COMM 4240: Rhetoric & Popular Culture
Summer 2020, 5W1         Mondays-Thursdays      ONLINE

Professor: Dr. Suzanne Enck

Office Hours: I’ll be in our Zoom classroom Mondays - Thursdays at 2pm and can schedule other times by appointment.

E-mail: suzanne.enck@unt.edu or you can contact me through Canvas

COURSE OVERVIEW
This course explore the ways in which popular culture — the everyday messages to which we are exposed, especially through mass mediated platforms — is a dominant persuasive, rhetorical influence in most people’s lives. This course is neither 5 weeks of celebration nor condemnation of mediated artifacts and mass culture. Rather, we will take a detailed look at popular artifacts and phenomena to explore the effects they might have on our understandings and performances of race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, politics, & more. The main goal of this course is to make students more aware of popular culture’s myriad influences in our everyday lives so that those influences may be accepted or resisted more consciously, thoughtfully, and deliberately.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
☐ To understand the power and influence of popular culture in a global environment.
☐ To explore connections between communication, culture, and ideology.
☐ To improve students’ abilities to describe, interpret, and evaluate the popular culture(s) we encounter daily; or put another way, to improve your popular culture literacy.
☐ To bolster students’ critical thinking and analytical skills by identifying relevant issues, critically evaluating situations, and articulating informed positions in a precise and more nuanced manner.
☐ To appreciate, evaluate, and question the complex ways that familiar popular cultural artifacts make and re-make our (social) worlds.
As this course is dealing with a variety of cultural identities, expressions, performances, and privileges, it is imperative that we each consider the orientation from which we engage these topics, and the manner in which we voice our thoughts on such matters in the public space of the classroom (even if the classroom is hosted online). While it is not my job (or desire!) to police your individual worldviews, it is my responsibility to create a space that is respectful and open to a variety of viewpoints and to push everyone to think beyond their immediate life experiences and consider how others experience the world. It is my hope that each of us will speak to the issues raised in class ways that are thoughtful, authentic, and rooted a growth mindset.

The online space is one that offers its own range of opportunities and challenges. You will be asked to write Daily Reflections about the assigned readings/viewings/concepts and make strong arguments (claims supported with strong reasoning and backing). You are not being graded based on your agreement with particular viewpoints on the world — you are being graded on your capacity to effectively understand and use concepts to analyze popular culture texts. In your responses to each other (e.g., in discussion boards), I do not expect everyone to agree with each other (what a boring world that would be!) — but, when you disagree with someone, please focus on their argument (their claim supported with reasoning & backing). Think about how they’re using a concept well (or perhaps not making the strongest connection). While affirmations of each other are certainly encouraged, we’re going to all work toward pushing each other (respectfully) toward a more robust understanding of concepts, theories, practices, and experiences.

Learning and growing demands vulnerability and trust — please do not share your peers’ words or posts outside of this course (unless you’ve asked for and received permission from your peers).

**Office Hours and Meetings**

I will set up a recurring Zoom classroom login for every day of the class (Monday-Thursday of each week). I will show up at 2pm every day. If you want to join me to discuss the readings, ask questions about course concepts or assignments, talk to each other about the course content, PLEASE DO! If no one has shown up by 2:15 on a given day, I’ll sign off of Zoom for that class session.

If this time does not work for you and you’d like to set up a different time for Zoom office hours, feel free to send me an email or Canvas message.

**Creating an Inclusive (Yet Challenging) Class Climate**

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**Required Readings:**

- Alison Bechdel — *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*
- Supplemental articles and chapters from our Canvas site.

This course requires a high level of engaged reading of materials ranging from the course textbook written with an upper-division rhetoric student in mind, a graphic novel filled with “adult” content, critical-cultural rhetoric articles from peer-reviewed academic journals, and ongoing shorter articles/posts from popular press outlets and audio-video examples. The base-line assumption is that you’re here to do the work, to dynamically engage with the wide array of readings & texts, and to open yourself up to the challenge of learning.
Assignments & Grading

**Active Participation - 15%**
This course will benefit students who are motivated to read, write, and engage in discussion — and since we’re doing this all online, everyone needs to manage their time well. At its core, this course is animated primarily through your active dialogue, informed discussion, and critical engagement with the materials and with each other — We can achieve this, even in an online environment!

