

# Fitness Cultures in US History

HIST 4407

Summer 2022

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Department of History

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## **About the Course**

Many Americans today are obsessed with weight loss, exercise, fitness, and physique. While aspects of this are very new (CrossFit, fitspo online, Tough Mudders), aspects of this are also surprisingly old (jogging, weight training, fitness contests). In this online course we examine the history of physical fitness in the United States from the 19<sup>th</sup> through 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Our focus is not on simply looking at the novel ways Americans pursued fitness, but on asking what fitness *meant* to Americans, and why they pursued it so tenaciously. The pursuit of physical fitness intersects with questions of American politics, including concerns over military fitness, immigration, schooling, and citizen-shaping programs like the President's Council on Physical Fitness. The pursuit of physical fitness also intersects with questions of identity and power, as women, children, low-income Americans, black Americans, individuals with disabilities, and others have had different access to ideals of fitness in the U.S. In this course we examine changes over time in American fitness practices and American ideas about fitness, and how they intersected with other aspects of American politics and culture.

## **Learning Objectives:**

- You will become familiar with major themes in the history of fitness and exercise from the 19<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> century U.S.
- You will be able to contextualize the history of fitness and exercise within broader narratives of U.S. history, including American political history, women's and gender history, the history of race, and cultural and social history
- You will be able to define, historicize, and question concepts including "fitness," "unfitness," "exercise," and "health"
- You will be able to critically read and assess a variety of primary sources related to the history of physical fitness, including photographs, objects, advertisements, memoirs, periodicals, and guidebooks
- You will be able to connect issues of historical fitness to contemporary fitness, and produce critical readings of both historical and contemporary fitness

## **Required Texts**

Many essays, book chapters, primary sources, and documentaries that are accessible through Canvas. (nothing to purchase)

## **Grades and Course Requirements**

Your final grade in the course will be based on the following components (totaling 1000 points):

Assignment	Points Possible	Percentage of Final Grade
Topics in Fitness paper (Paper #1)	200 points	20%
Fitness Reflection paper (Paper #2)	200 points	20%
Discussion Board posts and comments (5 contributions)	80 points each x 5 = 400	40%
Reading quizzes (4 quizzes)	50 points each x 4 = 200	20%

Total Points Possible = 1000 points

Grade Calculation [1000 points, total]

900 + = A

800-899 = B

700-799 = C

600-699 = D

Below 600 = F

Final grades are non-negotiable. Please do not email to request “rounding.”

### **Late Assignments**

I will accept late work. Discussion boards and discussion board replies will be penalized 2 points for each day late, since the point of these boards is to all engage at the same time. I cannot accept ANY late work after **August 12.**

### **Turn-around Time**

The TA & I aim to return graded work to you within one week of the due date. When this is not possible, I will send an announcement to the class.

### **Grade Disputes**

You are required to wait 24 hours after receiving a grade before contacting me to dispute a grade. Within that time, I expect that you will review the assignment details and reflect on the quality of the work you turned in. If you would still like to discuss this, send me a professional and appropriate in-Canvas email (I cannot discuss grades over regular email). You should include specific examples that demonstrate that you earned a higher grade than you received. If you do not contact me to schedule a meeting within seven days of receiving your grade, you also forfeit your right to a grade dispute.

### **Office Hours**

By appointment.

You can zoom with me (Dr. Moran) or our TA (Nathalie Ross). Here is a quick breakdown of who you should talk to:

**Dr. Moran:** paper questions, paper #1 or #2 grading or expectations, overall course concerns or questions, understanding readings or sources

Set up by emailing [Rachel.Moran@unt.edu](mailto:Rachel.Moran@unt.edu) or in canvas message

**Ms. Ross:** logistical questions, discussion board questions or grades, paper writing and brainstorming, understanding readings or sources, advanced yoga questions  
Set up by emailing [NathalieRoss@my.unt.edu](mailto:NathalieRoss@my.unt.edu) or in canvas message

### **Accessibility**

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information see the Office of Disability Access website at <http://www.unt.edu/oda>. You may also contact them by phone at 940.565.4323.

