

Department of English & Writing Studies

**Reading Popular Culture**

**I'm Right and You're an Idiot: Polarization and the Contemporary Culture Wars<sup>1</sup>**

**English 2017 (001)**

Fall/Winter 2022-23

**Instructor:** Dr. Jason Sandhar

[jason.sandhar@uwo.ca](mailto:jason.sandhar@uwo.ca)

**Course Location:** Social Science Centre 3028

**Course Day/Time:** Mondays 6:30-9:30 pm

**TAs:** Fatme Abdallah

[fabdal4@uwo.ca](mailto:fabdal4@uwo.ca)

Panteleimon Tsiokos

[ptsiokos@uwo.ca](mailto:ptsiokos@uwo.ca)

Course Description

If popular opinion has anything to say about it, we are living in an age of polarization, misinformation, and outrage. Strangers abuse one another on Twitter; “news” websites like *Infowars*, *Breitbart*, and *Rebel* peddle racist conspiracy theories about migrants and refugees; self-appointed gatekeepers of the political left condemn those who disagree with them as racist, classist, or misogynistic. This course considers how the culture industry (mass communication in the form of news, streaming television, YouTube, and social media, for instance) shapes our view of the world and what it can show us about our polarized moment. How do linear or “one-way” media (like films, documentaries, books, or works of art) figure into the contemporary culture wars? Do Twitter and TikTok help or hinder public debate? Have we lost the capacity to respect, or even hear, perspectives that chafe against our moral or political assumptions? To read popular culture, we will foreground the politics of gender, race, class, sexuality, and geopolitics in our historical moment. We will slowly and carefully assess how mass media and culture both shape and are shaped by the way we think about these categories. We will not rush to answers or bend a given cultural question to our preconceived notions of what is right; instead, we will slow down and notice the complexities of our contemporary quagmire.

Course Materials

**Required texts:**

Harry G. Frankfurt. *On Bullshit*. Princeton UP, ISBN 9780691122946

Angela Nagel. *Kill All Normies*. Zero Books, ISBN 9781785355431

Laurie Ouellette. *The Media Studies Reader*. Routledge, ISBN 9780415801256

Robert Samuels and Toluse Olorunnipa. *His Name is George Floyd*. Penguin Random House, ISBN 9780593490617

**NB! Additional required texts will be posted on OWL, under the “Course Readings” tab**

**OWL**

Students are responsible for checking the course OWL site (<http://owl.uwo.ca>) on a regular basis for news and updates. This is the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the class.

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<sup>1</sup> From the 2019 book by James Hoggan

Readings not available in the bookstore will be posted to OWL: <http://owl.uwo.ca>. For reasons of copyright and intellectual property, lecture materials and PowerPoints will **not** be posted (for more information, please see “Intellectual Property/Copyright” on the following page). If students need assistance with the course OWL site, they can seek support on the OWL Help page. Alternatively, they can contact the Western Technology Services Helpdesk. They can be contacted by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 8380

### Methods of Evaluation

#### **Assignments:**

Short Essay (due Week 5)	15%
Midterm (TBA)	25%
Research paper (due Week 24)	30%
Final exam (TBA)	25%
Attendance/Participation (ongoing)	5%

The **short essay** consists of a 5pp critical response to one of the course readings up to (and including) Week 5. You are not required to do any research for this assignment. I will provide detailed instructions and tips for the short essay on the first day of class.

The **final paper** (10-12pp) requires secondary research (minimum of **six** sources) on a topic of your choice that engages with the course. In the Winter semester, I will distribute instructions and tips for the final paper, along with some suggested topics.

The **midterm** and **final exams** will consist of three essay-length questions, of which you are asked to answer **two only**. The midterm questions will be based on a topic from the Fall semester. The final exam might include questions from either the Fall or Winter semester.

Attendance is mandatory. For more on attendance, please see the “Attendance” course policy below.

### Attendance

Attendance is mandatory in all classes and tutorials. In cases of excessive absenteeism (e.g. more than 9 unexcused hours for a half course, 18 for a full course), which are not accounted for by either academic consideration or accommodation, students may be debarred from taking the final examination, and will receive an official warning to this effect by or before the course drop date (see Senate policy). In classes with or without final exams, students who do not attend class will receive 0% for course participation grades. Unless other policies dictate a different set of penalties in specific English and Writing Studies programs, this will apply to all department programs.

### Intellectual Property/Copyright

All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students’ personal use within the course, and remain the instructor’s intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to

recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

### Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#).

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at [https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf).

The full policy is set out here:

[https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf).

### **Religious Accommodation:**

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the [Western Multicultural Calendar](#).

### Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

### **Plagiarism:**

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

### **Plagiarism Checking:**

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the

system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Academic Support & Engagement <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Proposed Timetable (subject to change)

<b>Course Introduction</b>	
Week 1	No readings assigned
<b>Consumption</b>	
Week 2	Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. "The Culture Industry" Lipsitz. "Popular Culture: This Ain't No Sideshow"
Week 3	Carol Adams, "The Sexual Politics of Meat" (OWL) Daniel Welsh, "Lady Gaga's Meat Dress Turns 10" (OWL)
<b>Race</b>	
Week 4	Stuart Hall: "The Work of Representation" Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, "Stereotype, Realism, and the Struggle over Representation"
Week 5	In-class screening: <i>Get Out</i> <b>Short essay due</b>
Week 6	David Gilotta, "'Man, I Told You Not to Go in that House': The Humor and Horror of Jordan Peele's <i>Get Out</i> " (OWL)
Week 7	Stuart Hall "The Spectacle of the Other" (OWL) bell hooks: "The Oppositional Gaze"
<b>Postmodernism</b>	
Week 8	In-class screening: Slavoj Žižek, <i>The Pervert's Guide to Ideology</i>
Week 9	Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What is the Postmodern?" (OWL) Frederic Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." (OWL)

<b>Commodities</b>	
Week 10	Karl Marx, “Commodity Fetishism” (OWL) Anne McClintock, “Soft-Soaping Empire: Commodity Racism and Imperial Advertising”
Week 11	<u>Videos (watch ahead of time):</u> McIntosh Plus, “リサフランク420 / 現代のコンピュー”(YouTube) Fancy’s crappy mashups, “V A P I N G I N T H E H O O D” (YouTube) Saint Pepsi, “Cherry Pepsi” (YouTube) Lucien Hughs, “S U N D A Y S C H O O L” (YouTube) Laserdisc Visions, “Laserdisc Visions” (YouTube) <u>Readings:</u> Ken McLeod, “Vaporwave: Politics, Protest, and Identity” (OWL) Laura Glitsos, “Vaporwave, or music optimised for abandoned malls” (OWL)
Week 12	No readings assigned
<b>Post-Truth</b>	
Week 13	Harry G. Frankfurt, <i>On Bullshit</i>
Week 14	Jill Lepore, “Battle Lines” (OWL) Michael Humphrey, “I analyzed all of Trump’s tweets to find out what he was really saying” (OWL)
<b>After #BlackLivesMatter</b>	
Week 15	W.E.B. DuBois, “Strivings of the Negro People” (OWL) Derrick Bell, “ <i>Brown v. Board of Education</i> ” (OWL)
Week 16	Samuels and Olorunnipa, <i>His Name is George Floyd</i>
Week 17	Ibram X. Kendi, “My Racist Introduction”; “Definitions” (OWL) Danielle Pletka, Marc Thiessen, and Allen Guelzo, <i>What the Hell is Going On</i> ep. 108: “WTH is critical race theory?” (Podcast and transcription via OWL)
<b>Woke Capitalism</b>	
Week 18	Video: Beyoncé Knowles. “Flawless.” In-class screening: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. “We Should all be Feminists.”
Week 19	Steven Booth Marston, “The Episodic Kneel: Racial Neoliberalism, Civility, and the Media Circulation of Colin Kaepernick, 2017–2020.” (OWL) Nike, <i>Dream/Crazy</i> (YouTube)
<b>(Toxic) Fandom</b>	
Week 20	Joseph Reagle, “Geek Policing: Fake Geek Girls and Contested Attention.” (OWL) Proctor, William. “‘Bitches Ain’t Gonna Hunt No Ghosts’: Totemic Nostalgia, Toxic Fandom and the Ghostbusters Platonic” (OWL)
Week 21	Adrienne Massanari, “Gamergate and The Fapping: How Reddit’s Algorithm, Governance, and Culture Support Toxic Technocultures” (OWL)
<b>Shitposting &amp; Deepfakes</b>	
Week 22	Angela Nagel, <i>Kill All Normies</i> (selections) Jenni Hokka, “PewDiePie, Racism and Youtube’s Neoliberalist Interpretation of Freedom of Speech” (OWL)
Week 23	<u>Videos (watch ahead of time):</u> Kendrick Lamar, “The Heart, pt. 5” (YouTube) Ye, “Life of the Party” (YouTube) <u>Reading:</u> Deleuze and Guattari, “Year Zero: Faciality” (OWL)
<b>Wrapping up</b>	
Week 24	Final paper due: no readings

**Important Sessional Dates:**

Fall Classes begin: September 8, 2022  
Reading Week: October 31 – November 6, 2022  
Classes end: December 8, 2022; April 10, 2023  
Fall exam period: December 10 – 22, 2022  
Winter Classes begin: January 9, 2023  
Winter Reading Week: February 18 – 26, 2023  
Winter exam period: April 13 – 30, 2023

**Contingency plan for an in-person class pivoting to 100% online learning**

In the event of a COVID-19 resurgence during the course that necessitates the course delivery moving away from face-to-face interaction, affected course content will be delivered entirely online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will not change. Any remaining assessments will also be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.