 1960s.

It can be one of the figures we talk about in class or someone else of prominence.

Your project can take many forms. It can be a traditional research paper, a website, an audio project or a film. The medium doesn't matter. The content does.

We will discuss this later in the semester. The projects will be due by April 1 (no foolin').

## Learning objectives

### Students will

- Develop an awareness and appreciation of the resounding role of the 1960s and how that decade shaped our culture.
- Develop an awareness of the the role of the mass media in modern society
- Develop an appreciation of key artists and political figures.

**The March on Selma, Alabama,** in early 1965 was one of the key moments in the decade's struggle over civil rights and marked a critical point in the news media's coverage of social change.





# Policies and procedures

## Help when you need it

I encourage you to take advantage of all the resources BSU has to offer. Please familiarize yourself with them.

- [Online Student Support & Success](#)
- [Academic Support Resources](#)
- [Belongingness and Wellness Resources](#)
- [Student Crisis Resources](#)

## Student commitment

My goal is for us to co-create a positive class community in which everyone participates in course activities and in reflective, dynamic, and engaging discussions. Everyone can succeed in this class if you're willing to put forth the effort and persist in the face of challenging course content. I am committed to your success and intend to work collaboratively as a partner in your learning.

## Our approach

A student-centered approach views all students as equal members in the learning environment. As part of being responsible for your own learning, you will have choices when possible and appropriate. For example, there will be opportunities regarding which media you use to demonstrate your learning (e.g., written, screencast demos, podcasts, sketches, etc.) and the media for accessing course materials (e.g., videos, text/discussion boards, readings, podcasts, web sites). You will have choice among what articles to read and what topics you may research; I encourage you to select topics or activities that reflect/support your career goals.

## Diversity, equity and inclusion

Y our experience in this class is very important to me. I strive to create a respectful, supportive, and inclusive environment that fosters growth, self-discovery, and a sense of belonging for all students, regardless of their background or identity. This includes, but is not limited to, students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, LGBTQIA+ students, students of varying political persuasions, religious beliefs, socioeconomic statuses, abilities, and all other identities and experiences. I observe all accommodations approved by Student Accessibility Services.

I expect all students to actively contribute to creating an inclusive and respectful environment for their peers. It is essential that everyone feels safe, valued, and heard in our classroom. Please ensure you are familiar with BSU's communication expectations.

If at any point you feel that this is not happening, please contact me immediately. Your feedback is crucial to ensuring that our classroom remains a welcoming and supportive space for everyone.

If I observe any comments or behaviors that suggest or reflect bias or discrimination, I will pause the class to invest the necessary time for us to discuss the issue.

If you would like input or ideas for holding these discussions, consider contacting the Office of Teaching and Learning, Student Success, Equity and Diversity, or the TTC.

# Policies and procedures continued

## Student conduct

The Office of Community Standards supports the development of a thriving learning environment by helping students learn the value of their rights and to realize the importance of their responsibility as members of the campus community, and in all communities of which they are a part. Please familiarize yourself with expectations of student conduct.

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**The Beatles'** 1964 arrival had a huge impact on several aspects of American culture.

## A.I. policy

You may use AI for pre-task activities like initial brainstorming, planning stages of assignments, synthesizing ideas, or reviewing course basics as long as it isn't to complete course activities or exams. For example, you can use AI to create outlines or explore general concepts. However, the actual content of assessments must be created independently. If you have any questions about whether AI use is allowed, please ask your instructor to ensure compliance with academic integrity policies.

**Rationale:** This level of AI usage encourages you to engage with generative tools in the ideation phase but emphasizes the importance of independently developing deeper insights and arguments. It fosters critical thinking and strengthens your ability to refine ideas without relying on AI for the execution.

**Citation:** If AI is used to help brainstorm or plan, you should provide a brief acknowledgment in your work (e.g., "Initial brainstorming supported by [AI tool]"). Be transparent about how it was used.

## Engagement

Your engagement in all activities, discussions, etc. is paramount. Sometimes, however, the unexpected arises and you may need to miss class or have circumstances where you request an extension. Do not be afraid to ask.

