

SOCIOLOGY 163: POPULAR CULTURE **Spring 2016**

INSTRUCTOR

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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 11am-12:30pm
Sign-up: <https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/xjanb>

CLASS MEETING

Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:00-3:30pm
4 LeConte

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Some may view popular culture as unworthy of academic study; indeed, popular cultural texts are often described as trashy, lowbrow, lacking merit, and even harmful. In this course, however, we will be examining the importance and impact of popular culture on our lives.

Questions we will consider in this course:

- What does "popular" mean?
- What makes something "popular"?
- Why should we study popular culture?
- What is the sociological approach to studying popular culture?
- What lessons about our social world does a study of popular culture provide?
- How are power and inequality reproduced through popular culture?

This course will focus on the idea that popular culture is a site of dominance and contestation between those who have power and those with relatively little power. Sociologist Laura Grindstaff argues: "what we call *popular culture* involves a continuous and unequal struggle between forces of domination, points of resistance, and everything in between. This struggle is particularly complicated (and particularly unequal) in highly mass-mediated, postindustrial societies like the United States..." (2002:33).

We will explore this theme through a wide range of popular cultural forms including Sci-fi, Filipino taxi dancers, Morrissey and his Latino fans, romance novels, Elvis, fandom, Beatlemania, symbolic representations of African-Americans, slash fiction, and the search for a "nonracist utopia" in the midst of the War on Terror, by Muslim youth around the globe partly by drawing upon the politics and musical culture of the African-American civil rights movement.

By focusing on a wide range of topics, we can see how thoroughly saturated our daily lives are with popular culture, how it impacts our identity and our social relationships, and how culture can be used to both reinforce and challenge social inequality.

Sociology is the study of human social activity, organization, and interaction. Sociology is about the search for patterned behavior and social, rather than individual, explanations for this behavior. Sociologists look beyond the taken-for-granted notions of our social environment to examine the many layers of social meaning in the human experience. Thus, we will be examining popular culture sociologically.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Jenkins, Henry. 2013. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. Twentieth Anniversary Ed. New York: Routledge.

Aidi, Hisham D. 2014. *Rebel Music: Race, Empire, and the New Muslim Youth Culture*. New York: Vintage Books.

Course Reader: Available at Central Copy (on Bancroft) and on bCourses

ASSIGNMENTS

Exams: Two take-home midterms and a final exam--all in essay format. You will be responsible for course readings, lectures, and any media presented in the class.

GRADE BREAKDOWN:

Midterm 1: 33.33%

Midterm 2: 33.33%

Final Exam: 33.33%

COURSE FORMAT AND POLICIES

Readings: Readings should be completed prior to class. You must keep up with the readings to participate in class discussions and complete assignments. Bring your reading materials to every class; you will likely need to refer to them in class discussions. All of your assigned readings (aside from the required books) are available on bCourses and as a reader at Copy Central on Bancroft.

Participation: This class will incorporate the use of lecture, films, music, visuals, and group discussions. I expect you to be an active participant in the course. Bring your questions and comments to class and don't be shy about bringing them up.

You can also participate by posting links to news stories or videos, as well as any relevant thoughts on issues related to popular culture in the chat room on bCourses. Be sure to contextualize any posts by connecting them to issues in the class.

If you have a question about the readings, lecture, etc., please post your question to the chat room on bCourses where both your questions and my answers will be visible to other students, rather than e-mailing me. Feel free to answer each other's questions as well.

If you miss a class, do not ask me if you missed anything. Of course you did!--but don't expect me to fill you in. I suggest sharing contact information with a classmate early on in the semester and getting the notes you missed.

I use course slides which often incorporate media. I post course slides after lecture, not before, but they will only contain the text. Keep in mind that these slides are meant to be a guide during lecture and are therefore not exhaustive or a substitute for attending class.

****ALL CELL PHONES MUST BE SILENCED AND PUT AWAY DURING CLASS**

Do not read, listen to music, browse the Internet, text, or sleep during class. If you want to do these things, don't bother coming to class.

GRADING POLICIES

NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE ACCEPTED WITHOUT PRIOR APPROVAL

TURNITIN: All of your assignments will be checked by TurnItIn for **plagiarism**. Keep in mind, this program keeps a database of previously turned-in papers as well.

For assignments turned in via bCourses, your feedback can be there. Be sure to click the button to show feedback. This feedback is provided to help you improve on future assignments.

