

Politics and Popular Culture
Political Science 330
Spring 2015

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Office Hours: M, T, W, TR 10:15 to 11:30 and by appointment

Course Objectives:

1. Students will develop a sense that knowledge and belief are socially constructed and are conditioned by the social context in which they are learned.
2. Students will learn about basic cultural and behavioral processes that underlie cultural learning and political order.
3. Students will understand the ways in which popular culture represents a locus of the learning and negotiation of political ideas and beliefs.
4. Students will learn to recognize the political and social content of popular cultural materials.
5. Students will examine the relationship between popular culture, political power and legitimacy and explore the role of popular culture in political change and stability.

Introduction

This course presumes that a powerful determinant of political behavior in any society is the way culture shapes human activity. That is, human beings necessarily must develop a way to help the world make sense. Without a framework for such understanding, human action is constantly problematic, human emotion is incomprehensible and social life impossible. To allow humans to establish and maintain satisfying and productive social relations, it is necessary to establish a common set of meanings and patterns of interaction which make purposeful and moral action possible.

These interactions are to be understood in a normative context. That is, they are characterized by definite but not always explicit values which members of a culture feel in varying degrees obligated to hold. These values are expressed through communication and manifest in symbolic action whereby members of a society reaffirm and recreate the institutions, commitments and beliefs which characterize the social order. Together, these symbols, commitments, values, meanings, and patterns of interaction prescribe the range of possible human activity within a given society.

Politics is among the behaviors that are shaped by culture. While power relations are grounded in material as well as cultural factors, the experience of politics depends to a large extent on the symbolic context in which the citizen operates. Indeed, any citizen's understanding of his or her place in the political order depends fundamentally on the symbols, narratives and rituals that define and express the society's basic political beliefs. Furthermore, the use of symbols for the expression of authority and the mobilization of interests is as fundamental to the operation of any political system as the use of economic incentive and physical coercion.

This course contends that political symbolic action extends to popular culture. While ideologies and belief systems are directly inculcated in formal institutions such as schools, corporations, and government, individuals are also exposed to the precepts of political culture through popular culture. Television, radio, literature, movies and the internet all include symbolic communications and actions which express current and prevailing ideas, values and social relations. These expressions often serve to reinforce the power of the dominant groups in a society but can be sources of innovation and change. In an era when human beings in advanced industrial societies increasingly devote time to the consumption of popular culture, it becomes increasingly important to recognize that popular culture supports or challenges existing social organization.

Writing Intensive

This is a writing intensive course. It includes assignments that require students to engage in writing as a process, work in multiple drafts, revise written work, complete ungraded writing assignments and produce a certain quantity of written work. As such, the quality of writing will be a significant factor in evaluating all graded assignments.

Learning Disability Accommodations

Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Elaine Mara, Assistant Director of Academic & Disability Learning support, at the lower level of Monocacy Hall, or by calling 610-861-1401. Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic Support Center.

Academic Honesty

All students should be aware of their obligations under the Academic Honesty Policy which can be found at the following urls:

https://amos.moravian.edu/ICS/icsfs/ACADEMIC_HONESTY_SUMMARY_PAGE_FOR_FACULTY.pdf?target=d7812ca4-d74f-41a2-b93d-4ad7c292a4f7

https://amos.moravian.edu/ICS/icsfs/Academic_Honesty_Policy.pdf?target=ebeb34f5-5765-4eb1-b699-ab980cfb8622

Books

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, **The Social Construction of Reality**, (Random House, 1966)

Jeffrey P. Jones, **Entertaining Politics**, second edition, (Rowman & Littlefield, 2010)

Evgeny Morozov, **The Net Delusion**, (Public Affairs, 2011)

David Sirota, **Back to Our Future**, (Random House, 2011)

Evaluation of Student's Work

The student's grade will be determined on a 300 point basis through the following assignments:

Reading Journal	100 points
Music discussion project	30 points
Annotated bibliography	20 points
Draft	40 points
Research paper final draft	100 points
Instructor evaluation	10 points

Reading Journals

- Students will complete a reading journal. There should be at least one entry per week. The entries should be typewritten and submitted as e-mail attachments by the Friday of each week at 4:00 p.m.
- Unless otherwise specified, the weekly entry should be a response to the assigned reading. This could be a summary of what a student read during the week, questions (with explanations) prompted by the reading, a commentary on the content of the reading or some other indication of an effort to do and engage the reading.
- Unless otherwise specified, journal entries should be a minimum of 250 words.
- Comments and feedback will be provided periodically but **individual entries will not be graded.**
- Evaluation of the journal will be based on the following criteria:
 1. The quality of the observations, insights or questions presented in a given journal entry
 2. The degree to which the entry incorporates material from the course readings.
 3. The clarity and effectiveness of the writing.
 4. Whenever appropriate, proper citation of text materials.

