Welcome to SOC 331: Mass media & popular culture
(Section A)

Albright College – Reading, PA
Tentative Syllabus for Spring 2003

Instructor: Charles M. Brown
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Office Hours: M, W, & F 10:00-11:00; T & TH 11:00 - 12:00 and by appointment
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Home Page: http://fp.enter.net/~brownc
Alternate Page: http://www.geocities.com/cbrown965
Class Meeting Times and Location: Chapel 102: T & TH- 9:30 - 10:50

A Little About Your Instructor
I thought it might be nice to provide a small introduction to myself since we will be spending the interim together. A certain amount of mystique is always good, so I won't tell you everything (besides, I'm sure that you wouldn't be interested anyway). For starters, I was born and raised in the Pacific Northwest (Oregon and Washington). I received my Bachelors degree in sociology from Oregon State University, my Masters degree from the University of South Florida, and my Ph.D. from Southern Illinois University. I also spent two years as a visiting assistant professor at Ohio University before accepting a full time tenure track position here at Albright College in the Fall of 2001. My major research interests in sociology include culture, religion, and popular culture. My master's thesis was a formulaic analysis of the lyrics and major themes of Conservative Christian speed/thrash metal music. My dissertation (the book that is written for the Ph.D.) incorporates interviews, participant observation, and secondary literature to analyze the production of contemporary evangelical Christian culture, especially popular culture, and how various tensions within the industry are recognized and mediated. My hobbies include snow skiing, playing softball, listening to music (everything from alternative to classical although I am getting into industrial techno), reading, computers, and playing the guitar (both electric and acoustic).

Course Description
"Sociology, what's that?" I have been asked this question numerous times as an undergraduate sociology major and a Ph.D. student. Most confuse sociology with social work (a field that is actually an offshoot of sociology) or some type of counseling. Although sociologists may participate in these activities, the field is much broader.

Sociology is the study of social life and the social causes and consequences of human behavior. It investigates the structure of groups, organizations, and societies, their information, development, and interactions. Since all human behavior is social, the subject matter of sociology ranges from the intimate family to the hostile mob, from crime to religion, from the divisions of race, gender, and social class to the shared beliefs of a common culture, from the sociology of work to the sociology of sport. In fact, few fields have such broad scope and relevance. This is nice because sociologists are largely free to conduct research in any area that interests them. It is a field that synthesizes from all of the other social sciences including psychology, philosophy, anthropology, political science, economics, and history. Furthermore, sociology has
generated other disciplines including social work, criminal justice, and communication studies. All of these were, at one time, part of the field of sociology.

Although there are many subspecialties in sociology (religion, crime, science, etc.) this class will be focusing on popular culture in society, how it affects society and how society has affected it. The study of popular culture is a relatively new area of exploration. Most scholars up until the 1960’s viewed the study of popular culture as irrelevant since popular culture was seen by many as "uncouth," and "vulgar."

This course is designed to provide an opportunity for the student to develop a general sociological understanding and perspective with which to evaluate, interpret, and understand popular culture. We will begin by discussing how and when the academic study of popular culture began and what theories have been instrumental in the field. Then, we will discuss popular culture and social change, locating popular culture within its historical context. After this, we will investigate the social meaning of popular culture, trying to understand the content and messages in various forms of popular culture. Finally, we will consider the social organization of popular culture, exploring how it is created, produced, distributed, and consumed. The lectures, readings, and discussions will use examples from several of the popular arts.

**Text & Other Readings**
2. Various articles on reserve at the library
3. Readings from the internet

**Course Prerequisites**
There are no prerequisites for the course other than an open mind and a desire to participate in class.

**Course Objectives**
Students in this course will be able to:
1. Demonstrate an understanding of the basic sociological terms, concepts, and theories for analyzing popular culture.
2. Display basic knowledge of how popular culture reflects and contributes to social change.
3. Interpret the meaning of popular culture.
4. Apply an organizational approach to analyzing the creation, production, distribution, and consumption of popular culture.

**Course Requirements**
Each student is responsible for completing all class assignments, exams, and readings. This means that if you are absent, you should check with me as soon as possible to make sure that you did not miss any assignment changes, etc. Each student is also responsible to attend each class period. The instructor reserves the right to move exams and assignments at his discretion. Missing an exam or assignment because it has been moved IS NOT A VALID EXCUSE! IF YOU MISS AN EXAM OR ASSIGNMENT FOR THIS REASON YOU WILL NOT BE ALLOWED TO MAKEUP THE WORK AND YOU WILL FAIL TO RECEIVE ANY POINTS!

**Term Exams**
Each student will take three term exams worth 50 points each. The term exams will most probably consist of multiple choice questions and an essay question. I warn you, my lectures will deviate from the text from time to time. The exams will cover both the lecture and reading material. Therefore, you must read the material and attend the lectures. **LATE EXAMS WILL NOT BE GIVEN** unless the student receives prior permission or an emergency warrants the situation. Students who miss an exam for these reasons must
contact the instructor **within 48 hours** of the exam in order to schedule a makeup. **Make up exams will be all essay in format.** You will need a pencil for the exams.

