

**SOC 306i: Popular Culture in Sociology, Spring 2014**  
**Mon / Wed / Fri 11-11:50am, Quigley 201**  
**Instructor: Kristi Brownfield**

If you need to contact me:

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Mon / Wed 12pm-3pm

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We will be using SIU Online frequently; this includes both turning in work and the weekly readings. If you have trouble accessing the course, let me know ASAP.

**Required Texts:**

Storey, John. 2009. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*. Harlow, England: Pearson Longman. 5<sup>th</sup> Edition.

Recommended Texts:

*Fables vol 1: Legends in Exile*, Bill Willingham, 2011, Vertigo.

*Pacific Rim*, 2013, Guillermo del Toro

*Yeezus*, Kanye West / *Artpop*, Lady Gaga / *Beyoncé*, Beyoncé

*Divergent*, Veronica Roth, 2012, Katherine Tegan Books.

The Storey text, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, will be your primary textbook throughout the class. You will NEED to get a copy of this book to pass the class. The other items you will need to complete review assignments. However owning the item is not necessary so long as you are able to get copies (e.g., from the library, from a friend, etc.).

**Course Objectives:**

Students will be able to: (a) demonstrate an understanding of basic sociological terms, concepts, and theories for analyzing popular culture; (b) apply fundamental principles of social scientific investigation to the study of popular culture; (c) develop communication skills by participating in oral presentations to the class; and (d) interact with peers to complete collaborative projects.

Popular culture surrounds us. It has been labeled different things; dismissed as trivial entertainment, a tool of deception that creates couch potatoes and fashion victims concerned only for consuming, and even as an agent for social change. In this course we will take a step back and look at (mostly American) popular culture sociologically to understand how ideas and ideologies are transmitted, how popular culture is contested terrain, and the subcultures that are devoted to popular culture. We will investigate popular culture from both sides of the equation: production/distribution and consumption, with an emphasis on understanding the themes and meanings present in the media we consume.

Each time I teach this class, I do so with a particular “theme” in mind. See if you can guess the theme for this semester!

**Plagiarism:**

See the student handbook for a definition of plagiarism. Taking another person's work and passing it off as your own will not be tolerated in this class. You will receive an immediate zero for plagiarized work. The second attempt at plagiarism will be reported to the university and I reserve the right to give a failing grade for the course at that point.

### **Electronics:**

Electronics are welcome and, on some days, will be encouraged in this class. However, your electronics use should be *related to* this class and should not be disruptive to other students. This means please turn off cell phone ringers. Do not play music or videos. No headphones. Be respectful of the classroom as a learning environment. Please note that if you're being disruptive or I notice your inattention you will be required to write a thousand-word essay about a sociological concept of my choosing.

### **Discussion Ground Rules:**

During the semester students will be able to share thoughts, opinions, and beliefs about their own experiences. We will also read articles and books that will offer academic perspectives. The differences in these perspectives will add depth and richness to this course. Please be respectful of those differences. Here are some ground rules for discussion I expect people to follow in class:

1. Acknowledge your privilege! We all have advantages and information we have been given that colors our perceptions of the world and how the world works. Understand and acknowledge those privileges, from white privilege, to male privilege, to class privilege, to able-bodied privilege, to heterosexual privilege, and many other types of privileges.
2. Be willing to listen to the perspective of others – *especially* when they come from different backgrounds and experiences.
3. Acknowledge that discrimination – both individual and institutional – exists. Acknowledge that racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, ableism, and other such prejudices exist and affect the lives of people every day.
4. We do not blame victims for their experiences of oppression.
5. We do not demean or put down anyone in this class for their experiences.
6. Anecdotes are not the best form of evidence to use for your claims. Anecdotes are a *type* of evidence and should be judged alongside other evidence such as scientific research or collected testimonials. If your claim begins with “I saw someone once” or “I knew someone who” be ready to back your claim up with other evidence.
7. The classroom will be a safe space to discuss issues that are often sensitive and the cause of strong emotions. If a student within the class makes a comment they do not wish repeated outside of the classroom, please preface your remarks saying so and the class will agree to the student's wishes.

