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**


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.

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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


**Week Two: Critical Approach to Popular Culture**

Tuesday, 1/26  The Critical Approach to Popular Culture


Thursday, 1/28  Applying the Critical Approach


**Weeks Three-Five: Dominance and Resistance**

Tuesday, 2/2  The Body and Social Control


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

Tuesday, 2/9  

Bodies out of Control


Thursday, 2/11  

(Re)Producing Racial Inequality: Controlling Images


Tuesday, 2/16  

(Re)Producing Racial Inequality: Model Minority Myth in Popular Culture


Thursday, 2/18  

Taking Back the Body

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


Thursday, 3/11       Symbolic Creativity


Tuesday, 3/16       Symbolic Creativity in Action


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


Thursday, 4/1       Understanding Reception


https://theoutline.com/post/2425/when-stan-became-a-verb
Tuesday, 4/6  
Slash Fiction


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](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?


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