This portion of your final grade is based on your meaningful feedback to and engagement with your classmates’ posts of their DAQs. You’ll have until 10pm on each Friday to have posted meaningful responses to your peers (but you’re strongly encouraged to keep up with this daily).

**Daily Reflections - 25%**
Educational scholars strongly suggest that “frequent, low-stakes assessments” improve learning tremendously. For each day of reading/viewing, there will be an opportunity to earn points for this component of your grade.

Since this course will be delivered entirely online, all reflections will be submitted as daily assignments through CANVAS. Occasionally, you will be asked to submit your reflection as a video through the Flip Grid app — you’ll get clear directions on how to do this.

Each daily reflection is meant to help engage more deeply with the readings/viewings (and to help you extend and build upon course terminology as we move through the course).

We will have 15 Daily Reflections and you are expected to complete at least 12 of them (on time) to be eligible for maximum points. If you do more than 12 reflections, your best 12 will be counted toward this portion of the grade (if you complete more than 12, the extra reflections will count toward extra credit).

**Note:** The Reflection for Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home* is required for everyone.

**Two Exams - 15% x 2 = 30%**
Exams require you to demonstrate command and mastery of course concepts. Both exams will be open-book/note with a set amount of time to complete the exam. You’ll receive study guides ahead of time and the Daily Reflections are structured to help you prepare for the types of questions that you’ll see on the exams. Due to the nature of the course, the exams will consist of short answer & essay questions.

**Final Project - 30%**
This final project offers you an opportunity to explore issues raised by the materials from this course in a more in-depth manner. You will have two options for this final project:

1) A 3-minute video that draws popular culture texts together with a narrative voice-over to makes an argument related to rhetoric and popular culture + 4-5 page theoretical reflection paper.

2) A 10-12 page theoretically grounded research paper that analyzes a popular culture artifact (or set of artifacts).

Either option will ask you to combine rhetorical scholarship with a particular argument related to a popular culture artifact (or set of artifacts). You’ll decide what works better for your skillset and interests. I will offer plenty of support, guidance, and feedback.

**Question:** What if I don’t agree with the grade I’ve received?

**Answer:** I’m happy to reconsider my assessment of your graded work. Occasionally, I miss something when I’m grading and I’m open to a strong argument. If you want me to reconsider a specific grade, you’ll need to submit a written memo detailing your argument for why your grade should be higher within a week of receiving your grade. This memo needs to demonstrate complete arguments (including claims, warrants, and backing). Do keep in mind, that in asking for a reassessment of your work, the reassessment may result in a higher, equal, or lower grade.

**Please note:** Claiming that you “worked really hard” or “need a certain GPA” does not count as an argument for increasing a grade based on the standards of a given assignment.
Policies & Expectations

Deadlines:
There’s a good amount of flexibility built into the schedule of the course since people can skip up to 3 Daily Reflections and everyone has until Fridays to complete the week’s responses to their peers. The difficulty of taking a class during the Summer Session is that everything moves VERY QUICKLY — this is what you signed on for in taking a class that would typically unroll over 15 weeks in just 5 weeks. It will be essential for everyone to stay abreast of the daily readings, viewings, and short lecture updates.

If you are having trouble meeting deadlines or managing the workload, please talk to me — I am here to help you and want to support your learning needs as much as possible.

Academic Integrity

It is expected that all students have read and understand the Dean of Students’ expectations regarding academic honesty and integrity. It is of utmost importance that you understand what is meant by cheating, facilitating academic dishonesty, fabrication, plagiarism, etc. It is also important for you to understand your rights should I or any other instructor accuse you of academic dishonesty. Every graded assignment requires you to do original, independent, and creative work.

In addition to copying someone else’s words or ideas, reusing your own work from other courses is considered academic dishonesty — you might be permitted to extend research from other classes, but you must clear this with your instructors before proceeding with such research. **You may re-use writing you’ve done IN THIS COURSE if it’s relevant to the project (e.g., if you have an explanation in one of your Daily Reflections that you’d like to use again in your final project, you’re encouraged to do so).