Music Discussion Project

Students are responsible for listening to a set of songs and the watching the accompanying videos. The list of You Tube urls are list in a file on the Blackboard site. After listening to the song and watching the video, students should write a brief reaction to the song. Those reactions should include the following:

- A statement of the principal theme of the song/video? (One to three sentences)
- Reflection on the social/political content of the song video.

One can also include anything that the student learned about the song or the artists for any "research" he or she does in regard to the song. **The reactions will be submitted during the calendar week listed on the music video file. Each student is responsible for responding to at least one song per week and for a total of at least 12 responses.**

The class will also construct a Blackboard discussion forum for posting reactions to the songs. Students can post as many comments as they care to post but each student is required to post comments on at least five different songs.

Research Paper

Each student will complete a research project regarding the political or ideological elements of some part of popular culture. The specific focus of the research will be determined by the student in consultation with the instructor. Research can be done on:

- specific forms of popular culture (e.g. television shows, movies, music)
- issues that have political dimensions that are manifest or "negotiated" in popular culture (e.g. race, gender, religion, war, violence)
- use of popular culture for political actions or goals

The final project will be at least 15 typewritten pages, will be completed using the writing process described below. In completing this assignment, students will be required to submit the following prior to completion of the final draft which will be **due on 4/23**:

1. **Preliminary statement** identifying topic and explaining what the student anticipates doing **DUE: 2/2**
2. **Annotated bibliography** that provides the bibliographic information on a minimum of 10 sources and a paragraph summarizing the content of six of those sources and describing why the source appears to be useful or was chosen. **Due 3/4**
3. **Thesis statement, outline, and complete preliminary draft. Due 4/1**
4. **Final draft. Due 4/27**

Instructor Evaluation

Each student will be evaluated by the instructor for his or her participation, involvement in and contributions to the course. This portion of the grade will reflect all activities in the course that are not otherwise specified in the syllabus including attendance and participation in class discussion. It will also include the oral presentation of the research projects which will be scheduled for the last week of the semester.

Readings and Class Assignments

Below are the dates of class, the topic for the class meetings and the reading assignments. Students are expected *to complete all of the readings in the texts required for purchase*. All additional readings can be accessed on the Blackboard site. Due to the large number of readings, the instructor will, on some topics, assign specific readings to specific students who will have responsibility for reporting on those readings in class. For those classes, *students not assigned a specific reading will not be responsible for that reading*.

1/19 Introduction

1/21 Structure, culture and power relations

Read: Todd Gitlin, "Prime Time Ideology: The Hegemonic Process in Television Entertainment," **Social Problems**, Vol. 26, No. 3. (Feb., 1979), pp. 251-266.

<http://www.csub.edu/~rdugan2/SOC%20577%20Pop%20Culture/gitlin%20and%20prime%20time%20ideology.pdf> or

http://www.jstor.org/stable/800451?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

Todd Gitlin, "Prime Time Ideology: The Hegemonic Process in Television Entertainment- Summary, Notes and Review," **The Cultural Studies Reader**, Sunday, August 28, 2011

<http://culturalstudiesnow.blogspot.com/2011/08/todd-gitlin-prime-time-ideology.html>

1/26-1/28 Social construction of meaning: comprehension, shared meaning, and plausibility

Read: **The Social Construction of Reality** pp. 1-32

2/2 Language, texts and discourses

Read: **The Social Construction of Reality** pp. 32-44

2/4-2/9 Institutionalization, socialization and behavior

Read: **The Social Construction of Reality** pp. 45-85, 119-150

2/11 The Political Functions of Culture

- Social boundaries and identity

Read: John Kelly, "Two Children's Book Authors Thought Military 'Brats' Deserved a New Name. The Brats Thought Otherwise," **Washington Post**, December 29, 2014

http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/two-childrens-book-authors-thought-military-brats-deserved-a-better-name-the-brats-thought-otherwise/2014/12/29/6a584f98-87d3-11e4-9534-f79a23c40e6c_story.html?wpisrc=nl_headlines&wpmm=1

Key & Peele, "Obama Meet & Greet"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nopWOC4SRm4>

- Create rituals for social solidarity

Read: Nathan Colquhoun, "Why We Shouldn't Stand For Our National Anthem," November 22, 2014

<http://www.nathancolquhoun.com/2014/11/22/why-we-shouldnt-stand-for-our-national-anthem>

- Group mobilization

Read: Eric Hananoki, "REPORT: "Fair and Balanced" Fox News Aggressively Promotes "Tea Party" Protests," **Media Matters, April 8, 2009**

<http://mediamatters.org/research/2009/04/08/report-fair-and-balanced-fox-news-aggressively/149009>

