**MACS 320 – Popular Culture**

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Class Meeting Times: 1-1:50 PM M/W/F in 331 Armory

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Do you love watching *Jane the Virgin* but wish you could more deeply analyze its gender, race, and class politics? Do you want to understand what the words “simulacra,” “superstructure,” and “spectatorship” mean? Do you want to irritate your family with intricate explanations of television branding strategies or media ownership during Thanksgiving this year? Do you want to discuss taste, fandom, Hitchcock, rap music, The Lego Movie, and Nickelodeon? Then, this class is for you!

Over the course of the semester, we will work hone our argumentative, critical thinking, and analytical skills as applied to the media and culture we consume every day. This course does not offer a comprehensive history or overview of popular culture or an introduction to the basics of analyzing the media, rather, it offers more advanced tools and strategies through which to understand and analyze popular culture, media, and communication. Specifically, this course is designed to deepen your understanding of basic theories and frameworks discussed in MACS 100 and MACS 101, particularly in critical and cultural theory. You should think of the course not as a basic survey of popular culture, but rather as an advanced lab in which to experiment with ways to apply critical and cultural theory to the pop culture you consume in your everyday life.   
  
**REQUIRED TEXTS**You are required to obtain a copy by whatever means necessary of:   
**Storey, John (2015). Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction. 7th** **Edition. Routledge.** ISBN: 1138811033

You will also occasionally be asked to rent and view a film or TV show online. All films/shows will be under $3.

All other reading will be available online, through the Library’s website or through our Compass site.

Materials will be uploaded and available at least two weeks before we use the materials in class. **Syllabus and readings are subject to change.**

**And now, three warnings about this class:**   
  
1) Sometimes students see the words “Pop Culture” in a course title and assume the course consists entirely of watching TV and talking about how great it is. That is not what this class is about.

You should be prepared to learn to critically think about, write about, and discuss popular culture. I’ve split the readings between canonical theoretical cultural studies texts, more recent scholarly applications of those theories, and current mainstream pop culture writing. This way, you will be able to see not only what the theory looked like in its “original” form, but also how it has been applied. These readings will deal with issues of power, politics, gender, race, class, and economics.

2) This class takes Cultural Studies as its general theoretical approach. This includes discussion of Marxism, Feminism, Capitalism and other “isms.” Cultural Studies, by its nature, questions and challenges many commonsense assumptions about society and deals with questions of power and knowledge. The course addresses numerous questions about how our lives are controlled and regulated, and how we (as individuals or groups) manage our lives, through various media and technologies of popular culture. This means that you may be asked to critique things you love and challenge beliefs you hold.

Up front, I want to say that I respect all of your opinions and beliefs, but expect you to be able to engage with ideas that may be uncomfortable in a respectful manner. You are free to agree or disagree with the theories in this course, but you are to do so in a way that thoughtfully considers and engages with the material.

3) Because popular culture is a major part of our identity and lived experience, there is a tendency to want to generalize our experiences as universal. Therefore, throughout the semester, whenever you find yourself wanting to use your own experience as proof or evidence, make sure that you’re:  
  
 a) only making an argument about your experience and allowing that others may have different experiences   
  
 b) grounding your argument in theory from the course material.

We all also must work to accept and listen to others’ experiences, believe them, and understand that they may differ from our own.

**REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING**

**Attendance**   
You can miss up to 3 classes without penalty. I don’t differentiate between excused and unexcused absences, you can miss 3 for whatever reason, therefore, you don’t need to let me know why you missed a class.

For every class you miss past 3, you’ll lose participation points.

I understand that people are late sometimes for legitimate reasons, but if lateness becomes an issue, I will start counting tardies against participation as well.

If you miss a lecture or a discussion or come in late FOR ANY REASON, you are responsible for contacting another student for the day’s notes and materials. I won’t reteach you what we went over that day. Do not ask me “If you missed anything.” The answer is always “Yes.”

If an extended illness or emergency makes it impossible to attend to responsibilities, please contact the Dean of Students, who will notify me so I can make any necessary accommodations.

If you forsee meetings/extra-curriculars/other classes conflicting with any part of this class on a regular basis, drop the class. We offer it every semester!