Frequently, you will be asked to summarize and synthesize various course readings and additional research. Even if you are not quoting text directly, you need to indicate when you are using another scholar’s thoughts/ideas/concepts/paradigms/etc. by putting their name and publication year in parentheses after the idea. Violation of these expectations will result in swift & severe consequences (typically, failure for the assignment and possibly, failure for the course).

For an excellent resource for both avoiding plagiarism and integrating sources effectively, see Harvard’s Guide for Using Sources. Ways to avoid plagiarism suggested in their guide include keeping your writing and sources separate (in a different file or a different color font), keeping a source trail, quoting your sources properly, and not only paraphrasing carefully but also acknowledging sources explicitly when paraphrasing.

A note on open-note/book exams: I will highly encourage you to study together for exams and support each other as you’re each on your own learning journey. Everyone’s work on the exam answers needs to reflect their own understanding of the materials. I will ask each of you to sign an honor code at the beginning of each exam, indicating that you will not reveal the exact questions to each other and/or share your answers to any exam questions. Any evidence that suggests that students have violated these expectations will be investigated thoroughly and may lead to consequences (including failure for the assignment and reporting the incident to the Dean of Students).
E-mail & Canvas:
Students are expected to check their Canvas daily in order to stay current with course communications. If you have a question outside of class, please contact me via e-mail - suzanne.enck@unt.edu or through the Canvas message system. If you are experiencing problems with the Canvas system (e.g., if you can’t log on or access the system), please contact the UNT Help Desk immediately: 940-565-2324 or helpdesk@unt.edu.

Incompletes:
In accordance with University policy, a student can only receive a course grade of “I” if the student 1) has completed at least 75% of the coursework, 2) is passing the course, and 3) has a justifiable and documented reason beyond the control of the student for not completing the work on schedule (e.g., serious illness, military service).

SPOT Evaluations:
The Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT) evaluation is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. This short survey will be made available to you online at the end of the semester, providing you a chance to comment on how this class is taught. I am very interested in the feedback I get from students, as I work to continually improve my teaching. I consider the SPOT to be an important part of your participation in this class.

Disclaimer:
This syllabus should not be considered a binding contract on the part of the professor, who reserves the right to change any aspect of the course without prior notice.

Acknowledgments:
Syllabi are often influenced by others in the field who do good work as teachers and mentors. I am especially indebted to the following people for their influence on this syllabus: Megan Morrissey, Barry Brummett, Jeff Bennett, Cara Buckley, Ragan Fox, Claire Sisco King, Wendy Hessford, Jamie Skerski, and Isaac West.
If you are feeling lost or overwhelmed...

1. **Attend the daily Zoom at 2pm.**
   There will likely be other students attending these sessions, so this should allow you to engage in conversation with other students, get to know your peers more, and get more insight into the concepts/readings/materials.

2. **Make an appointment with Suzanne.**
   You are more than welcome to e-mail Suzanne or set up a Zoom meeting or phone call to discuss questions, concerns, and ideas. Many issues and questions can easily be resolved this way.

3. **Contact the Writing Lab.**
   This is a great resource to talk about your ideas, improve the organization of your writing, or work on your grammar and writing skills. Check the Writing Center’s website for more information about their summer online meeting options: [writingcenter.unt.edu](http://writingcenter.unt.edu). You can also contact them by phone at 940-565-2563 or e-mail: WritingCenter@unt.edu.

**Course Accessibility**

Your success in this class is important to me. We will all need accommodations because we all learn differently. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know as soon as possible. Together we'll develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course.

**Statement from the Office of Disability Accommodation:**

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class.

I will happily set up a Zoom meeting to discuss how to best meet your accommodations.

For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation’s website at [http://www.unt.edu/oda](http://www.unt.edu/oda). You may also contact them by phone at 940-565-4323.

**Title IX Support for Victims of Violence**

UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. Federal laws (Title IX and the Violence Against Women Act) and UNT policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, and therefore prohibit sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking, and/or sexual assault, there are campus resources available to provide support and assistance.

UNT’s Survivor Advocates can assist a student who has been impacted by violence by filing protective orders, completing crime victim’s compensation applications, contacting professors for absences related to an assault, working with housing to facilitate a room change where appropriate, and connecting students to other resources available both on and off campus. The Survivor Advocates can be reached at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students Office at 940-565-2648. Additionally, sexual misconduct can be non-confidentially reported to UNT’s Title IX Coordinator at oeo@unt.edu or at (940) 565 2759.