If you would like to request a re-grade or re-evaluation of an assignment you must first, wait 24 hours after the assignment was returned and second, write up a statement detailing why you believe you deserve a higher grade. This statement should be about the substance of your work, not about effort. **You must request a re-grade within 7 days of the assignment being returned.** My assessment and grade of your work will be used, even if that means you get a lower score than originally given for that work.

Grades are not given based on “need.” If you need a particular grade in this course it is your responsibility to earn that grade.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

The University defines academic misconduct as “any action or attempted action that may result in creating an unfair academic advantage for oneself or an unfair academic advantage or disadvantage for any other member or members of the academic community” (UC Berkeley Code of Student Conduct).

Academic dishonesty includes cheating and plagiarism. Cheating is collaboration with other students on response papers or on exams or using notes during exams. Plagiarism includes turning in any work that is not your own as well as improper or missing citations of others' works. As a student of the University of California, you are bound by the Code of Academic Conduct. Any cases of cheating or plagiarism will result in a referral to The Center for Student Conduct and a zero for that assignment.

Plagiarism is most likely to occur because students are unaware of how to cite their sources or because they feel desperate. If you get to this point in your writing, contact me ASAP rather than doing something you'll very likely regret.

OFFICE HOURS

I will be holding office hours from 11am-12:30pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Sign-up: <https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/xjanb>

If you are having any difficulties with the material or assignments for the course or if you are having any personal problems that are affecting your ability to complete assignments on time, you should take advantage of office hours early in the semester. I will be much more amenable to granting extensions when I have been made aware of problems early on rather than at the last minute.

Remember that office hours are an important resource if for no other reason than getting to know your instructors could help you when you may need letters of recommendation.

Email: Clearly indicate to which class you are referring in your emails to me. I endeavor to respond to emails within 24 hours, but this is not always possible; please be patient.

SPECIAL NEEDS

Disability Accommodations

Please let me know early in the semester if you qualify for any disability accommodations.

Student Learning Center

“The primary academic support service for students at Berkeley, the SLC helps students transition to Cal; navigate the academic terrain; create networks of resources; and achieve academic, personal and professional goals.” Located in The Cesar Chavez Student Center on Lower Sproul Plaza. Front desk phone: 510 642 7332.

COURSE OUTLINE Readings are to be **completed** on the day listed below.

WEEK ONE: DEFINING POPULAR CULTURE

Tuesday, 1/19 **Introductions**

Thursday, 1/21 **The Sociology of Popular Culture**

Storey, John. 2009. "Chapter 1: What is Popular Culture?" Pp 1-15 in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*. 5th Edition. New York: Pearson.

Grindstaff, Laura. 2008. "Culture and Popular Culture: A Case for Sociology." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 619 (1):206-222.

WEEK TWO: CRITIQUES OF MASS CULTURE

Tuesday, 1/26 **Mass Culture Critiques**

Gans, Herbert J. 1999. "Chapter One: The Critique of Mass Culture." Pp 29-88 in *Popular Culture & High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste*. New York: Basic Books.

Thursday, 1/28 **The Critical Approach to Popular Culture**

Grazian, David. 2010. "Chapter 3: Monsters, Inc.: A Critical Approach to Popular Culture." Pp 44-65 in *Mix It Up: Popular Culture, Mass Media, and Society*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Dubin, Steven C. 1987. "Symbolic Slavery: Black Representations in Popular Culture." *Social Problems* 34 (2):122-140.

WEEKS THREE-FOUR: DOMINANCE AND RESISTANCE

Tuesday, 2/2 **The Body and Social Control**

Kasson, John. 1990. "Venturing Forth: Bodily Management in Public." Pp. 112-136 in *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in 19th-Century Urban America*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Fiske, John. 1989. Excerpt from "Offensive Bodies and Carnival Pleasures." Pp. 69-81 in *Understanding Popular Culture*. Boston: Unwin/Hyman.

Thursday, 2/4 Bodies Out of Control

Fiske, John. 1993. Excerpt from "Elvis: A Body of Controversy." Pp. 94-123 in *Power Plays, Power Works*. New York: Verso.

Ehrenreich, Barbara, Elizabeth Hess, and Gloria Jacobs. 1997. "Beatlemania: A Sexually Defiant Consumer Subculture?" Pp. 523-536 in *The Subcultures Reader*. Edited by Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton. New York: Routledge.

Tuesday, 2/9 Taking Back the Body

España-Maram. Linda M. 1998. "Brown 'Hordes' in McIntosh Suits: Filipinos, Taxi Dance Halls, and Performing the Immigrant Body in Los Angeles, 1930s-1940s." Pp 118-135 in *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth-Century America* edited by Joe Austin and Michael Nevin Willard. New York: New York University Press.

