

Political Science 395I – Politics Through Culture**OVERVIEW**

What do we mean when we say that something is “political”? Our general notion is that there is some issue or position which is undergoing a degree of contestation, and that this contestation takes place within recognized political arenas - generally some sort of institutional setting. Within this common understanding of the “political,” the social/cultural realms tend to be pared away from the political. The cultural realm is considered primarily to be the locus of entertainment and, to the extent that the cultural functions politically, it does so only because it is at times suffused by that which we have already determined to be “political.” The latter instance would occur, for example, when we view what might be termed “political movies” – films centered on elections, candidates, issues of a war and peace, etc. Inherent in this construction is the relation between two separate spheres - a pre-determined, commonly understood “political” realm which might on occasion interact with the otherwise paradigmatically distinguished cultural realm.

One of the purposes of this class is to problematize this relation between the political and the cultural. In examining the artifacts of culture we look not merely for manifestations of an existing political realm but, rather, for the social and cultural reformulations of what we mean by “politics.” Instead of a relationship in which culture functions as the passive recipient of an occasional political intrusion, we will consider the ways in which the cultural realm both elucidates and reworks our existing ideas of how politics functions. Our notion of politics will be extended from areas of contestation to those of de-contestation. We will consider the ways in which the media gives primacy to certain norms and values such that these norms and values function as simply being “natural.” Is this primacy a form of politics? We will consider the processes of power in the broader social and cultural realms and the possibilities, and limits, of a cultural politics which seeks to either subvert or deconstruct existing dominant norms.

Political Science 395I – Politics Through Culture**REQUIREMENTS**

1. Students are expected to attend all classes, to have read the assigned materials and to participate in class discussion. An excused absence requires written documentation. All medical documentation must be given to me (not merely shown to me) and must include the student's name as well as the name of a medical doctor or clinic with a verifiable phone number. Students who do not regularly attend class will receive an "F" for their class participation grade. Students who miss classes or assignments with a valid excuse should consult with me in order to make up their work in a timely fashion.

Students are allowed two unexcused absences without affecting their grade.

Lateness: Students who arrive more the five minutes late will be marked absent.

2. Written work will consist of two papers and a final exam. In the papers you will not be answering descriptive questions (e.g. - describe the plot of a particular movie). Rather, you will be given a "prompt" offering a particular argument or contention which you must defend or contest.
 - **First Paper** – 3-4 pages (topic to be assigned)
 - **Second Paper** – 3-4 pages on (topic to be assigned)
 - **Final Exam** – will focus on all the materials we have read, discussed and viewed in class. Exam will be open book, open notes. Computers will be allowed at the final exam to access e-reserve materials. You must take the exam at the scheduled time – there are no make-up exams.

Papers do not require outside research. They are to utilize the course readings and appropriate media components we have considered in class. You may also utilize current social and political events as examples of your assertions, but examples are not substitutes for arguments. The course materials constitute your research for the papers – *papers must cite textual and media evidence* in the proffering of assertions and the formulation of arguments.

Late papers will not be accepted without a grade reduction except for viable medical reasons, University sanctioned activities, or death in the family. Written documentation will be required.

The last chance to hand in a paper is with your final exam. If you hand in a viable paper, the lowest grade will be a D, even with deductions. If you do not hand in a paper, the grade is F.

Though you should already know the following, it always bears repeating. *Do not plagiarize.* Do not utilize outside sources, even those that supposedly offer merely objective information. We are approaching both the texts and the visual media in very specific ways, aligning them with questions concerning the construction of the political realm and the viability of attempts to alter or subverting dominant social and cultural norms. It is highly unlikely you will find suitable arguments for your papers from other sources. Plagiarism will be dealt with severely.

Students are not allowed to use computers during class lectures and discussions.

The procedures for withdrawal from this course will conform to university policies. Students requiring accommodation for university verified disabilities must notify me in advance.

Political Science 395I – Politics Through Culture**GRADING**

- 20% Class participation and attendance
Participation includes attendance. Excellent participation is when, in the instructor's judgment, the student contributes regularly in ways that demonstrate both an *understanding* of the reading materials *as well as* thoughtful *consideration* of and *reflection* on the issues and themes that are addressed in readings and in class discussion.
- 20% First paper
- 30% Second paper
- 30% Final Exam

COURSE MATERIALS**ONLINE**

- There are materials you should read or view which are online. Sites are specified in the "assignments" section of the syllabus.

