



Repression and Dissent in Popular Culture

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Days/times: Tuesday 9 to 12
Location: G160 Angell Hall

Words of Wisdom

The Universe is made of stories, not atoms.

Murial Rukeyser

For reasons that lie deep in childhood learning, cultural immersion, or perhaps even in the structure of human brains, people usually recount, analyze, judge, remember, and reorganize social experiences as *standard stories* in which a small number of self-motivated entities interact within constricted, contiguous time and space. (Unfortunately) stories fail dramatically to provide viable explanations, indeed demand explanation in their turn.

Charles Tilly, *Stories, Identity and Political Change*

Stories are more than dramas people tell or read. Story, as a pattern, is a powerful way of organizing and sharing individual experience and exploring and co-creating shared realities.

The Co-Intelligence Institute

This course is about understanding how state repression (genocide, human rights violation, counter-insurgency and protest policing) and political dissent (e.g., demonstrations, boycotts, terrorism, insurgency and sit-ins) are dealt with in diverse aspects of popular culture; two of these have been among the most popular in human history (i.e., film and comics) and one is emerging as an increasingly popular medium (i.e., graphic novels). It is maintained that these diverse windows on culture provide important information about what a specific society believes is important as well as how problems are dealt with and resolved. For example, graphic novels and film tell us about why repression and dissent occur, who participates, when things are undertaken and how they take place. This informs us about when such activities are legitimate and illegitimate thereby influencing how we understand the most essential aspects of human freedom and domination. We will explore particularly American stories of repression and dissent. We will then venture to create our own.

Expectations

The course seeks to develop the general understanding of the student with regard to what can be classified as state repression and political dissent as well as what aspects of these phenomenon are dealt with in popular culture. Specifically, the student of this course will be able to comprehend

- What are the Actions involved
- Who are the Perpetrator(s)
- Who are the Victim(s)
- Who are the Target(s)
- What are the Objective(s)
- What is covered in Graphic Novels and Film
- How do these characterizations differ (if at all)
- What is specifically American about the representations
- What is covered within Other Cultures

Disclaimer: the instructor reserves the right to change class format and/or evaluation/activities as deemed necessary.

Attendance

Students are required to attend and participate actively in class and complete the assigned readings before the class meeting for which they are listed. Students should endeavor to always be considerate of your instructor(s) and fellow-students by arriving to class on time. Repeated tardiness will be counted against class participation (3 instances of tardiness = 1 absence); Repeated absences will also be counted against participation (3 unexcused absences = 50% reduction in individual class participation).

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you think you need an accommodation for a disability, please let me know at least two weeks prior to the time when the accommodation will be needed. Some aspects of this course, the assignments, the in-class activities, and the way the course is usually taught may be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. As soon as you make me aware of your needs, we can work with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) to help us determine appropriate academic accommodations. SSD (734-763-3000; <http://www.umich.edu/sswd>) typically recommends accommodations through a Verified Individualized Services and Accommodations (VISA) form. Any information you provide is private and confidential and will be treated as such.

Communication

There are three ways to communicate with the instructor and I wanted to provide expected response times so that you can make the selection that best meets the students needs.

In-Person meeting during office hours: Immediate response
Telephone: 3-5 days
Email: 7-10 days

Requirements & Grading

Participating in discussions/activities – 40%

Contributing to classroom discussion through informed commentary/
reflection about reading and/or prior discussion as individual, quizzes

Midterm Examination – 20%

An assessment of what you have grasped thus far about the material and
theories used to inform them

Assessed by degree of clarity, creativity and thoroughness with which
material is covered

Final Product – 40%

An original abbreviated comic, graphic novel, short film or board game (yes,
original) assessed by degree of clarity, creativity and thoroughness with
which material is covered

Readings

Required:

Palestine by Joe Sacco
Nil: A Land Beyond Belief by James Turner
The Authority by Ed Brubaker, Dustin Nguyen

Recommended:

Constructing the Political Spectacle
Why Societies Need Dissent
Theatre of the Oppressed
The Wire: Urban Decay and American Television
Graphic Novels: Stories to Change Your Life
Ronald Reagan the Movie: And Other Episodes in Political Demonology

Class Schedule

Context and Analytic Tools

September

4 – Introduction: What we are going to do and how
What is popular culture?
What is political conftnetion?
How are they related?
How will we study the topic?

11 – Contentious Politics 101

Reading:
Pop Culture chapters

18 – Popular Culture 101

Reading:
“Harry Potter and the Functions of Popular Culture.”
2007. *The Journal of Popular Culture* 40(1): 69-89.

“The International Relations of Middle-earth: Learning
from The Lord of the Rings.” 2008. *International Studies
Perspective* 9: 377-394.

Additional Reading (i.e., if you finished the other reading and you're bored):

"Hell on Earth: Threats, Citizens and the State from Buffy to Beck." 2009. *Cooperation and Conflict* 44: 400-419

Film

25 – *Robin Hood*

October

2 – *Billy Jack*

9 – *Avatar*

Comics & Graphic Novels

23 – *Nil*

30 – *The Authority*

November

6 – *Palestine*

13 – Take Examination & Submit 2 page proposal for Project

Board Games

20 – Several TBD

27 – Several TBD

December

4 – Project discussion and assistance

11 – Presentations of Projects

18 – Submission of Projects