HU 3860
Popular Culture
Summer 2002

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Course Objectives

Our aim is to explore a variety of conversations about contemporary culture in the United States, with the hope of critically engaging these discussions. We will begin with an exploration of high, mass, and popular culture debates as a means to better understand contemporary culture. Next we will explore specific sites of popular culture. Finally, to facilitate an understanding of participation in and reactions to current cultural struggles, we will conclude with an examination of the uses of popular culture as a tool for social and political activism (e.g. stenciled graffiti, fanzines, and hip hop). Similarly, we will analyze how these modes of communication function to work toward a more vibrant and democratic public sphere. A theme throughout will be tensions between "authentic" participation in popular cultural practices and the co-optation of those practices.

Required Texts

Course Reader available on-line

The following book is available at the campus bookstore:


Some of the reading assignments will be quite dense. In many instances difficulties with material emerge from problems with terminology. Although I have included some glossaries in your reader, I recommend that you think about purchasing the following book to facilitate your understanding of the material:

Course Assignments

Exploratory Paper (2-3 Pages) 5%
Zine Contribution and Presentation 10%
Paper #1 (3-5 Pages) 15%
Paper #2 (3-5 Pages) 15%
Pop quizzes 25%
Final Exam 20%
Attendance/Participation (including 1 cultural sighting) 10%

You are required to complete the reading assignments before you attend class. This will lead to more fruitful discussion.

The Exploratory Paper asks you to make connections between the first three course readings on popular culture and to explain how the essays inform your understanding of popular culture (the term and the thing itself). You should develop an analysis that considers the following questions: (A) What is popular culture and how does it differ from other forms of culture? (B) What are some historical and contemporary concerns about popular culture? (C) What are some hopes for popular culture? (D) Where do I stand in relation to the different attitudes toward popular culture expressed in the course readings? Your paper should feature support from the three essays. The objective of this paper is to advance your own ideas about what popular culture is and how the debates have led you to that understanding. While you’re arguing for your ideas, this paper requires that you provide more than a description of your attitudes and experiences. Instead, you are asked to assess where you stand in relation to the ideas discussed by the theorists. (Note: By “assess” I mean that you are asked to do more than simply describe the differences. You should discuss the reasons why the differences are important and why/how you view a certain approach to be more useful, ethical, enlightening, etc.) This paper is due May 28th.

For the Zine Contribution and Presentation you are asked to contribute to a course e-zine. Your contribution can take multiple forms: brief essay or story, poem or poems, photography or other art, etc. You can address any topic you’d like; however, you must discuss your contribution with me. We will discuss this assignment in the second week.

Each student is required to write two papers analyzing a set of readings and make an argument that intervenes creatively in the conversation. While I want your papers to cover a specific theme (i.e. fanzines and the public sphere), your approach should reflect your own theoretical interests. Your paper must make an argument. Merely summarizing a reading or stating that a reading is "correct" because it speaks to your own personal experience is not an argument. (See the syllabus addendum for further information about writing for this course.) Paper #1 should explore issues related to the study of culture or cultural practices. This paper is due by June 10th. Paper #2 should cover an issue relevant to the critique of popular culture or popular culture as a source of activism. This paper is due by June 19th. Papers must be turned in no later than seven days after we cover the reading (e.g. If you’re writing about Stephen Duncombe’s “Community” then your paper would be due June 5th.).
Pop quizzes will be short answer and will allow me to gauge how well you understand the arguments made in the readings. Unlike your papers and class discussion, where I am interested in your opinions about the issues and the strength of the writer's argument(s), the quizzes are designed for you to state the author's argument only. In other words, I am not striving to understand what you think about the issues; rather, I am interested in how well you understand the construction of the author's argument. If we do not understand what s/he's saying then our critique of her/his work will not be properly grounded.

I will provide a list of essay questions for the Final Exam. You will answer one question (3-5 pages). Exams are due June 27th by Noon. Note: The information in this syllabus and the syllabus addendum about writing assignments applies to the final exam as well.

You will be responsible for One Cultural Sighting this semester. These sightings should offer material examples of cultural practices and allow us to make connections between the realm of theory and our everyday lives. For example, you might find a comic strip that you think is particularly insightful regarding public communication or the construction of culture, you might see a commercial that makes you angry and tape it, or you might find an old book that offers advice on how to be a rebel. If the sighting is something you can tape to a piece of paper then write your name on the paper and attach the sighting. If the sighting is a video or a book then type up a few sentences explaining the sighting so I can give you credit. Of course you want to bring the video, book, etc. to show the class. Your presentation of the sighting shouldn't take more than 2-3 minutes; although class discussion about your sighting will most likely last much longer. We will select dates for sighting presentations during our next meeting. Note that these sightings are part of your attendance and participation grade. If you do not present a cultural sighting to the class then you can not earn an “A” for your attendance and participation grade.

