

PSCI 318
Spring 2021
Online

3 credit hours

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Pop Culture and Politics College of Arts & Sciences Syllabus

This course explores the relationship between popular culture and politics, how celebrities affect political events, the impact of popular culture on politics, and political representations in pop culture especially as they intersect with issues of race, gender, and sexuality. The first half of the course examines the rise of a celebrity-infused political culture and analyzes the changing influence of Hollywood on political campaigns. The remainder of the course considers political representations in TV, film, theater, and music, both in the American context as well as in international relations.

Prerequisites:

Sophomore standing or above.

Required Texts

There are five required texts for this course:

- Kathryn Cramer Brownell, *Showbiz Politics: Hollywood in American Political Life* (University of North Carolina Press, 2014)
- Lauren A. Wright, *Star Power: American Democracy in the Age of the Celebrity Candidate* (Routledge, 2020)
- Mark Harvey, *Celebrity Influence: Politics, Persuasion, and Issue-Based Advocacy* (University Press of Kansas, 2018)
- Anthony Gierzynski and Kathryn Eddy, *Harry Potter and The Millennials: Research Methods and the Politics of the Muggle Generation* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).
- Stephen Benedict Dyson, *Otherworldly Politics: The International Relations of Star Trek, Game of Thrones, and Battlestar Galactica* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).

Objectives

This course is intended to give students insight into the relationship between popular culture and politics, both in the United States and internationally. Substantial reading and writing are required, as well as informed class discussions. Students are expected not only to learn the

substantive material, but also to apply the theories they learn across multiple areas drawn from multiple disciplines. By the end of the semester students should have a detailed understanding of how celebrities affect politics, how campaigns have changed as a result of Hollywood's influence, and how politics is represented in popular culture. Students are also expected to write a paper that demonstrates both their grasp of the material and their ability to generate informed opinions based on empirical research.

Academic Integrity Policy

By enrolling in this course, you are bound by the NEIU Student Code of Conduct: <http://www.neiu.edu/university-life/student-rights-and-responsibilities/student-code-conduct>. You will be informed by your instructor of any additional policy specific to your course regarding plagiarism, class disruptions, etc.

ADA Statement

Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in making reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. To request accommodations, students with special needs should make arrangements with the Student Disability Services (SDS) office, located on the main campus in room D104. Contact SDS via (773) 442-4595 or <http://www.neiu.edu/university-life/student-disability-services>.

Campus Safety

Web links to Campus Safety: Emergency Procedures and Safety Information can be found on NEIUport on the MyNEIU tab or as follows: http://homepages.neiu.edu/~neutemp/Emergency_Procedures/MainCampus/.

Course Requirements

- 1) This is an online course. Assignments will all be submitted through the Desire2Learn platform, and you will earn participation points through discussion on the D2L discussion board. Be aware that online does not mean easier! This course is the equivalent to any other course offered.
- 2) Complete all readings on schedule
- 3) Actively participate in class discussions. As this is an online course, our work will occur online, and discussions will happen on the D2L discussion board. You are expected to regularly contribute to the discussions. **At minimum**, you must make one original post per unit, and comment twice per unit on your classmates' posts. Your participation grade will be determined by the **quality** of the posts you make, not just meeting the minimum posting requirement.
- 4) Keep up with the news. We will frequently discuss current events as they relate to the concepts we are discussing in class. This way, we will be able to connect what can be abstract

ideas to real-world outcomes. Read a newspaper, visit cnn.com, or do anything that helps makes you an informed citizen.

5) Take the midterm and final exams. Both will consist of essay questions that I will provide in advance. Make-up exams will only be given in the event of an emergency, verified with proper documentation.

6) Submit all required writing assignments. **Late papers will be penalized one-third of a letter grade for each day they are late** (barring serious emergencies, which must be documented). I will not accept submissions via email or in hard copy. Do not wait to the last moment to submit assignments.

Writing Assignment #1: Write 5 short papers summarizing a unit's assigned readings. Papers should be approximately 2-3 pages in length. For each unit you may write only one short paper, and you may not submit more than 5 in total. They are due at the end of each unit.

Writing Assignment #2: You will choose a work of popular culture and write about its relevance to politics. The assignment will take place in stages:

1. Topic proposal. This should be no more than 2 pages. Briefly describe the popular culture object you are interested in and explain why you believe it has political relevance. Due no later than **February 18th**. The grade for this assignment is Approve/Disapprove. If I do not approve your proposal, you must rewrite and resubmit it; you may not continue to the next stage until your proposal has been approved.
2. Annotated bibliography. About 2 pages. List no fewer than 6 separate academic sources you will use for your paper. Describe each source and its relevance to your research question. Due no later than **March 11th**.
3. First draft, at least 6 pages. Due no later than **April 19th**.
4. Final draft, at least 8-10 pages. Due no later than **May 3rd**.

