

Annenberg School  
for Communication &  
Journalism  
University of  
Southern California

TTH 12:30-4:40pm  
Wallis Annenberg  
(ANN) 209

Instructor: Dayna  
Chatman  
Email:  
[dchatman@usc.edu](mailto:dchatman@usc.edu)  
Office hours: TH by  
appointment 10:30am  
-12:30pm  
Office location: ASC  
G6



## Course description and objectives

What is “culture”? What is the relationship between “culture” and “communication”? What impact does culture/communication have on us as individuals? As a nation? How do we study or examine culture/communication and for what reasons? What is the relationship between communication/culture and power? What are the implications of this relationship as it relates to social change? These are just a few of the questions that this introductory theory-oriented

course grapples with throughout the semester.

This course begins with the premise that any study of communication entails an understanding of culture, and vice-versa. Over the semester students will engage with a variety of theories that will facilitate an understanding of this complex connection between communication and culture. Though utilizing “textual analysis” as a critical methodological approach to the study of culture and

communication, students will practice cultural criticism.

Each week we will touch on key communication and cultural theories and concepts and address contemporary topics such as news media and discourses of race, the manufacturing of Korean pop music and “idols,” the cultural appropriation of rap music, and the role of new media in current racial politics and social justice movements, etc.

**Enclosed is a TENTATIVE syllabus. It is subject to revisions.**

## Assignments

**Participation (15%):** Before class you are expected read all of the required readings. In class you should prepare to ask relevant questions, and be ready to make insightful, substantive, critical and respectful contributions to our discussion of the course materials. Attendance is mandatory; it will be taken each day that the class meets. Your mere presence in class does not constitute participation. More than two absences without explanation will result in deduction of half a grade off the final grade per absence

**Blog posts (15%):** Each week, you will be asked to write one brief 300-400 word post that applies at least one of the readings for that week to a discussion of a cultural artifact. These posts should demonstrate that you have read and thought critically about the assigned reading(s).

**Popular/mass culture video essay (15%):** Reflecting on the “good” and/or the “bad” aspects of popular/mass culture, you (and a partner/classmate if you so choose) will be required to create a 4-5 minute video essay that discusses a cultural artifact (e.g. film/television clips, ads, song, etc.) in relation to course readings. Further details on

## Student learning outcome

As a theory oriented course, the primary objective is for students to utilize existing communication/cultural theories to critically contemplate the function, utility, and power of communication mediums particularly as it relates to the dissemination of ideologies, rhetoric, images, discourses, etc., which inform how we understand culture(s)



this assignment will be provided at a later date.

**Media and discourses of race critical reflection essay (15%):** You will be required to write a 4-5 page essay that describes and reflects upon the discourses of race used in media coverage of a recent news event. More details about the requirements for this assignment will be provided at a later date.

**Final project:** For your final project you will be required to create an original cultural artifact (e.g. music/video playlist, original photo

as a society.

By the end of this course, you will have learned: How knowledge about culture is produced and communicated; how to apply key concepts/theories about communication and culture; how “culture” and communication are connected to “power”; and, how to utilize contemporary communication platforms to engage with, reflect on, and produce culture/communication in meaningful ways.

“Culture is ordinary: that is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these in institutions, and in arts and learning. The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment under the pressures of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land.”

Raymond Williams, From “Culture is Ordinary”

essay, podcast or vlog, etc.) and place it in conversation with concepts/theories covered in the course. This assignment has two parts: **1) a presentation (15%), and 2) a 5-6 page essay (25%).**

Extensive details about the requirements for the final project will be provided at a later date.

*Late assignments will receive significant penalties. If you are unable to turn in an assignment due to illness or a personal emergency, written documentation is required, and the instructor must be notified in a timely manner.*

## Technology Use Policy

Use of laptops in the classroom is a privilege. You may use a laptop or tablet device in class **ONLY** for taking notes and participating in other-class related activities. If you abuse this privilege by checking email, Facebook, etc., you will be marked as absent for that class period. All other electronic devices such as smartphones, music players, etc., must be turned off before class begins.

