

Fall 2015

## **SOC 5150**

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# **SOCIOLOGY OF POPULAR CULTURE**

## **SOCIOLOGY 5150**

**Fall, 2015**

Vern Baxter, Professor

Office: Room 190 Milneburg Hall

Office Hours: Mon, 12-2, Tu-Th 11-12, and 2:00-3:00, and by appointment

Phone: 280-7312; e-mail: vbaxter@uno.edu

Class meets: TTH, 12:30- 1:45 in Milneburg 320.

### Course Description:

The course provides students an introduction to the sociology of culture, with a focus on popular culture. Theories and methods appropriate to the study of culture will be combined with readings and discussion of the relationship of culture and society, the process of cultural production, and the reception of culture. Alternative subcultures will also be discussed. Emphasis will be on development of an understanding of the variety of meanings and significance of the culture industry and such popular cultural expressions as organized sport, the Punk movement, hip hop, and others.

### Learning Objectives:

Graduate students will receive a rigorous introduction to a substantive area of sociology, comprehension of which will be measured with in-class examinations. Students will also receive advanced instruction in the melding of theory and data in the research process through intensive feedback on term papers.

### Course Requirements:

Course requirements include attendance at lectures, participation in class discussions, and completion of required readings. Several required readings will be placed on reserve and made accessible through Moodle, which can be accessed through the UNO web page. Several other readings are available as electronic resources accessible through the UNO library web page.

### Required Books:

David Grazian. 2010. Mix It Up: Popular Culture, Mass Media, and Society. New York: W.W. Norton.

Matt Wray. 2014. Cultural Sociology: An Introductory Reader. New York: W.W. Norton.

Patti Smith. 2010. Just Kids. New York: Harper-Collins.

#### Exams and Grading:

The final course grade will be based on the following requirements: (1) class participation (10% or 40 points); (2) in class mid-term examination (25% or 100 points); (3) three short (2-3 page) papers (30% or 120 points); and (4) final examination (35% or 140 points). The mid-term and final exams will consist of multiple choice, short answer and short essay questions. A later hand-out will elaborate the paper assignments. Class participation grades will include periodic attendance checks.

#### Additional Work for Graduate Students:

Graduate students enrolled in the course must read all required and recommended readings and must complete all assignments described above. In addition, graduate students must also prepare a term paper (12-15 pages). Each graduate student must meet with Dr. Baxter to work out a paper topic and to discuss the final paper.

#### Attendance Policy:

Attendance is required. Part of class participation portion of final grade is based on periodic attendance checks.

#### Academic Integrity:

Academic integrity is fundamental to the process of learning and evaluating academic performance. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, tampering with academic records and examinations, falsifying identity, and being an accessory to acts of academic dishonesty. Refer to the UNO Judicial Code for further information.

#### Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:

Students who qualify for services will receive the academic modifications for which they are legally entitled. It is the responsibility of the student to register with the Office of Disability Services on the first floor of the Science Building each semester and follow their procedures for obtaining assistance.

Course Outline and Reading Assignments:

August 20 –27: Introduction to Sociology of Culture and Study of Popular Culture

Read: David Grazian. 2010. Mix It Up, chapter 1, “The Straight Story,” pp. 2-21 (hereafter, Grazian).

Read: Raymond Williams. “The Meanings of Culture.” Pp. 51-7 in Cultural Sociology: An Introductory Reader, edited by Matt Wray (hereafter, Wray).

A. Studying Culture: An Introduction to Methods in the Sociology of Culture

Read: Clifford Geertz. “Thick Description,” pp. 275-84 in Wray.

Read: Wendy Griswold. “Method,” pp. 285-99 in Wray.

Read: Eva Illouz. “Studying Oprah,” pp. 332-44 in Wray.

September 1 -10: Culture and Social Boundaries

Read: Grazian, chapter 7, “The Rules of the Game,” pp. 132-51.

Read: Paul DiMaggio. “Highbrow and Lowbrow Culture.” Pp. 92-110 in Wray.