Papers must include appropriate references (either footnotes or parenthetical style is acceptable) as well as a bibliography. All written assignments must be typed in a 12-point font, double spaced, with one-inch margins, and have page numbers. Papers not meeting these criteria will be penalized.

Grading

Work conducted towards the end of the semester will be more heavily weighted in my mind when dispensing final grades; in other words, *improvement counts*.

Participation: 20%

Summaries: 15%

Paper: 25%

Midterm: 20%

Final: 20%

90-100 A
80-89 B
70-79 C
60-69 D
Below 60 F

Incompletes will only be given for valid, documented emergencies.

NOTE ON PLAGIARISM: Any student found plagiarizing work will receive a grade of **zero** for that assignment and an **F** for the course. You will also be reported to the University for violating the academic integrity policy. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to: direct copying of material that is not your own, copying the material even while providing a citation, or copying ideas without proper attribution. **It is your responsibility to avoid plagiarism; if you are uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism, please ask!**

Schedule of Classes and Exams

Unit 1: The Building of a Celebrity Political Culture (part 1)

READ:

- Regina G. Lawrence and Amber E. Boydston, “Celebrities as Political Actors and Entertainment as Political Media”
- Kathryn Cramer Brownell, *Showbiz Politics: Hollywood in American Political Life*, Introduction and chapter 1

WATCH:

- Celebrity political endorsement roundup

DO:

- Discussion post: Should celebrities be political? Why or why not? (**due January 18th**)

Unit 2: The Building of a Celebrity Political Culture (part 2)

READ:

- Kathryn Cramer Brownell, *Showbiz Politics: Hollywood in American Political Life*, chapters 3, 5, 6, 7
- Kevin Kruse, “Pitchmen for Piety,” chapter 5 of *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America*

WATCH:

- Celebrities get political at Grammy Awards 2017

DO:

- Discussion post: How have celebrity politics influenced us and how has their influence changed? **(due January 28th)**

Unit 3: Celebrities in Politics – Running for Office

READ:

- Lauren A. Wright, *Star Power: American Democracy in the Age of the Celebrity Candidate*
- “George Murphy, Singer and Actor Who Became Senator, Dies at 89”
- Wikipedia entry for George Murphy

WATCH:

- Ronald Reagan, “Bedtime for Bonzo”
- “Back to the Future” clip – “I’m from the future”
- Tom Lehrer, “George Murphy”

DO:

- Discussion post: From George Murphy to Ronald Reagan to Donald Trump **(due February 8th)**

Unit 4: Celebrities in Politics – Issue Advocacy

READ:

- Mark Harvey, *Celebrity Influence: Politics, Persuasion, and Issue-Based Advocacy*, chapters 1-3, 5-6

WATCH:

- George Clooney joke from the 2015 Golden Globes
- Kim Kardashian, remarks at the White House, June 13th 2019

DO:

- Discussion post: Name an issue and name a celebrity (**due February 18th**)
- **Submit: Topic proposal**

Unit 5: Celebrities in Politics – Endorsements

READ:

- Harwood K. McClerking, Chryl N. Laird, and Ray Block, Jr., “The Fragility of Racial Transcendence: An Analysis of Oprah Winfrey’s Endorsement of the Barack Obama 2008 Presidential Campaign”
- Tsahi Hayat, Yair Galily, and Tal Samuel-Azran, “Can Celebrity Athletes Burst the Echo Chamber Bubble? The Case of LeBron James and Lady Gaga”
- Jan Zilinsky, Cristian Vaccari, Jonathan Nagler, and Joshua A. Tucker, “Don’t Republicans Tweet Too? Using Twitter to Assess the Consequences of Political Endorsements by Celebrities”
- Michael Jordan on “Republicans buy sneakers too”

WATCH:

- Oprah endorses Obama, December 8th 2007
- LeBron James on Black Lives Matter

DO:

- Discussion post: Would you listen to a celebrity? (**due February 25th**)

Unit 6: Celebrities in Politics – Comedy Representations

READ:

- Jody C. Baumgartner, Jonathan S. Morris, and Natasha L. Walth, “The Fey Effect: Young Adults, Political Humor, and Perceptions of Sarah Palin in the 2008 Presidential Election Campaign”
- Don J. Waisanen and Amy B. Becker, “The Problem with Being Joe Biden: Political Comedy and Circulating Personae”
- Amy B. Becker, “Trump Trumps Baldwin? How Trump’s Tweets Transform SNL into Trump’s Strategic Advantage”
- Josh Compton, “Live from DC: *Saturday Night Live* Political Parody References in Presidential Rhetoric”

WATCH:

- Donald Trump Press Conference (SNL)
- VP Debate: Sarah Palin and Joe Biden (SNL)
- Governor Palin’s Press Conference (SNL)

DO:

- Discussion post: Is any of this funny? (**due March 3rd**)

Midterm Exam - due March 4th

Unit 7: Fiction and Political Attitudes

READ:

- Stanley Feldman and Lee Sigelman, “The Political Impact of Prime-Time Television: ‘The Day After’”
- Kenneth Mulligan and Philip Habel, “The Implications of Fictional Media for Political Beliefs”
- Calvert W. Jones and Celia Paris, “It’s the End of the World and They Know It: How Dystopian Fiction Shapes Political Attitudes”
- Jeremiah J. Garretson, “Does Change in Minority and Women’s Representation on Television Matter? A 30-Year Study of Television Portrayals and Social Tolerance”

WATCH:

- Hunger Games – Catching Fire – Speech of Revolution
- The Day After Attack Sequence (**warning: intense content**)

DO:

- Discussion post: Should fiction shape our attitudes? Why does it? (**due March 11th**)
- **Submit: Annotated bibliography**

Unit 8: Harry Potter and American Politics

READ:

- Anthony Gierzynski and Kathryn Eddy, *Harry Potter and The Millennials: Research Methods and the Politics of the Muggle Generation*
- Diana C. Mutz, “Harry Potter and the Deathly Donald”
- Benjamin H. Barton, “Harry Potter and the Half-Crazed Bureaucracy”

WATCH:

- The Unforgivable Curses
- Dolores Umbridge Being the Absolute Worst
- Dumbledore’s Army

DO:

- Discussion post: To what extent does “Harry Potter” remain a moral compass? **(due March 29th)**

Unit 9: Crime and Torture

READ:

- Anmol Chaddha and William Julius Wilson, “‘Way Down in the Hole’: Systemic Urban Inequality and The Wire”
- Kathleen M. Donovan and Charles F. Klahm IV, “The Role of Entertainment Media in Perceptions of Police Use of Force”
- Casey Delehanty and Erin M. Kearns, “Wait, There’s Torture in Zootopia? Examining the Prevalence of Torture in Popular Movies”

WATCH:

- The Wire - Bodie getting beat up by the Baltimore PD
- How fictional police violence impacts real lives – New York Times

DO:

- Discussion post: How do we think about portrayals of the police or security officials in this era? **(due April 5th)**

Unit 10: Hamilton

READ:

- Annette Gordon-Reed, “The intense debates surrounding *Hamilton* don’t diminish the musical – they enrich it,”
- Joanne B. Freeman, “Will the Real Alexander Hamilton Please Stand Up?”
- Ed Morales, “The Problem with the ‘Hamilton’ movie”

WATCH:

- Hamilton’s America - The Dinner Party Compromise of 1790
- Hamilton’s America – The Founding Fathers

DO:

- Discussion post: Does *Hamilton*’s lack of accuracy harm its project or enhance it? **(due April 12th)**

Unit 11: Comics and Superheroes

READ:

- Robert Genter, “‘With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility’: Cold War Culture and the Birth of Marvel Comics”
- Alex Abad-Santos, “The insane history of how American paranoia ruined and censored comic books”
- Annika Hagley and Michael Harrison, “Fighting the Battles We Never Could: *The Avengers* and Post-September 11 American Political Identities”
- Alex Abad-Santos, “Marvel’s comic book superheroes were always political. Black Panther embraces that”

WATCH:

- Nick Fury: “There was an idea”
- The Sokovia Accords
- Sokovia Accords Debate
- Black Panther’s cast reacts to the Wakanda border debate

DO:

- Discussion post: How do we think about superheroes, and why do we think the way we do? **(due April 19th)**
- **Submit: First draft of paper**

Unit 12: Star Trek

READ:

- J. Furman Daniel III and Paul Musgrave, “Synthetic Experiences: How Popular Culture Matters for Images of International Relations”
- Stephen Benedict Dyson, *Otherworldly Politics: The International Relations of Star Trek, Game of Thrones, and Battlestar Galactica*, chapters 1-3
- Robert Greene II, “Revisiting *Star Trek*’s Most Political Episode”

WATCH:

- The City on the Edge of Forever – “No, Jim!”
- The Kobayashi Maru

DO:

- Discussion post: What can Star Trek tell us about the conduct of international affairs? **(due April 26th)**

Unit 13: Game of Thrones

READ:

- Stephen Benedict Dyson, *Otherworldly Politics: The International Relations of Star Trek, Game of Thrones, and Battlestar Galactica*, chapters 4-6
- William Clapton and Laura J. Shepherd, “Lessons from Westeros: Gender and Power in *Game of Thrones*”

WATCH:

- “When you play the game of thrones, you win or you die”
- “Power is a curious thing”
- “Power is power”

DO:

- Discussion post: What kind of politics does Game of Thrones advocate for? **(due May 3rd)**
- **Submit: Final draft of paper**

Final Exam - due May 6th