**Research Paper and Assignments**
An important part of your grade will be participating in a group project and writing up a 10-15 page research paper worth **80 points**. While many students do not like group projects (it's sometimes difficult to get together with other members, someone in the group slacks off and affects the work of the rest of the group, etc.) I feel that such projects are reflective of the actual challenges you will face when you go to work at your first "real job." In short, this assignment is not just a way to earn points, but to learn valuable skills that can be put to use outside of the classroom. You will learn, for example, how to deal with conflict, how to work cooperatively to achieve goals, how to become a better communicator, and how to interact with others that may be different from you ethnically, socially, culturally, etc. Groups will consist of three members and will be formed by the instructor. No one is allowed to work independently on a research project. Furthermore, each group will be expected to turn in assignments designed to provide me information on your progress. Although you will not receive points for assignments; failure to turn in assignments will cost each group member 5 points off of their total score for each assignment that is not turned in. More details regarding the paper and the assignments will be presented in a few weeks.

**Extra Credit Assignment**
We are living in an age of computers and it is obvious that anyone who wishes to succeed in today's world needs to feel comfortable using them. Because of this, and because I may need to contact you at some point in the semester, I am providing you an opportunity to gain an easy 2 points. NOTE: This will be the only extra credit assignment given, so be forewarned! Begging and pleading at the end of the semester will do no good!!! Here's what you need to do: email me using your own email account. In the "subject line" please type your first and last name and be sure to provide the following in the body of the message: (1) the class number (Soc. 105); (2) your name; (3) phone number; (4) your major; and (5) email address. You must complete this assignment within the first four weeks of the first day of the class. Late emails will not be credited. This assignment is worth **2 points**.

**Methods of Evaluation**
Grades will be determined by percentages in the following manner:

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>97-100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-96%</td>
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<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89%</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>83-86%</td>
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<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82%</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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<td>D+</td>
<td>67-69%</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>63-66%</td>
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<td>D-</td>
<td>60-62%</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Under 60%</td>
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You can calculate your current grade at any point in the semester by dividing the number of points you have earned by the total amount of points possible and referring to the scale above. Thus, if you achieved a “15” on the quiz and a “40” on the first exam, then you would calculate your current grade as follows: 15 + 40 = 55 divided by 65 (15 possible points for the quiz and 50 for the first exam) = .85 Using the scale above you can see that you are currently earning a “B”.

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Student Resources
Some students require special needs from time to time or throughout their college career. Below are some important resources that you should take advantage of if you require assistance. I would encourage anyone who has special needs to drop by and see me (if you feel comfortable doing so) so that I can better understand your situation and work with you more effectively.

Students With Special Needs
Albright does not have a formal, separate program for students with learning or other disabilities. However, the College does attempt to make reasonable accommodations for students with special needs. Students with such needs should contact Student Services at 921-7611.

Academic Learning Center/ Writing Center
The Academic Learning Center provides a comprehensive program of academic support services including individual student tutors, study group sessions, instructional interns, and academic progress sessions. The Writing Center is available to students of all disciplines who need assistance with their written work. The Writing Center is supported by the English department. Interested students are encouraged to call the English department at: 921-7450.

Some Further Guidelines
First, if you have any questions, please ask. Chances are if you do not understand something, half the class does not either. I will not think you are stupid because you ask questions. On the contrary, if you knew all about sociology, you would not be here in the first place. Also, your questions tend to liven up the class and make it more interesting for all of us. If for some reason you do not feel like asking the question during class, stop me after class. If you do not have time after class, please make an appointment, we can find another time.

Second, I expect you to exercise proper manners while in class. This means that you should not talk during class to another student while I or another student is addressing the class. This means that you should arrive on time and not leave early. This means that you should not sleep in class, read the newspaper, listen to music, etc. NOTE: THE INSTRUCTOR RESERVES THE RIGHT TO SUBTRACT POINTS FROM ANY STUDENT WHO REFUSES TO EXERCISE PROPER MANNERS IN CLASS. FURTHERMORE, POINTS MAY BE SUBTRACTED IN THE AMOUNT THAT THE INSTRUCTOR SEES FIT. IF MEMBERS OF THE CLASS LEAVE EARLY, THE INSTRUCTOR MAY, AT HIS DISCRETION, BEGIN ADMINISTERING POP QUIZZES TOWARD THE END OF THE CLASS PERIOD.

Third, I consider your class participation to be very important. Please feel free to ask questions offer suggestions and/or comments, etc. If you disagree with me, fine. Feel free to say so. I only ask that you provide a rational and/or evidence for your position. In other words, don’t simply say, “I disagree with you because I just don’t think you are correct,” give me a reason why you disagree.