Taylor, Verta, Leila J. Rupp, and Joshua Gamson. 2004. "Performing Protest: Drag Shows as Tactical Repertoire of the Gay and Lesbian Movement." *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* 25:105-138.

Thursday, 2/11 Taking Back the Body (Cont)

Reich, Jennifer A. 2011. "Public Mothers and Private Practices: Breastfeeding as Transgression." Pp 130-142 in *Embodied Resistance: Challenging the Norms, Breaking the Rules*. Edited by Chris Bobel and Samantha Kwan. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.

Finley, Nancy J. 2010. "Skating Femininity: Gender Maneuvering in Women's Roller Derby." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 39 (4):359-387.

WEEK FIVE: MAKING MEANING

Tuesday, 2/16 Interpretive Communities and Meaning

Grazian, David. 2010. "Chapter 8: The Searchers: Audiences and the Quest for Meaning in Popular Culture." Pp 152-173 in *Mix It Up: Popular Culture, Mass Media, and Society*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Klosterman, Chuck. 2006. "Viva Morrissey!" Pp 47-56 in *A Decade of Curious People and Dangerous Ideas*. New York: Scribner.

Thursday, 3/10 Bronies

Roberston, Venetia Laura Delano. 2013. "Of ponies and men: *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* and the Brony Fandom." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 17 (1): 21-37.

Jones, Bethan. 2015. "*My Little Pony*, Tolerance is Magic: Gender Policing and Brony Anti-Fandom." *Journal of Popular Television* 3 (1):119-125.

Tuesday, 3/15 Film Screening: *A Brony Tale: A Film About Men... Who Like My Little Pony*

Thursday, 3/17 Catch-Up/Review

WEEK TEN: SPRING BREAK

MONDAY, 3/21-FRIDAY, 3/25

WEEK ELEVEN: SLASH FICTION

Tuesday, 3/29 Slash Fiction

Jenkins: "Chapter 6: 'Welcome to Bisexuality, Captain Kirk': Slash and the Fan-Writing Community" in *Textual Poachers*

Tosenberger, Catherine. 2008. "Homosexuality at the Online Hogwarts: Harry Potter Slash Fanfiction." *Children's Literature* 36:185-207.

Thursday, 3/31 Slash Fiction (Cont)

Scodari, Christine. 2009. "Resistance Re-Examined: Gender, Fan Practices, and Science Fiction Television." *Popular Communication* 1 (2):111-130.

WEEK TWELVE: IDENTITY CLAIMS AND POPULAR CULTURE

**Tuesday, 4/5 Whose Popular Culture Is This?
MIDTERM 2 DUE**

Hall, Stuart. 1993. "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" *Social Justice* 20 (1/2):104-114.

Wang, Oliver. 2007. "Rapping and Repping Asian: Race, Authenticity, and the Asian American MC." Pp. 35-68 in *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America* edited by Mimi Thi Nguyen and Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

WEEKS THIRTEEN-FIFTEEN: REBEL MUSIC: MUSLIM YOUTH CULTURE

Thursday, 4/7 Introducing Rebel Music

Hisham D. Aidi: "Prologue" in *Rebel Music: Race, Empire, and the New Muslim Youth Culture*

Tuesday, 4/12 The Politics of Music in Islam

Hisham Aidi: "Chapter 3: Ghettos in the Sky"

Hisham Aidi: "Chapter 4: 9,000 Miles...of Sufi Rock"

Thursday, 4/14 Jazz and Islam

Hisham Aidi: "Chapter 5: The Jazz Caliphate"

Hisham Aidi: "Chapter 6: The Blue Spirit Chose Me"

Tuesday, 4/19 The Racial Politics of Arab and Muslim Identities

Hisham Aidi: "Chapter 8: 'We Ain't White'"

Thursday, 4/21 Hip Hop Debates

Hisham Aidi: "Chapter 9: American *Banlieue*"

Hisham Aidi: "Chapter 10: The X Factor"

Tuesday, 4/26 North African Politics and Music

Hisham Aidi: "Chapter 11: When the Violins Weep"

Hisham Aidi: "Chapter 12: The North African Syndrome"

Thursday, 4/28 Sum Up and Review

WEEK SIXTEEN: READING, REVIEW, AND RECITATION

MONDAY, 5/2- FRIDAY, 5/6

TAKE HOME FINAL EXAM DUE: MONDAY, MAY 9 at 2:30PM