Course Policies

Attendance and Active Participation are expected and required. Excessive absences will result in a lower final grade.

Promptness is expected as a general rule. If you are consistently late to class your grade will be negatively effected.

All assignments are due on assigned days. There will be NO MAKE-UPS. Documented illness or documented emergencies are the only exception to this policy. Changes in work schedules, personal celebrations (i.e. birthdays), transportation problems, etc. are NOT considered to be legitimate reasons for missing assignment deadlines or class meetings. If you miss a quiz and have documentation for your absence then you will take the quiz on the next date you attend class. (Note: If you will be missing a class because of a religious holiday, let me know in writing at least two weeks before the holiday so we can make arrangements to make up missed work.)

If you have a cellular phone, turn it off. If you have a pager, set it to vibrate or turn it off.
Written Assignment Requirements
All papers should be typed, double-spaced throughout the entire essay, and use a consistent style (i.e. MLA, APA, etc.). Use one inch margins and 12-point font. Further details on written assignments can be found on a separate handout.

Plagiarism
I have often found that plagiarism becomes tempting if students are feeling pressured. Remember, when in doubt quote. If you are quoting somebody directly then you need to list the information within quotation marks and cite a page number. If you are paraphrasing then you need to cite the person and a page number. Never copy and paste entire documents into your paper and do not quote others to the point where your ideas become indistinguishable from your source’s ideas. There is no reason to plagiarize. If you do, then you should know that the Dean of Student Affairs will be contacted.

Grade Scale
90-100 A  78-79 BC  60-67 D
88-89 AB  70-77 C  0-59 F
80-87 B  68-69 CD

Internet Account
You pay fees that cover an Internet account for e-mail and research. Having an e-mail account can greatly simplify your research tasks, make contact with group members, and allows me to send written feedback to you if you have any questions about assignments. My e-mail address is: dmakagon@mtu.edu
## Popular Culture

### Tentative Course Schedule Summer 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>READING ASSIGNMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5/20</td>
<td>Course Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Defining (High, Mass, and Popular) Culture</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/21</td>
<td>Dwight MacDonald “A Theory of Mass Culture” (pp. 1-top 3, mid 5-17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/22</td>
<td>Henry Jenkins “Congressional Testimony on Media Violence” (pp. 1-22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/23</td>
<td>James Carey “A Republic, If You Can Keep It”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Sites of Popular Culture</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/27</td>
<td>Memorial Day</td>
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</tbody>
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| 5/28 | Stephen Duncombe “Zines”  
**EXPLORATORY PAPER DUE** |
| 5/29 | Stephen Duncombe “Community” |
| 5/30 | Pamela J. Creedon “Women, Sport, and Media Institutions”  
Dennis Rodman “Man on Man” |
| 6/3  | Ben Malbon “The Club” |
| 6/4  | Scott McCloud “Chapter One” from *Understanding Comics*  
Tom Kuntz “Did Somebody Say, ‘Give Me a Sign Lord’?” |
| 6/5  | Film Screening in Class |
| 6/6  | Malcolm Gladwell “The Cool Hunt” |
|      | **Critiquing Popular Culture** |
| 6/10 | Frank & Weiland *Commodify Your Dissent*, pp. 13-56  
**PAPER #1 DUE BY THIS DATE** |
Frank & Weiland *Commodify Your Dissent*, pp. 127-142

Frank & Weiland *Commodify Your Dissent*, pp. 145-161

Frank & Weiland *Commodify Your Dissent*, pp. 183-202

**Activism in Popular Culture**

6/17 Steven Heller & Karrie Jacobs *Angry Graphics* (Excerpts)
Hoss Jooten "Taking it to the Streets"
Richard Goldstein "The New Real Thing"

6/18 Marshall Berman "‘Justice/Just Us’: Rap and Social Justice in America"

6/19 Film Screening in Class
**PAPER #2 DUE BY THIS DATE**

6/20 Jesse Drew "Media Activism and Radical Democracy"

6/24 **Zine Presentations**

6/25 Review and Final Exam questions delivered to students

6/26 TBA

6/27 **FINAL EXAMS DUE BY NOON**

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**Exploratory Paper**

\[ 5\% \times 0.05 = \] _____

**Zine Contribution/Presentation**

\[ 10\% \times 0.10 = \] _____

**Paper #1**

\[ 15\% \times 0.15 = \] _____

**Paper #2**

\[ 15\% \times 0.15 = \] _____

**Quizzes**

\[ 25\% \times 0.25 = \] _____

**Final Exam**

\[ 20\% \times 0.20 = \] _____

**Attendance/Participation**

\[ 10\% \times 0.10 = \] _____
Final Grade= __________