Fourth, cheating of any kind is not allowed. Any student who appears to the instructor to be cheating will receive an automatic "F" for the entire course and s/he will be turned in to the appropriate academic authorities.

Fifth, each and every class is important. My lectures do not always follow the text. I may disagree with the text and may present material not found in the text. Lectures count more than text on exams. Therefore, YOU SHOULD ATTEND EACH AND EVERY CLASS.
Finally, I do not grade on a curve. This means you have more to gain by cooperating rather than competing with each other. I would like you to get to know the students in your discussion group really well. You should exchange addresses and telephone numbers with each other and try and form a study group. As a group you can help each other with the class material, particularly in studying for exams. You also can come into my office as a group and we can talk over things that are not clear.

**Majoring in Sociology**

Some students may be interested in sociology as a major. I would be happy to talk to you if you have any questions. I also have a pamphlet that I can give you published by *The American Sociological Association* that can tell you what sociology is, what sociologists do, and where sociologists can be employed. It is an interesting (not to mention useful) field, and worth checking out!!!
COURSE OUTLINE

RL = Recommended (not required) reading (available in the reserve library packet)
P = Packet Readings
L = Library (available at front desk)
I = Internet Readings

UNIT 1: INTRODUCTION

Week 1 (Taking Popular Culture Seriously)
Reading:
P 2. Dwight MacDonald "A Theory of Mass Culture."

Week 2 (Perspectives on Popular Culture)
Reading:
P 1. James Curtis "From American Graffiti to Star Wars."
P 4. Yahlin Chang "Cross Over, Beethoven."

UNIT 2: SOCIAL CHANGE

Week 3 (The Historical Emergence of Popular Culture)
Reading:
L 1. Joseph Gies "Automating the Worker"

Week 4 (The Historical Emergence of Popular Culture)
Reading:

Week 5 (Fads & Fashions: How Something Becomes Popular)
Reading:
P 1. Kendall Hamilton "Blowing Smoke."
P 3. Jan Harold Brunvand "New Legends for Old."

Week 6 (How Popular Culture Reflects Social Change)
Reading:

******* EXAM 1: THURSDAY *******
UNIT 3: SOCIAL MEANING

Week 7 (Methodological Perspectives on Meaning)
Reading:

Week 8 (SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS)

Week 9 (Determining The Meaning of Cultural Objects)
Reading:

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Assignment 1: Topic & Bibliography Due (Thursday) !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Week 10 (Gender, Racial, & Ethnic Stereotypes in Popular Culture)
Reading:
P 1. Jane Caputi & Susan Nance "One Size Does Not Fit All: Being Beautiful, Thin and Female in America."
P 3. Ray Hanania "One of the Bad Guys?"

Week 11 (Gender, Racial, & Ethnic Stereotypes in Popular Culture Continued)
Reading:
P 1. Christopher Geist & Angela Nelson "From the Plantation to Bel-Air: A Brief History of Black Stereotypes."
I 2. Censors Vs. Comix! 50's PMRC Forerunners Set Sights on Comics!
P 3. David A. Kaplan. "Download Some Manners, Upgrade Your Career."

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! first meeting with group mediators (Monday or Tuesday) !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Week 12 (Consumption & Media Effects)
Reading:
L 2. Brian Siano. "Evidence Connecting Media Violence on Society is Exaggerated."

***************** EXAM 2: THURSDAY *****************

UNIT 4: SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Week 13 (Creation of Popular Culture)
Reading:
P 2. Howard Becker "Art Worlds."
Week 14 (Production & Distribution)

Reading:
I 1. J. Michael Strazynski. "What is an Executive Producer?"

************ Assignment 2: thesis & proposal due (tuesday) ************

********** second meeting with group mediators (Monday or tuesday) **********

Week 15 (Production & Distribution, Continued)

Reading:
P 5. John LeLand & Allison Samuels "Taking to the Streets."
I 6. Summary of the Barnes & Noble Lawsuit
I 7. ABA, Independent Bookstores Sue Barnes & Noble and Borders
I 8. The Clayton Act
I 9. The Robinson-Patman Act

************* PAPERS DUE: THURSDAY, 4:00 P.M. *************

Week 16

*********** FINAL EXAMINATION ***********

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Student Information:
Please answer the questions below and write your answers on the 3x5 note card provided by the instructor:
1. Name
2. Age
3. Major (spell out please)
4. Class standing (Freshman, Sophomore, etc.)
5. Where are you from?
6. Do you know anyone that has taken this course before? If so, who?
7. Have you transferred from another college or university? If so, which one?
8. How many semesters have you attended Albright?
9. What other sociology courses have you taken?
10. Do you belong to a fraternity or sorority? If so, which one?
11. Are you involved in Albright sports? If so, which one(s)? (Don't include Intramural sports)
12. Do you work? Where? How many hours per week?
13. E-mail & phone number
14. Why did you take this class?