### **Course Format:**

This is a writing intensive class. Class time will be spent in discussion, during which we concern ourselves with understanding the readings and with learning how to "read" and analyze all sorts of other things, including snapshots, ads, fashion, grocery store shelves, rock videos, public performances, social norms, blockbuster movies, and Starbucks—to name just a few!

In order to be prepared for class, thus, you will need to spend your time outside of class doing a lot more than just reading. You will need to be writing and also be "out-in-the-world" doing some data collection of your own. You will also need a ways to take pictures that can be shared with the class. A camera, or a cell phone equipped with a camera, will do nicely.

**Course Requirements and Grading:**

Blog Discussion Participation: 10 points each x 10 weeks = 100 points

Group Project and Presentation: 100 points

Critique Portfolio: 25 points each x 4 critiques = 100 points

Midterm Essay: 100 points

Final Essay: 100 points

Total points possible: 500 points

**Grading Scale:**

450 and above: A

400-449: B

350-399: C

300-349: D

299 and below: F

*Participation and Attendance:*

I expect students to attend class every day and to come to class on Mondays having reviewed the assigned readings for that week, which we will discuss with greater specificity as the week progresses. Obviously, students often have other priorities or circumstances that interfere with meeting these expectations. I keep track of attendance, participation in classroom discussions, and visits to my office, all of which I take into consideration if your final grade is borderline. The more often you are here, participate, and come see me if needed, the more likely I am to raise a borderline grade. The more frequently you are absent without telling me why, or you come in late, the less likely I am to raise a borderline grade. Do not be late for class. Being late is disruptive and disrespectful.

*Blog Discussion Participation:*

Students are expected to finish all the readings before class and participate in the discussion of the reading materials in class. In addition to in class discussions, the readings will be posted weekly on the class blog. Everyone is expected to post a 200-word response analyzing aspects of the readings. You are required to post to the blog at least ten times out of the twelve weeks of readings. On weeks that we have sections due in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, you MUST address the book chapter. Some suggested topics to write about:

Questions the readings raised for you

Videos, articles, or other interesting internet-based material that is related to the readings (along with a discussion of how they are related)

Applying sociological theories and ideas in the readings to popular culture you consume  
Responses and thoughts – connected to the readings – to things other people have posted to the group

*Group Project and Presentation:*

The majority of what we will talk about in class will be based in American popular culture. You will be asked to branch out in a semester-long group project on popular culture around the world. Groups of 2-3 students will work together to research a country in a different region of the world (South America, Africa, Europe, Asia, or Australia) and make a PowerPoint presentation of fifteen to twenty minutes in the last three weeks of class. I will allow only one country per group on a first-come, first-serve basis (i.e., so the first group to claim “Ireland” is the only group allowed to discuss popular culture from Ireland). I will also only allow three European countries. The presentation should be on a piece of popular culture present (for example Japanese animation, or anime) within that country; topics you should touch on in your talk should be things like:

The origin and history of the artifact (i.e., the first anime ever made and how anime became popular)

The cultural ideologies present in famous pieces of popular culture (i.e., what the movie *Akira* says about Japan in the 1980s)

Images and themes about race, class, gender, and sexuality within popular culture (i.e., how are women constructed within anime)

Essentially, this presentation should demonstrate WHAT the cultural artifact is, WHY it is considered a piece of *popular* culture, and HOW the artifact reflects the ideologies, signs, symbols, attitudes, anxieties, beliefs, and so forth of the culture that produced it. You will also be required to turn in a one page summary that details exactly what each group member did to research and prepare for this presentation. This paper must be signed by each group member to receive credit. Be sure to work together on this as everyone in the group will be receiving the same grade!

#### *Critique Portfolio:*

You are required to turn in a portfolio of four critiques of popular culture artifacts. Each critique should be 500-750 words long and should analyze the artifact looking one of the following: a) the context of production and distribution, b) meanings, themes, and ideologies present in the artifact, or c) the context of consumption. You will be given specific prompts for each critique to follow and an example critique will be provided on the blog.