**This being said** – come talk to me if you ever have any major issues with your class work and I will be more than happy to try to work out a plan with you. I’d rather you talk to me than try to figure it out on your own.   
 **Leading Class Discussion (Group Assignment)**Starting the third week of class, groups of 3-4 students will lead discussion on Fridays of each week on the week’s topic. We will be signing up for groups the second week of class, at which point I will give you a handout with specific guidelines.

**Weekly Reading Reflections**

Each week you will turn in on Compass a reflection on the week’s readings picking out the main ideas and arguments and either applying the material to a media text or answering a discussion question. This will allow you to grapple with the material on your own and give us a jumping off point for class discussion.

**Participation**This class will rely heavily on discussion and in-class activities, so it is important that you come to class. Your participation grade will include attendance, in-class activities, and pop quizzes should they become necessary.  **Final Paper**Your final paper will contextualize and analyze a pop culture artifact using Julie D’acci “circuit of culture model” as a framework. You will examine your artifact’s socio-historical context, production, representation/ideology, and reception. You will choose your artifact early in the semester and turn in a rough draft of each part of the final paper every few weeks. At the end of the semester, you will turn in significantly revised version of the four sections with the addition of a conclusion and introduction that summarizes your findings and makes connections between the sections.  **Midterm and Final Exam**While the final paper and in-class activities are focused on developing your writing, research, and analytical skills, the tests are designed to make sure you have a basic working understanding of the course material. They are also designed to reward you for keeping up with the reading, showing up to class, and paying attention. The tests, which will consist of 20-30 multiple-choice questions and one essay question, will only cover half of the class each. **The final will not be cumulative.**  
**ACCOMODATIONS**  
If you have any learning, physical, emotional or medical needs that require adjustments to the course, space, or materials, I am happy to work with you to accommodate them. Please set a time to meet with me during the first week of class so that we may discuss any accommodations, DRES or otherwise, and work out a plan for the semester.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**According to the CODE OF POLICIES AND REGULATIONS of the UIUC, it is the student’s responsibility to refrain from violations of academic integrity (cheating; plagiarism; fabrication and others), from behavior that may lead to suspicion of such violations, and from behavior that helps others in such violations. The code is also explicit about incivility, absences, fair grading, TA’s responsibilities and obligations, and students’ rights. It is expected that all UIUC students will read and abide by the code of policies.

If you ever have a question of whether something constitutes plagiarism, COME SEE ME.

**CLASS INPUT ON THE SYLLABUS**During the first week, I will take recommendations from the class on the following topics and then add them to the syllabus.

* MEDIA USE IN CLASS
* GROUP PROJECTS: Grading/Choosing Groups
* WEIGHTING OF GRADES
* CLASS EXPECTATIONS OF EACH OTHER
* CLASS EXPECTATIONS OF ME
* WEEKLY READING CHECKS
* FINAL PAPER DUE DATE/PRESENTATIONS

**Reading/Assignment Schedule**

**Week 1 – How/Why Do We Study Popular Culture?**(For Friday)Jonathan Culler. Ch 1: What Is Theory? In *Literary Theory.* 1997.  
[Hua Hsu: Stuart Hall and the Rise of Cultural Studies, *The New Yorker*](http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/stuart-hall-and-the-rise-of-cultural-studies)*.* 2017.

[Linda Holmes. A Few Notes on Pop Culture Writing.](http://www.npr.org/sections/monkeysee/2013/12/30/258384187/what-monkeys-eat-a-few-thoughts-about-pop-culture-writing) *[NPR](http://www.npr.org/sections/monkeysee/2013/12/30/258384187/what-monkeys-eat-a-few-thoughts-about-pop-culture-writing)*

**Week 2 – What is Popular Culture?**John Storey CTPC, Ch. 1

D’acci, Julie. "Cultural studies, television studies, and the crisis in the humanities." Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition (2004): 418-42.\*

Williams, Raymond. The Analysis of Culture.

**Week 3 – Mass Culture Theory**

WATCH: *A Face In The Crowd*. Available for rent on YouTube, iTunes, Amazon, Google

John Storey CTPC, Ch. 2Maloney, Courtney (1999). The Faces in Lonesome’s Crowd: Imagining the Mass Audience in *A Face In The Crowd. JNT: The Journal of Narrative Theory*. 29.3.   
  