"Trayvon Martin Shooting Sparks 'Hoodie' Movement," **CBS News, January 15, 2015**

<http://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/trayvon-martin-shooting-sparks-hoodie-movement/>

- Decision making

Read: "Elections 101," **Zoom Out The Vote, PBS Kids, January 15, 2015**

<http://pbskids.org/zoom/fromyou/elections/elections101.html>

"Rock the Vote," January 15, 2015

<http://www.rockthevote.com/about-us/> and

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htIfnDiZa80>

"Schoolhouse Rock – The Electoral College"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyIFqf3XH24>

"Schoolhouse Rock – I'm Just a Bill"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFroMQIKiag>

- Authority/legitimation

Read: Jessica Reaves, "Al Gore's Graceful Valedictory," **TIME, Dec. 13, 2000**

<http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,91845,00.html>

2/16

Legitimation and ideology

Read: The Social Construction of Reality pp. 85-118

2/18-2/23 Popular culture and social change

Read: Francesca Polletta, "Culture and Movements," **The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science**, Vol. 619, (Sep., 2008), pp. 78-96

Theresa A. Martinez, "Popular Culture as Oppositional Culture: Rap as Resistance," **Sociological Perspectives**, Vol. 40, No. 2 (1997), pp. 265-286

2/25 Postmodernism

Read: Dino Felluga, "General Introduction to Postmodernism," **Introductory Guide to critical Theory**, January 23, 2011

<http://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/postmodernism/modules/introduction.html>

Todd Gitlin, "Postmodernism Defined, at Last," **Dissent**, Winter 1989

Brian Duignan, "Postmodernism," **Encyclopedia Britannica**, December 16, 2015

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1077292/postmodernism>

Jedediah Purdy, "Avoiding the World," pp. 9-25, **For Common Things**, 1999

3/2 The ideals of political engagement

Read: Nicholas Lemann, "The Good Citizen: How Our Ideals of Citizenship Are Changing," **The Washington Monthly Online**, October 1998, Volume 30 Issue 10

<http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/books/1998/9810.lemann.citizen.html>

Richard Dalton, "Citizenship Norms and Political Participation in America: The Good News Is ... the Bad News Is Wrong," **The Center for Democracy and Civil Society**, Georgetown University, 2006

<http://www.civicvoices.org/docs/daltonoccasionalpaper.pdf>

Association of American College & Universities, "Civic Engagement VALUE Rubric," January 16, 2015 <http://www.aacu.org/civic-engagement-value-rubric>

3/4 Television and the construction of ideology

Read: Back to Our Future, pp. 1-30

3/16 Ideology: Materialism and individualism

Read: Back to Our Future, pp. 33-105

3/18 Rethinking entertainment and civic engagement

Read: Entertaining Politics, pp. 3-58

3/23 The new political television

Read: Entertaining Politics, pp. 63-109; selected chapters will also be assigned to groups within the class.

3/25 Globalization and popular culture

Read: Benjamin Barber, "Jihad vs McWorld," **The Atlantic**, March 1992, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1992/03/jihad-vs-mcworld/303882/>

Girish Mishra, "Globalization and Culture," **State of Nature**, April 18, 2008, <http://www.stateofnature.org/?p=6292>

Johanna Blakley, "Entertainment Goes Global: Mass Culture in a Transforming World," **Norman Lear Center**, January 2001 <http://www.learcenter.org/pdf/EntGlobal.pdf>

Paul Bond, "Study: Global Entertainment Industry Poised to Top \$2 Trillion in 2016," **The Hollywood Reporter**, June 05, 2013
<http://www.billboard.com/biz/articles/news/global/1565728/study-global-entertainment-industry-poised-to-top-2-trillion-in>

3/30 Ideology: Militarism

Read: Back to Our Future, pp. 107-170

James Fallows, "The Tragedy of the American Military," **The Atlantic**, January/February, 2015
<http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/12/the-tragedy-of-the-american-military/383516/>

4/1 Technology and technological determinism

Read: Net Delusion, pp. 275-299

4/6 Ideology: Race

Read: Back to Our Future, pp. 173-213

4/8 Cyber utopianism and cyber centrism

Read: Net Delusion, pp. 1-56

4/13 The Internet as a means for political control: censorship and propaganda

Read: Net Delusion, pp. 85-141

4/15 Ideology: Gender

Readings to be announced

4/20 Identity and privacy

Read: Net Delusion, pp. 143-178

Frontline, "Generation Like," PBS, February 18, 2014
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/generation-like/>

4/22 The Internet and civic engagement

Read: Net Delusion, pp. 179-203

4/27 The consequences of Internet freedom

Read: Net Delusion, pp. 204-274

4/29 Closing