Critique One: Due 02/07/2014

*Yeezus / Artpop / Beyoncé*

Critique Two: Due 03/07/2014

*Divergent*

Critique Three: Due 04/04/2014

*Pacific Rim*

Critique Four: Due 04/21/2014

*Fables vol 1: Legends in Exile*

#### *Midterm and Final Essays:*

There will be two short take-home essay exams in the course. Exams should be typed using 12-point, double-spaced font. The short answer questions will cover material from the readings,

lectures, class discussions, movies, or online materials and *will be cumulative*. You are expected to do your own work! No blocks of quotes from the course materials! No use of Wikipedia!

Midterm essay: 03/17/2014

Final essay: 05/02/2014

### **Turning Work In:**

I ask that students turn their work in digitally through SIU Online. If you have issues uploading, you may also email an attached copy of your work to [kabrownf@siu.edu]. All work should be sent by 9:00am on the day that it is due. Assignments should be turned in as PDF or Word (.doc or .docx) files. No other formats will be accepted.

### **Late Work:**

Turn in your assignments when they are due! **Late work will not be accepted within this class – you will receive a zero if you do not complete your assignments on time.**

**Tentative Course Schedule:** (topics/readings subject to change)

CTPC = Cultural Theory and Popular Culture

**Week 1 (Jan 13, 15, 17):** Introduction to Sociology; What is Pop Culture?

Read: CTPC Chapter 1

**Week 2 (Jan 22, 24):** Reading and Interpreting “Signs” of Popular Culture

Read: Maasik, Solomon: Popular Signs, or Everything You Always Knew About American Culture (but Nobody Asked)

View: Barbie & Ken & American Girl doll pictures & come to class prepared to talk about what signs of culture you “read”

[<http://www.flickr.com/photos/22691138@N05/sets/72157603693131721/>]

Listen to: <http://www.studio360.org/2009/feb/13/barbie/> - NPR’s American Icon show on Barbie

**Week 3 (Jan 27, 29, 31):** What Popular Culture Tells Us About Being an American

Read: Goewey: “Careful, You May Run Out of Planet”: SUVs and the Exploitation of the American Myth [<http://www.uvm.edu/~jhaig/Myth/SUVs.pdf> ], CTPC Chapter 2

**Week 4 (Feb 03, 05, 07):** American Idols and American Icons

Read: Wasko: Corporate Disney in Action [<http://www.scribd.com/doc/54459570/17/Chapter-17>], CTPC Chapter 3

Read: Guillermo, Emil. William Hung: Racism, or Magic? [<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/g/a/2004/04/06/eguillermo.DTL&type=printable>]

View: Blog post with pictures from Amy Spencer’s female American pop icons shoot in Glamour magazine [<http://www.killahbeez.com/2009/03/05/amy-spencers-female-american-pop-icons/>]

Watch: I’ve Got a Crush on Obama [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKsoXHYICqU>]

**Due 02/07: Critique One**

**Week 5 (Feb 10, 12, 14):** Gender and Popular Culture

Read: CTPC Chapter 7, Tannen: There is No Unmarked Woman  
[<http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/tannend/nyt062093.htm>], Gibson: Warrior Dreams  
(available on course reserves)

View: Collection of Twilight parodies and spoofs [<http://www.squidoo.com/twilight-spoof>],  
Ladies, Don't Let Anyone Tell You You're Not Awesome by Sarah Rees Brennan  
[<http://sarahtales.livejournal.com/188663.html>]

**Week 6 (Feb 17, 29, 21): Race, Ethnicity and Popular Culture**

Read: CTPC Chapter 8, Sullivan: Rap and Race It's Got a Nice Beat, but What about the  
Message? [<http://jbs.sagepub.com/content/33/5/605.short?rss=1&source=mfc>], Fung: Looking  
for my Penis [<http://www.richardfung.ca/index.php?/articles/looking-for-my-penis-1991/>]

View: 5 Things That Killed Hip-Hop [<http://www.hiphopdx.com/index/editorials/id.723/title.5-things-that-killed-hip-hop>]