E-RESERVE

- Readings for which no web address is indicated are on E-Reserve.
- The **password** for E-Reserve materials is: **Culture99**

CONTACT

- OFFICE: SPA 344
- HOURS:
- EMAIL: richard.goldin@csulb.edu

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ASSIGNMENTS

Students should be prepared to discuss materials on the date indicated

- WEEK 1:** 8/22 Introduction
8/24 READINGS:
- Bachrach and Baratz: “Two Faces of Power”
 - Foucault: “Method”

HEGEMONY AND THE POLITICS OF SUBVERSION

- WEEK 2:** 8/29, 8/31 READINGS:
- Marx: “The German Ideology”
 - Landy: “Cultural Politics and Common Sense”
 - Butler: “Gender as Performance” (excerpt)
 - Gergen: “Postmodern Culture”

WEEK 3: 9/7 **Media:** The Yes Men

THE THREAT OF (DIS)ORDER

- WEEK 4:** 9/12, 9/14 READINGS:
- Hobbes: *Leviathan* (Chapters 13, 14)
<http://socserv2.socsci.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3ll3/hobbes/Leviathan.pdf>
 - Locke: *Second Treatise of Government* (Chapters I-III)
<http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/locke1689a.pdf>

Media: Lord of the Flies

- Week 5:** 9/19, 9/21 READINGS:
- Edelman: “Tearrooms and Sympathy”
 - Rogan: “Kiss Me Deadly: Communism, Motherhood, and Cold War Movies”
 - Seed: “Conspiracy Narratives”

Media: Invasion of the Body Snatchers

- Week 6:** 9/26, 9/28 READINGS:
- Greene: “The March on CBS: *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*”
 - Anti-Drug PSA – “Sent”
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77z1D1SfJ2Y>

Media: Reefer Madness, Smothered

Political Science 395I – Politics Through Culture**WEEK 7:** 10/3, 10/5

READINGS:

- Doyle: “Staging the Revolution”
- Baur: “You Say You Want a Revolution: The Beatles and Marx”
- Heath/Potter: “The Birth of Counterculture”

Media: Wild in the Streets, John & Yoko: Give Peace a Song***FIRST PAPER DUE 10/5****IDENTITY: CONSTRUCTION AND SUBVERSION****WEEK 8:** 10/10, 10/12 READINGS:

- Butler: “From Parody to Politics”
- Benhabib: “Feminism and Postmodernism: An Uneasy Alliance”
- Hartsock: “Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?”

Media: Father Knows Best, Pleasantville**WEEK 9:** 10/17, 10/19 READINGS:

- Foucault: “The Perverse Implantation”
- Seidman: “Identity and Politics in a ‘Postmodern’ Gay Culture”
- Butler: “Gender is Burning”
- hooks: “is paris burning?”
- Bersani: “Homos”

Media: Ellen “Comes Out,” Paris is Burning, Dolce & Gabbana**WEEK 10:** 10/24, 10/26 READINGS

- Appiah: “Color Conscious”
- Gutmann: “Responding to Racial Injustice”
- Fuchs: “Michael Jackson’s Penis”
- Morgan: “After...Word! The Philosophy of the Hip-Hop Battle”

Media: Watermelon Man**THE DISSOLUTION OF THE “REAL”****WEEK 11:** 10/31 11/2 READINGS

- Baudrillard: “The Precession of Simulacra”
- Edelman: “Political Language and Political Reality”

Media: Network, Wag the Dog

Political Science 395I – Politics Through Culture**WEEK 12:** 11/7, 11/9

READING

- Keyishian: *Screening Politics*: “Introduction”

Media: The Candidate, Bulworth***SECOND PAPER DUE 11/9****WEEK 13:** 11/14, 11/16

READINGS

- Nietzsche: *On the Genealogy of Morals* (Preface and First Essay)
http://www.inp.uw.edu.pl/mdsie/Political_Thought/GeneologyofMorals.pdf
- Conrad: “Thus Spake Bart: On Nietzsche and the Virtues of Being Bad”

Media: Rope**WEEK 14****FALL BREAK****WEEK 15:** 11/30, 12/2

READINGS

- Partridge: “Plato’s Cave and the Matrix”
- Conard: “The Matrix, the Cave, and the Cogito”
- Plato: *The Republic* (The Allegory of the Cave)
<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.8.vii.html>

*read until the line: “They are the men, and I will choose them, he replied.”***Media:** The Matrix**WEEK 16:****Considerations****WEEK 17****Final Exam**