**NOTE:** Your professors are mandated reporters if we learn about incidents of sexual misconduct, dating violence, stalking, or other forms of gendered violence. If you reveal that you have experienced such violence during your time at UNT, faculty will let the Victim’s Advocate know and they will reach out to you to offer support.
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<th>Date</th>
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| M - June 1 | **Introduction to Course & Getting to Know You:**  
• Introductions  
• Review of syllabus, calendar, assignments, and expectations. |                                                                                     | • Log onto Canvas  
• Post your Introductory Video to Flip Grid by 10pm |
| T - June 2 | **Situating Popular Culture**  
• What do we mean by culture?  
• What make popular culture popular?  
• Relationships between everyday life & culture? | • Jeffrey Nealon & Susan Searls Giroux - “Culture” (pp. 55-70)                     | • Daily Reflection #1 due by 10pm |
| W - June 3 | **Rhetorically Understanding & Critiquing Culture**  
• Relationships between texts, sources of meaning, context, & audiences.  
• How do we understand rhetorical situations?  
• How do we think rhetorically about culture?  
• Relationships between identities, cultures, power, and discourse. | • Barry Brummet - “Rhetoric & Popular Culture” (pp. 41-57)                         | • Daily Reflection #2 due by 10pm |
| R - June 4 | **Introduction to Critical Theory & Discuss Final Projects**  
• How do our subject positions orient us toward culture?  
• What kinds of “reading positions” might we adopt in consuming popular culture? | • John Storey - “What is Popular Culture?”  
• Jeffrey Nealon & Susan Searls Giroux - “Subjectivity”  
• Final Project Assignment Information | • Daily Reflection #3 due by 10pm |
| F - June 5 |                                                                                           | • Responses to Introductory Videos and Daily Reflections #1-3 need to be posted by 10pm |
| M - June 8 | **Imaging & Everyday Life**  
• How can the social dimensions of “everyday photography” and videos help enable broader connectivity?  
• What connections might we make between “banal imaging” and public/cultural memory?  
• How does Ibrahim’s notion of “banal imagining” help break down hierarchies between “high art” and the everyday?  
• In what ways might Ibrahim’s theorizing about Instagram extend to the world of TikTok? | • Yasmin Ibrahim — “Instagramming Life: Banal Imaging and the Poetics of the Everyday”  
• Jia Tolentino — “How TikTok Holds Our Attention” | • Daily Reflection #4 due by 10pm |
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<td>T - June 9</td>
<td>Vernacular Discourses</td>
<td>• Andrew M. Peck— “A Laugh Riot: Photoshopping as Vernacular Discursive Practice”</td>
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<td>• What is the relationship between popular culture and vernacular discourses?</td>
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<td>Daily Reflection #5 due by 10pm</td>
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<td>• What kinds of relationships operate between visual images and cultural contexts?</td>
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<td>W - June 10</td>
<td>Whiteness &amp; Post-Racial Discourses</td>
<td>• Megan Morrissey &amp; Christy Dale L. Sims — “Playing the Race Card”</td>
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<td>• How does post-racialism and colorblindness operate and circulate as an ideological messages?</td>
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<td>Daily Reflection #6 due by 10pm</td>
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<td>• How do rhetorical forces structure our intersectional expectations (race+class+gender)?</td>
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<td>• In what ways are racial stereotypes about Latin@’s generally and “immigrants” more specifically circulated within popular culture?</td>
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<td>Daily Reflection #7 due by 10pm</td>
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<td>• How do different popular cultural texts speak to each other in ways that reinforce similar narratives about assimilation and the “American Dream”?</td>
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<td>• How does topicalization operate to erase difference and presume cultural knowledge?</td>
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<td>F - June 12</td>
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<td>Responses to Daily Reflections #4-7 need to be posted by 10pm</td>
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<td>M - June 15</td>
<td>Afroturism &amp; Global Diasporas</td>
<td>• Lauren Jackson — “The Past and the Future Merge to Meet Us Here:” Afroturism in Lemonade A Case Study of How Beyoncé Draws on Afroturist t’Themes to Re-imagine Black Womanhood and Identity in America”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What kinds of rhetoric shape discourses of race &amp; ethnicity?</td>
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<td>Daily Reflection #8 due by 10pm</td>