Reply All: Episode 86 -Man of the People  
https://gimletmedia.com/episode/86-man-of-the-people/

\*Paper Topic Due  
**Week 4 – Taste and Popular Culture**Selections from Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.* 1984.

Bode, Lisa. "Transitional tastes: Teen girls and genre in the critical reception of Twilight." *Continuum* 24, no. 5 (2010): 707-719.

[Blog Post, “Everything Except Country and Rap”](http://www.runoutnumbers.com/blog/2015/11/16/everything-except-country-and-rap)

**Week 5 – Psychoanalysis**Watch: *Rear Window*, Hitchcock (1954)

John Storey CTPC, Ch. 5: Psychoanalysis

Laura Mulvey, Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema.

Gaines, Jane. "White Privilege and Looking Relations." *Hollywood: Cultural dimensions: ideology, identity and cultural industry studies* 4, no. 4 (2004): 246.  
  
\*\*Paper Part 2 Due

**Week 6 – Ideology, Hegemony, and the Culture Industry**John Storey CTPC, Ch. 4

Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (2006):

Antonio Gramsci, “Hegemony, Intellectuals, and the State’” *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (2006):

Theodor Adorno & Max Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception

[Kumars Salehi, “What Would the Frankfurt School Think of Social Media?” July 19, 2017.](http://diginativ.com/frankfurt-school-social-media/)

**Week 7** – **Post-Modernism**

John Storey, Ch. 9   
  
Jean Baudrillard “The Precession of Simulacra” *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*

bell hooks. “Postmodern Blackness.” *Postmodern Culture* (1990).

**Week 8 –** **Lego Movie!**This week, we will spend two days watching and taking notes on The Lego Movie in class with respect to the theories leading up to this point. Friday, we will work in groups to apply different theories to the film.

\*\*Part 2 draft due

**Week 9 – Review and Midterm**   
Monday and Wednesday groups will present on their respective theories to the class in preparation for the Midterm. Friday we will take the midterm.

**Week 10 – Representation**John Storey, Ch. 8

Dyer, Richard. “The matter of whiteness.” In *White*. 1998.   
  
*The Cultural Politics of Colorblind TV Casting*. Routledge, 2015.

Henderson, Felicia D. "The culture behind closed doors: issues of gender and race in the writers' room." *Cinema Journal* 50, no. 2 (2011): 145-152.

**Week 11** – **Feminist Theory and Gender Construction**   
John Storey, Ch. 7   
  
Erica Scharrer (2012) The Man In the Box: Masculinity and Race in Popular Television. In Ronald L Jackson II and Jamie E Moshin (eds) *Communicating Marginalized Masculinities:* *Identity Politics in TV, FIlm, and New Media.* Taylor and Francis.  
  
Watch: *Broadly. "*Meet the Consultant Teaching Trans Women How to Be 'feminine'"

Maglaty, Jeanne. When did Girls Start Wearing Pink? Smithsonian.Com. April 7, 2011.

\*\*Part 3 Draft Due

**Week 12 – Authenticity, Travel, and Self-Branding**Banet-Weiser, S. (2012). Introduction: Branding the Authentic. In Authentic : The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand culture . pp. 1-14

Maddox, Callie Batts. "Studying at the source: Ashtanga yoga tourism and the search for authenticity in Mysore, India." Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change 13, no. 4 (2015): 330-343.

Van Nuenen, Tom. "Here I am: Authenticity and self-branding on travel blogs." Tourist Studies 16, no. 2 (2016): 192-212.   
  
In preparation for Skyping with travel and beauty blogger Sheryll Donerson , we'll also be reading selections from her blog The Wanderlust Project.

**Week 13 – Audience and Fandom**   
Hall, Stuart. “Encoding, Decoding.” *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*   
  
Bobo, Jacqueline. The Color Purple: Black Women as Cultural Readers. *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*.Sturken, M. & Cartwright, L. (2009). Viewers make meaning. In *Practices of looking: An introduction to visual culture* . pp. 52-62; 72-89.

\*\*Part 4 draft due

**Week 14 – Student Choice**  
TBD

**Week 15 –** **Review and Wrap-Up**

**Week 16 – Finals Week  
Final Exam: TBD  
Final Paper Due: TBD**