Formal statement aside, though: Seriously – let me know what you need to make the course work for you. The course includes some disability studies, and is meant to be as accessible as possible. That said, accessibility sometimes requires extra effort on my end (whether you need things captioned, in larger print, extensions), so I just need to know what you need ahead of time.

### **Dean of Students**

If serious illness or injury, death or illness in the family, mental health matters, economic instability, pregnancy and/or parenting, legal matters, etc. are interfering in your academic success, you may want to speak with someone at the Dean of Students' office.  
<http://deanofstudents.unt.edu>

### **Week 1 – Does fitness have a history?**

July 11-17

- Watch Week 1 Overview Videos
- Read Barbara Ehrenreich, "Body Work," *The Baffler*
- Read E. Anthony Rotundo, "Body and Soul: Changing Ideals of American Middle-Class Manhood, 1770-1920"
- SUBMIT reading quiz #1 on Ehrenreich and Rotundo
- Read a primary source "Workout of the Week" – Eugen Sandow
- SUBMIT discussion board post #1 introducing yourself to classmates and analyzing Sandow.
  - Submit two replies to classmates.

### **Week 2 – Fitness in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

July 18-24

- Watch Week 2 Overview Videos
- Read Johnathan Black, "Selling the Body Beautiful"

- Read Jacqueline Reich, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man: Charles Atlas, Physical Culture, and the Inscription of American Masculinity"
- SUBMIT reading quiz #2
- Read a primary source "Workout of the Week": Charles Atlas
- SUBMIT discussion board post #2 analyzing Charles Atlas
  - Submit two replies to classmates.
- Read instructions on Fitness Analysis Paper (Paper #1) due Week 3 (July 31)

### **Week 3 – Fitness at Mid-Century**

July 25-31

- Watch Week 3 Overview Videos
- Read Shelly McKenzie, "Your Honeymoon Figure," from *Getting Physical*
- Read Jeff Wiltse, "The Black-White Swimming Disparity in America: A Deadly Legacy of Swimming Pool Discrimination"
- SUBMIT reading quiz #3
- View a primary source "Workout of the Week": Jack LaLanne
- SUBMIT discussion board post #3 analyzing Jack LaLanne
  - Submit two replies to classmates.
- SUBMIT paper 1 – Fitness Analysis Paper (750 words)
- Read instructions for Paper #2 – Fitness Activity Paper – Due Aug. 12

### **Week 4 – Fitness in the 1970s-1980s**

Aug 1-7

- Watch Week 4 Overview Videos
- Read Danielle Friedman, "Burn," from *Let's Get Physical: How Women Discovered Exercise and Reshaped the World*
- View *Pumping Iron*
- SUBMIT reading quiz #4
- View a primary source "Workout of the Week": Arnold Schwarzenegger (1977)
- SUBMIT discussion board post #4 analyzing Schwarzenegger clip (1977)
  - Submit two replies to classmates.

### **Week 5 – The 1990s to the Present**

Aug 8-11

- Watch Week 5 Overview Videos
- Watch Episode one, "We Are here," of *Running While Black* (22 min), Vice media, 2022 <https://youtu.be/IgOjmnoplc>
- Read Rachel Strugatz, "Is This the Most Expensive Pilates Class?" *New York Times* April 25, 2022

- Read Anne Helen Petersen, "Towards a Unified Theory of Peloton," *Culture Study* June 20, 2021 <https://annehelen.substack.com/p/towards-a-unified-theory-of-peloton?s=r>
- Read Marquisele Mercedes, "The Unbearable Whiteness and Fatphobia of 'Anti-Diet' Dieticians," *Medium* Sept. 16 2020 <https://marquisele.medium.com/the-unbearable-whiteness-and-fatphobia-of-anti-diet-dietitians-f3d07fab717d>
- **NO QUIZ THIS WEEK**
- View a primary source "Workout of the Week": Tae Bo
- SUBMIT discussion board post #5 analyzing Tae Bo or any of the readings
  - Submit two replies to classmates.
  - **DUE THURSDAY, AUGUST 11**

#### **Week 6 – Final Reflection**

- SUBMIT final reflection paper (750 words)
- **DUE FRIDAY, AUGUST 12**