# Evaluation of assignments

You will be evaluated on: your level of engagement with the course material (as evidenced by written work, and class participation); and your capacity to correctly and cogently apply the theories and approaches you learn in class to the analysis and critique of cultural artifacts (as evidenced by written work and class participation).

All written work will be graded on: how well it demonstrates your comprehension of the theories and course readings; how well it articulates, organizes, and structures its arguments and supplies supporting evidence; how well it adheres to writing standards related to spelling, grammar, citation style, etc.

Grades will be assigned as follows:

**A** outstanding, thoughtful, and engaged work that meticulously satisfies the requirements of the assignment and demonstrates excellent understanding of and insight into course topics

**A-** excellent work that totally satisfies requirements of the assignment and demonstrates an exceptional grasp of an insight into course topics

**B+** very good work that satisfies requirements of the assignment and

demonstrates strong insight and understanding of course topics

**B** good work that mostly satisfies requirements of assignment and demonstrates good insight and understanding of course topics

**B-** standard work that may partially satisfy requirements of assignments and demonstrates above average but somewhat limited understanding of and insight into course topics

**C+** work that shows some potential but only partially satisfies requirements of assignments and demonstrates a somewhat limited understanding of and insight into course topics

**C** work that needs improvement of ideas, argument and/or follow through and only partially fulfills that bare minimum of the requirements of the assignments and demonstrates limited understanding of and insight into course topics

**C-** work that fulfills the bare minimum of the requirements of the assignment and demonstrates a very limited understanding of and insight into course topics

**D** work that is turned in but does not meet the standards of a C-

"In the culture industry the individual is an illusion not merely because of the standardization of the means of production. [...] Pseudo individuality is rife [...] What is individual is no more than the generality's power to stamp the accidental detail so firmly that it is accepted as such."

Theodor Adorno & Max Horkheimer, from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*





# Statement on academic conduct and support systems

## Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://capsnet.usc.edu/departments/departments-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/>

provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage [sarc@usc.edu](http://sarc.usc.edu) describes reporting options and other resources.

## Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* [http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home\\_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html) provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu/> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

“Discourse, Foucault argues, constructs the topic. It defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way that topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others. Just as discourse ‘rules in’ certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write, or conduct oneself, so also, by definition, it ‘rules out’, limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it.”

Stuart Hall, from “Foucault: Power, Knowledge and Discourse”



# Syllabus & course schedule

(Subject to revisions) All readings can be found on at [www.comm206sms15.wordpress.com](http://www.comm206sms15.wordpress.com)

## Week 1

### Thursday, July 2: Theories of Culture

Course introduction

[Matthew Arnold](#), "From Culture and Anarchy," in *The Cultural Resistance Reader*, ed. Stephen Duncombe, (London: Pearson, 2002), 49-57.  
[Raymond Williams](#), "Culture Is Ordinary," in *Studying Culture: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Ann Gray and Jim McGuigan (London: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5-14.

## Week 2

### Tuesday, July 7: Marxist Theories of Culture, Ideology, & Hegemony

[Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels](#), "The Ruling Class and the Ruling Ideas," in *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks*, eds. Douglas Kellner and Meenakshi G Durham (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 9-12.

[Antonio Gramsci](#), "Hegemony, Intellectuals and the State," in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, 4th edition, ed. John Storey (London: Pearson, 2006), 75-80.

[Louis Althusser](#), "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)," in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 79-87.

### Thursday, July 9: The Culture Industry

[Max Horkheimer and Theodor W Adorno](#), "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment As Mass Deception," in *Dialect of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 120-167. [\*see reading guide to help skim this chapter]

[John Seabrook](#), "Factory Girls: Cultural Technology and the Making of K-Pop" <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/10/08/factory-girls-2>

## Week 3

### Tuesday, July 14: The "Mass" Culture Debates

[Walter Benjamin](#), "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Video Culture: A Critical Investigation*, ed. John Handhart (Rochester, NY: VisualStudies Workshop Press,

1986), 27-51. [\*see reading guide to help skim this chapter]

[Dwight Macdonald](#), "A Theory of Mass Culture," *Diogenes* 1, no. 3 (June 1, 1953): 1-17.  
[Stuart Hall](#), "Notes of Deconstructing 'the Popular,'" in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader, Second Edition*, ed. John Storey (London: Pearson/ Prentice Hall, 1998), 442-453.

