

Sociology 163: Popular Culture

Spring 2021

INSTRUCTOR Jill Bakehorn, Ph.D. (Pronouns: she/her or they/them)
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Drop-in Office Hours: Thursdays 2:30-3:30pm

Sign-up Office Hours: Tuesdays 11:15am-12:15pm

Wednesdays 12:30-2:00pm

Sign-up: <https://calendly.com/bakehorn/office-hours>

CLASS MEETING Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30-1:59pm
(Zoom lectures will be recorded)

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.

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 pay particular attention to the role of the body in this struggle.

We will explore this theme through a wide range of popular cultural forms including sci-fi; Filipino taxi dancers; romance novels; Elvis and Beatlemania; the intersection of class, country music and queerness; fandoms and slash fiction; and the challenging of racism by Black and non-Black Muslim youth through hip-hop and the performance of “Blackness.”

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.

Keep in mind this is a sociology course. Just to refresh your memory, 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.

This course challenges many taken-for-granted assumptions about the social world. Keep in mind that your personal experiences may not match the general sociological insights discussed in the course. This does not negate the insights. Ask yourself why this might be the case. You may not agree with everything we read and discuss, but I expect you to have an open mind and demonstrate your knowledge of the sociological perspective. Disagreements and debates are expected and welcome in this class; however, I will not tolerate personal attacks.

Course Goals

- ❖ Explore what "popular" means and what makes something "popular"
- ❖ Utilize a sociological approach to studying popular culture
- ❖ Study the ways power and inequality are reproduced through popular culture
- ❖ Demonstrate how popular culture can be a force for resistance

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the semester you should be able to:

- ❖ Discuss sociological theories of popular culture and apply a critical approach
- ❖ Connect sociological theories to the social world and your experiences
- ❖ Use an intersectional approach in analysis
- ❖ Critically engage with popular culture identifying how it can be used as a force for domination and resistance
- ❖ Write succinct papers that effectively synthesize course materials and apply theory

Required Texts

Hubbs, Nadine. 2014. *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, Press. (Available as a PDF on bCourses)

Khabeer, Su'ad Abdul. 2016. *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, and Hip Hop in the United States*. New York: New York University Press. (Available as a PDF on bCourses)

Course Reader: Available digitally on bCourses and in digital and hardcopy form from Copy Central (they will ship it to you if you are not local).

Assignments

Reading Responses: These reading responses test your comprehension of course readings as well as your ability to explain concepts **in your own words**. Because you will not be able to rely on direct quotations of the material, you must focus on your own understanding and articulation of the texts. You will also be asked to make connections between the course materials and your experience of the social world.

Essay Exams: Midterm and final exam. You will be responsible for course readings, lectures, and any media presented in the class. These exams will focus on your ability to apply theories and to synthesize and make connections between various readings.

All work must be original (you cannot recycle work from other courses).

Participation: Homework which could include individual reflections, collaborative assignments, and online discussions. These assignments are designed to keep you motivated and engaged with the course, to provide opportunities for you to check your comprehension, and to prepare for graded assignments. **You must complete 6 of the 10 assignments in order to get full credit.** You will receive either full credit (10 points) or zero for each assignment.

GRADE SCALE

Grade Range		Grade
100%	97%	A+
96%	93%	A
92%	90%	A-
89%	87%	B+
86%	83%	B
82%	80%	B-
79%	77%	C+
76%	73%	C
72%	70%	C-
69%	67%	D+
66%	63%	D
62%	60%	D-
59%	50%	F

Grade Breakdown

Reading Responses (30%)

Midterm (25%)

Final Exam (30%)

Participation Assignments (15%)

You must complete all assignments in order to pass the course.

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.

Course Slides: I use course slides which often incorporate media. I will post course slides, 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/ watching lecture.

Zoom Etiquette and Tips: Please refer to [this guide](#).

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.

Names and Pronouns: You have the right to be referred to by the name you prefer and with the correct gender pronouns. Because the name listed in University records may not correspond to your preferred name, please inform me of your name (and pronunciation) and your pronouns so that I can ensure you are properly recognized and respected.