Read: Pierre Bourdieu. [1978] 1991. “Sport and Social Class.” Pp. 357-73 in Rethinking Popular Culture, edited by C. Mukerji and M. Schudson (Moodle).

Read: Bethany Bryson. “Music and Symbolic Exclusion.” Pp. 387-92 in Wray.

Recommended: Josee Johnston and Shyon Baumann. 2007. “Democracy vs. Distinction: A Study of Omnivorousness in Gourmet Food Writing.” American Journal of Sociology 113, 1: 165-204 (See J-Stor to read as electronic journal, available through Earl Long Library Web page).

September 10: First essay due in class \*\*\*\*\*

## September 15 –October 6: Commodities and the Production of Culture

### A. The Culture Industry

Read: Grazian, chapter 3, “Monsters, Inc.,” pp. 44-65; and chapter 6, “Risky Business,” pp. 110-31.

Read: Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno. “Mass Deception.” Pp. 65-79 in Wray.

Read: Jennifer C. Lena and Richard A. Peterson. “Changing Musical Styles.” Pp. 239-67 in Wray.

### B. The Construction of Celebrity

Read: Grazian, chapter 2, pp. 32-6.

Read: Victor Corona. 2011. “Memory, Monsters, and Lady Gaga.” The Journal of Popular Culture 44, 1: 1-19 (available on-line at: [www.columbia.edu/~vc2118/corona\\_gaga.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/~vc2118/corona_gaga.pdf). )

\*\*\*\*\* October 8: Mid-term exam in class \*\*\*\*\*

## October 13 -27: Mass Marketing and Consumer Culture

Read: Grazian, chapter 9, “Scenes from A Mall,” pp. 174-93.

Read: Roland Barthes. [1983] 1991. “Written Clothing.” Pp. 432-45 in Rethinking Popular Culture, edited by C. Mukerji and M. Schudson (Moodle Reserve).

October 15: No class, Mid-Semester Break \*\*\*\*\*

## October 29 –November 5: Creating Popular Culture

Read: Grazian, chapter 5, “Bright Lights, Big City,” pp. 88-109.

Read: Howard Becker. “Art Worlds.” Pp. 159-75 in Wray.

Read: Patti Smith. 2010. Just Kids.

Class discussion on Smith book.

November 10: Second essay due in class \*\*\*\*\*

November 10 -17: The Contest over Culture

A. Subculture Theory

Read: Dick Hebdige. "Subculture" Pp. 355-71 in Popular Culture: A Reader, Edited by R. Guins and O. Cruz (Moodle).

Read: Grazian, chapter 4, pp. 80-85.

B. The Case of hip hop

Read: Jeff Chang. 2005. Can't Stop, Won't Stop. Chapter 4, "Making a Name: How DJ Kool Herc Lost His Accent and Started Hip Hop," pp 67-88; chapter 7, "The World Is Ours: The Survival and Transformation of Bronx Style, pp. 127-40; and chapter 8, "Zulus on a Time Bomb: Hip Hop Meets the Rockers Downtown," pp. 141-66 (Moodle).

November 19 –December 3: Cultural Diffusion and Construction of Meaning

Read: Grazian, chapter 4, "Something to Talk About," pp. 66-87; and chapter 8, "The Searchers," pp. 152-73.

Read: Jason Kaufman and Orlando Patterson. "Cultural Diffusion." Pp. 218-38 In Wray.

Read: Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz. "Collective Memory." Pp. 139-51 in Wray.

A. The case of electronic media

Read: Grazian, chapter 10, "Strange Days," pp. 194-214.

Read: Sherry Turkle. 2010. Alone Together. New York: Basic Books; Introduction and chapters 8 and 13 (Moodle).

November 26: No Class: Thanksgiving Holiday \*\*\*\*\*

December 3: Third essay due in class \*\*\*\*\*

December 6: Final graduate student papers due \*\*\*\*\*

December 10: Final Examination in classroom from 12:30- 2:30 \*\*\*\*\*