### Thursday, July 16: Taste and Distinction CLASS HELD AT LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART (LACMA) @ 1:00PM

[Pierre Bourdieu](#), "The Aesthetic Sense as the Sense of Distinction," in *The Consumer Society Reader*, eds. Juliet B Schor and Douglas B Holt (New York: The New Press, 2000), 205-211.

[Lawrence Grossberg](#), "Mapping Popular Culture," in *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 69-87.

[John Seabrook](#), "Nobrow Culture," *The New Yorker*. Access here: <http://www.booknoise.net/johnseabrook/stories/culture/nobrow/index.html>

## Week 4

### Tuesday, July 21: Cultural Discourses of Race

[Stuart Hall](#), "Foucault: Power, Knowledge and Discourse," in *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader*, ed. Margret Weherell, Stephanie Taylor, and Simeon J Yates (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 72-81.

[Craig Watkins](#), "Framing Protest: News Media Frames of the Million Man March." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 18, no. 1 (March 2001): 83-101.

[Ashley Doane](#), "Shades of Colorblindness: Rethinking Racial Ideology in the United States," in *The Colorblind Screen: Television in Post-Racial America*, ed. Sarah Nilsen and Sarah E. Turner (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 15-38.

### Thursday, July 23: Popular/mass culture video essay due by 11:59pm



# HIP HOP WAS BETTER BEFORE

“It’s been said that the thing that makes rap special, that makes it different from pop music and from written poetry, is that it’s built around two kinds of rhythm. The first kind of rhythm is the meter. In poetry the meter is abstract, but in rap, the meter is something you literally hear: it’s the beat. The beat in a song never stop, it never varies. No matter what other sounds are on the track. . . a rap song is usually built bar by bar, four-beat measure by four-beat measure. It’s like time itself, ticking off relentlessly in a rhythm that never varies and never stops. When you think about it like that, you realize the beat is everywhere, you just have to tap into it.”

Jay-Z, from *Decoded*

## Thursday, July 23: Communication, Cultural Politics and Methods of Resistance

Melissa Victoria Harris-Lacewell, “Everyday Talk and Ideology,” in *Barbershops, Bibles, and BET: Everyday Talk and Black Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 1-34.

Tanzina Vega, “Challenging stereotypes with a hashtag; Shooting in Missouri prompts a social media push over news images.” *New York Times*, August 14, 2014.

In-class screening: TBD

## Monday, July 27: Media and Discourses of Race Critical Reflection essay is due by 9:00pm

### Week 5

## Tuesday, July 28: Music, Culture, and Identity CLASS HELD AT THE GRAMMY MUSEUM @ 1:00PM

Simon Firth, “Music and Identity,” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 108-127.

Josh Kun, “Introduction: Strangers Among Sounds,” in *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1-28.

## Thursday, July 30: Cultural Appropriation

Stuart Hall, “What is ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?” *Social Justice* 20, no. 1 (1993): 104-115.

Richard A Rogers, “A Review and Reconceptualization of Cultural Appropriation,” *Communication Theory* 16 (2006): 474-503.

Seoulbeats, “Roundtable: Thoughts and Experiences of Black K-Pop Fans” <http://seoulbeats.com/2015/03/roundtable-thoughts-experiences-black-k-pop-fans/>

In class screening: *What Ever Happened to Hip Hop*

### Week 6

## Tuesday, August 4: Subcultures

Albert Cohen, “A General Theory of Subcultures,” in *The Subcultures Reader*, eds. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton (New York: Routledge, 1997), 44-54.

Additional readings TBD.

## Thursday, August 6: Final Project Presentations

### Week 7

## Tuesday, August 11: Final Project Essay due