You can refer to me as Prof. Bakehorn, Dr. Bakehorn, or Jill. My pronouns are she/they.

Grading Policies

No late assignments will be accepted without prior approval. Grades are not curved.

All assignments will be checked by TurnItIn for plagiarism. Keep in mind, this program keeps a database of previously turned in papers as well as searching the internet.

Be sure to carefully consider assignment feedback; it is provided to help you improve on future assignments. For in-text feedback, **click on the link "View Feedback"** which may not be visible if you are not in full-screen mode.

To **request a re-grade** of an assignment: 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. Be sure to make specific reference to your work, don't simply say that you responded to the questions asked. Demonstrate how you did so. **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.

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 and 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 failing grade for that assignment.

Plagiarism is most likely to occur because students are unaware of how to cite 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

Please see Page 1 or [this link](#) for information about my office hours.

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, please take advantage of office hours—I am here to help!

Remember that office hours are an important resource if for no other reason than getting to know your instructors could help you in the future when you may need letters of recommendation. You do not need to be struggling or have course-specific questions to go to office hours.

Student Support Services

Course Accessibility

This course is intended for all UC Berkeley students, including those with mental, emotional, physical, or cognitive disabilities, illnesses, injuries, impairments, or any other condition that can negatively impact equal access to education. If, at any point in the semester, you find yourself not able to fully access the space, content, and experience of this course, you are welcome (but not required) to contact me by email or during office hours to discuss your specific needs.

I also encourage you to contact the [Disabled Students' Program](#). If you have a diagnosis, DSP can help you document your needs and create an accommodation plan. By making a plan through DSP, you can ensure appropriate accommodations without disclosing your condition or diagnosis to course instructors.

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.”

Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Services

To learn more about these issues, how to support survivors, or how to file a report and receive support services, start here: <http://survivorsupport.berkeley.edu>. **Please note that I am not a confidential advocate; I am a mandated reporter.** You can speak to a [Confidential Care Advocate](#).

Economic, Food, and Housing Support

If you are in need of economic, food, or housing support, you can find help at [the Basic Needs Center](#). You may be eligible for money to buy groceries via [Calfresh](#) or our [Food Assistance Program](#). If you are in need of food immediately, please contact our UC Berkeley [Food Pantry](#). More information can be found [here](#).

Technology and Internet Support

Please see [this page](#) for the latest information on university-provided support.

Course Outline

Complete readings on the day listed below. Course schedule is subject to change.

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.

Week Two: Critical Approach to Popular Culture

Tuesday, 1/26 **The Critical Approach to Popular Culture**

Grazian, David. 2017. "Chapter 3: Welcome to the Machine: A Critical Approach to Popular Culture." Pp 48-71 in *Mix It Up: Popular Culture, Mass Media, and Society*, 2nd ed. New York: W.W. Norton.

Thursday, 1/28 **Applying the Critical Approach**

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

Weeks Three-Five: 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.

Thursday, 2/4 **The Body and Social Control (Cont)**

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

Tuesday, 2/9 **Bodies out of Control**

Fiske, John. 1993. Excerpt from "Elvis: A Body of Controversy." Pp. 94-107 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.

Thursday, 2/11 **(Re)Producing Racial Inequality: Controlling Images**

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1991. "Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images." Pp 76-106 in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge.

Tuesday, 2/16 **(Re)Producing Racial Inequality: Model Minority Myth in Popular Culture**

Lee, Robert G. 1999. "The Cold War Origins of the Model Minority Myth." Pp 145-179 in *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Thursday, 2/18 **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.

Weeks Six-Seven: Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music

Tuesday, 2/23

Situating Class in Country

READING RESPONSE 1 DUE

Nadine Hubbs: Intro in *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music*

Nadine Hubbs: Chapter 1: Anything But Country

Thursday, 2/25

Country Music as Working-Class

Nadine Hubbs: Chapter 2: Sounding the Working-Class Subject

Tuesday, 3/2

Country Music as Rebellion

Nadine Hubbs: Chapter 3: Gender Deviance and Class Rebellion in "Redneck Woman"

Thursday, 3/4

Country Music and Queer Politics

Nadine Hubbs: Chapter 4: "Fuck Aneta Briant" and the Queer Politics of Being Political

Nadine Hubbs: Outro

Week Eight-Nine: Making Meaning

Tuesday, 3/9

Interpretive Communities and Meaning

Grazian, David. 2017. "Chapter 8: Don't Stop Believing: Audiences and the Quest for Meaning in Popular Culture." Pp 162-181 in *Mix It Up: Popular Culture, Mass Media, and Society, 2nd Ed.* New York: W.W. Norton.