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<td>• How has rhetoric constructed contemporary understandings of race &amp; ethnicity?</td>
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<td>• How does whiteness function as an invisible center of discourse?</td>
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<td>• How can intercultural approaches to human communication disrupt Western expectations about race?</td>
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<td>T - June 16</td>
<td>Rhetorics of Race, Class, &amp; Neoliberalism</td>
<td>• Tasha R. Dunn - “Digging in the ‘Trash’: Contemporary Mediated Representations of White Working Class People”</td>
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<td>• How is class circulated &amp; signified in culture?</td>
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<td>Daily Reflection #9 due by 10pm</td>
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<td>• How do popular displays of class work to reinforce and/or disrupt normative expectations of bodies, work, and pleasure?</td>
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<td>• How does neoliberalism function as an ideological underpinning of Western discourses?</td>
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<td>W - June 17</td>
<td><strong>Race, Gender, and Violence</strong></td>
<td>• Suzanne Enck &amp; Blake McDaniel - “Playing With Fire: Cycles of Domestic Violence in Eminem and Rihanna’s ‘Love the Way You Lie’”</td>
<td>• Daily Reflection #10 due by 10pm</td>
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<td>R—June 18</td>
<td><strong>EXAM 1</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Exam 1 on Canvas</strong></td>
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<td>F- June 19</td>
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<td>• Responses to Daily Reflections #8-10 need to be posted by 10pm</td>
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<td>M—June 22</td>
<td><strong>Disrupting Heteronormativity &amp; Graphic Novels as Popular Cultural Form</strong></td>
<td>• Alison Bechdel - <em>Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic</em></td>
<td>• Daily Reflection #11 due by 10pm</td>
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<td>T - June 23</td>
<td><strong>Fashion as Cultural Performance</strong></td>
<td>• Erin J. Rand - “The Right to Be Handsome: The Queer Sartorial Objects of ‘Masculine of Center’ Fashion”</td>
<td>• Daily Reflection #12 due by 10pm</td>
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<td>W - June 24</td>
<td><strong>Masculinity, Culture, and Mental Health</strong></td>
<td>• Richard Mocarski &amp; Sim Butler - “A Critical, Rhetorical Analysis of Man Therapy: The Use of Humor to Frame Mental Health as Masculine”</td>
<td>• Daily Reflection #13 due by 10pm</td>
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<td>R—June 25</td>
<td><em>Last day to drop course with W or WF and last day to withdraw from semester</em>*</td>
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<td>**Daily Reflection #14 due by 10pm</td>
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<td><strong>Producing Narratives of Gender &amp; Sexuality</strong></td>
<td>• Ragan Fox - “You are Not Allowed to Talk about Production”: Narratization on (and off) the Set of CBS’s Big Brother</td>
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<td>F- June 26</td>
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<td>• Responses to Daily Reflections #11-14 need to be posted by 10pm</td>
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<td>M—June 29</td>
<td><strong>Humor as Performance, Irony, &amp; Satire</strong></td>
<td>• <strong>READING:</strong> Lacy Lowrey, Valerie Renegar, and Charles Goehring - “When God Gives You AIDS … Make Lemon-AIDS: Ironic Persona and Perspective by Incongruity in Sarah Silverman's Jesus is Magic”</td>
<td>• Daily Reflection #15 due by 10pm</td>
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<td>• How can popular humor operate to disrupt hegemonic expectations of identity and power?</td>
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<td>• How do our lived experiences relate to the potential for political satire to “work”?</td>
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<td>• How can we theorize the relationship between persona (while performing) and irony as a framework for critiquing culture?</td>
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<td>T - June 30</td>
<td><strong>Final Exam Review &amp; Meetings about Final Projects, if needed</strong></td>
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<td>Responses to Daily Reflection #15 needs to be posted by 10pm</td>
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<td>W — July 1</td>
<td><strong>EXAM 2</strong></td>
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<td>Exam 2 on Canvas</td>
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<td>R—July 2</td>
<td><strong>No Class - Meetings about Final Projects, if needed</strong></td>
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<td>F- July 3</td>
<td><strong>No Class</strong></td>
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<td>Final projects submitted by 10 pm</td>
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