# Instructor biography

I worked for newspapers and magazines before I started teaching. My first job, at *The Courier-Tribune* in Bloomington, Ind., lasted until that fine little newspaper went out of business. I was at *The Palm Beach Post* briefly and then joined *The American Spectator*, then served two years at *The Saturday Evening Post*. While at the *Post*, I helped edit a couple of books, including an anthology called *The American Story*.

Since I started teaching, I've taken several short term jobs – sometimes in the summers, sometimes night work on the copy desk during the school year – on *The Norman* (Okla.) *Transcript*, *The Courier-Journal* (Louisville, Ky.), *The Tampa Bay Times* and *The Gainesville* (Fla.) *Sun*. I've written reviews and features for *The Orlando Sentinel*, *The Tampa Bay Times* and *The Boston Globe* fairly regularly since 1989.

I earned a bachelor's in history and a master's in journalism from Indiana University, writing a historical survey of the portrayal of journalists in popular culture. I earned my Ph.D. in higher education administration from the University of Oklahoma, though that was largely a history degree.

Some of my books:

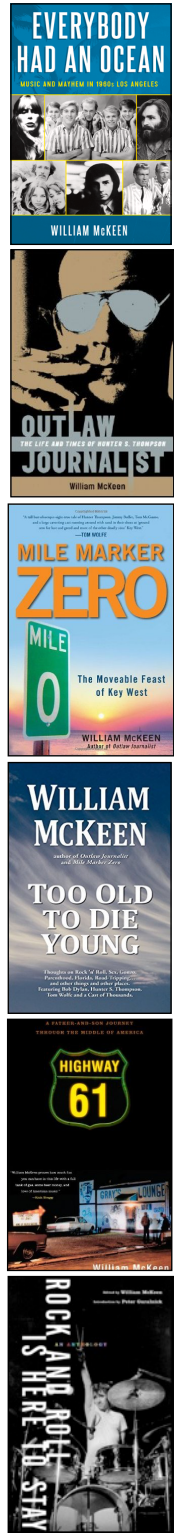
- *Everybody Had an Ocean* (Chicago Review Press, 2017) tells the story of the intersection of music and crime in the Los Angeles rock'n'roll world of the 1960s.
- *Too Old to Die Young* (Dredger's Lane, 2015) is a collection of articles, short stories, reviews and other stuff.
- *Homegrown in Florida* (University Press of Florida, 2012) is a collection of stories about growing up in Florida.
- *Mile Marker Zero* (Crown Books, 2011) is about the writers, artists, actors and musicians who found their artistic identities in Key West.
- *Outlaw Journalist* (W.W. Norton, 2008) is a biography of Hunter S. Thompson.
- *Highway 61* (W.W. Norton, 2003) is a memoir of a 6,000-mile road trip with my eldest son.
- *Rock and Roll is Here to Stay* (W.W. Norton, 2000) is an anthology tracing the history of popular music.

I have seven children – Sarah, a designer in New York; Graham, chief environmental officer for the Indiana University system; Mary, who works for a non-profit in Chicago; Savannah, a nurse in Boston; Jack, an artist in residence at my residence; Travis, a baseball and business major at Rivier University and Charley, a business major at Miami of Ohio. I also have five magnificent granddaughters, Mabel, Pearl, Rose, Myer, and Vivienne. A grandson is due momentarily.

Before becoming professor and chairman of the Boston University Department of Journalism, I taught at Western Kentucky University for five years, the University of Oklahoma for four years, and the University of Florida for 24 years, the last dozen as department chairman. I served 13 years as chairman at BU, for a grand total of 25 years in that job. I'm filling in as chair again in 2026 to accommodate our chair's schedule. I've been at BU since 2010 and I think it's a darn swell place.

I am thrilled to teach in Bridgewater State University's American Studies program.

I hope you enjoy the course as much as I enjoy teaching it..

**Shameless plug:** I have seven children who'd like to go back to three meals a day. Feel free to purchase several copies to support this cause.