Edgar, Amanda Nell and Ashton Toone. 2019. "'She invited other people to that space': Audience Habitus, Place, and Social Justice in Beyoncé's *Lemonade*." *Feminist Media Studies* 19 (1):87-101.

Thursday, 3/11 **Symbolic Creativity**

Willis, Paul. 1990. "Symbolic Creativity." Pp 1-29 in *Common Culture*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Tuesday, 3/16 **Symbolic Creativity in Action**

Radway, Janice. 1983. "Women Read the Romance: The Interaction of Text and Context." *Feminist Studies* 9 (1):53-78.

Thursday, 3/18 **TAKE HOME MIDTERM**
NO CLASS

Week Ten: Spring Break

Tuesday, 3/23 + Thursday, 3/25 **NO CLASS**

Weeks Eleven-Twelve: Fandoms and Slash Fiction

Tuesday, 3/30 **Fans as Poachers**

Jenkins, Henry. 2013. "Chapter 1: 'Get a Life!': Fans, Poachers, Nomads" Pp 9-49 in *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge.

Philbrick, Ian Prasad. 2021. "The Force (and a Lenient Disney) Is With 'Star Wars' Fan Filmmakers." *The New York Times*. January 7.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/07/movies/star-wars-fan-films.html>

Thursday, 4/1 **Understanding Reception**

Jenkins, Henry. 2013. "Chapter 2: How Texts Become Real" Pp 50-79 in *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge.

Gaillot, Ann-Derrick. 2017. "When 'Stan' Became a Verb: A Brief History of the Term's Evolution." *The Outline*. October 26.

<https://theoutline.com/post/2425/when-stan-became-a-verb>

Tuesday, 4/6

Slash Fiction

Jenkins, Henry. 2013. "Chapter 6: 'Welcome to Bisexuality, Captain Kirk': Slash and the Fan-Writing Community" Pp 185-222 in *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge.

Grady, Constance. 2016. "Why We're Terrified of Fanfiction." *Vox*. June 2. <https://www.vox.com/2016/6/2/11531406/why-were-terrified-fanfiction-teen-girls>

Weeks Thirteen-Fifteen: Muslim Cool

Thursday, 4/8

Whose Popular Culture Is This?

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

Su'ad Abdul Khabeer: Introduction in *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, and Hip Hop in the United States*

Tuesday, 4/13

The Loop Connecting Muslims, Hip Hop and Black Americans

Su'ad Abdul Khabeer: Chapter 1: The Loop of Muslim Cool: Black Islam, Hip Hop, and Knowledge of Self

Thursday, 4/15

Music and US Islam

Su'ad Abdul Khabeer: Chapter 2: Policing Music and the Facts of Blackness

Tuesday, 4/20

Blackness and the Muslim Self
READING RESPONSE 2 DUE

Su'ad Abdul Khabeer: Chapter 3: Blackness as a Blueprint for the Muslim Self

Thursday, 4/22

Masculinity, Race, and Religion

Su'ad Abdul Khabeer: Chapter 4: Cool Muslim Dandies: Signifyin' Race, Religion, Masculinity, and Nation

Tuesday, 4/27

The Limits of Muslim Cool

Su'ad Abdul Khabeer: Chapter 5: The Limits of Muslim Cool

Thursday, 4/29

Muslim Cool Conclusions

Su'ad Abdul Khabeer: Conclusion #*BlackLivesMatter*

Week Sixteen: Reading, Review, and Recitation

Monday, May 3—Friday, May 7

Final Exam: Due Thursday, May 13 at 6pm