**Week 7 (Feb 24, 26, 28): Culture and Social Power**

Read: CTPC Chapter 4

Watch: The O'Reilly Factor, Hannity, Special Report with Bret Baier, On the Record with Greta  
van Susteren, Fox Report with Shepard Smith, Dr. Drew, The Rachel Maddow Show, Daily  
Show, Colbert Report

**Week 8 (March 03, 05, 07): Advertising**

Read: CTPC Chapter 5, Marchand: Parable of the Democracy of Goods

[<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~DRBR/marchand.html> ], Twitchell: What We Are to Advertisers  
[<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/asr/v001/1.1twitchell.html> ], Blakeslee: If You Have a "Buy  
Button" in Your Brain, What Pushes It?

[[http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/19/science/19neuro.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/19/science/19neuro.html?_r=1)]

Watch: Beauty Pressures [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ei6JvKOW60I>]

View: Mac/PC on XKCD [<http://xkcd.com/934/>]

Browse: Adfreak [<http://www.adweek.com/adfreak>]

Watch: Killing Us Softly (in class)

**Due 03/07: Critique Two**

**Week 9 (March 10, 12, 14): Spring Break**

**Week 10 (March 17, 19, 21): Convergence Culture**

Read: CTPC Chapter 6, De Kosnik: Piracy is the Future of Television

[[http://convergenceculture.org/research/c3-piracy\\_future\\_television-full.pdf](http://convergenceculture.org/research/c3-piracy_future_television-full.pdf)], Green, Burgess:  
YouTube: Online Video and Co-Created Value

[[http://convergenceculture.org/research/C3\\_youtube\\_co-create.pdf](http://convergenceculture.org/research/C3_youtube_co-create.pdf)]

Browse: Futures of Entertainment blog [<http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/>]

**Due March 17: Midterm Essay**

**Week 11 (March 24, 26, 28): Consuming Culture**

Read: CTPC Chapter 9, Miller: Real vs. Fake News

[[http://boston.com/community/blogs/culture\\_club/2011/06/real\\_vs\\_fake\\_news.html?p1=Features  
\\_link5](http://boston.com/community/blogs/culture_club/2011/06/real_vs_fake_news.html?p1=Features_link5)]

**Week 12 (March 31, April 2, 4): Subcultures and Countercultures**

Read: Mullens: Get a Life? [<http://cinema.usc.edu/archivedassets/097/15727.pdf>]

Browse: Fandom\_Wank [[http://www.journalfen.net/community/fandom\\_wank/](http://www.journalfen.net/community/fandom_wank/)]

Watch: "Poker Face" by Talitha78 [<http://talitha78.livejournal.com/196085.html>], Women's

Work by Luminosity and sisabet [<http://sockkpuppett.livejournal.com/442093.html>], Origin

Stories by Giandujakiss [<http://giandujakiss.livejournal.com/360051.html>]

**Due April 04: Critique Three**

**Week 13 (April 7, 9, 11): Cybercultures**

Read: CTPC Chapter 10

View: Articles of War: Wikipedia's Lamest Edits

[<http://www.informationisbeautiful.net/visualizations/wikipedia-lamest-edit-wars/>], Wikipedia

Idiots: The Edit Wars of San Francisco [[http://www.sfweekly.com/2008-02-13/news/wikipedia-](http://www.sfweekly.com/2008-02-13/news/wikipedia-idiots-the-edit-wars-of-san-francisco/)

[idiots-the-edit-wars-of-san-francisco/](http://www.sfweekly.com/2008-02-13/news/wikipedia-idiots-the-edit-wars-of-san-francisco/)], Washington's politicians edit Wikipedia

[[http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/industry\\_sectors/media/article728983.ece](http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/industry_sectors/media/article728983.ece)]

**Week 14 (April 14, 16, 18): presentations**

**Week 15 (April 21, 23, 25): presentations**

**Due April 21: Critique Four**

**Week 16 (April 28, 30, May 2): presentations**

**Due May 2: Final essay**