

San José State University

Department of Anthropology ANTH 136: Thought Control in Contemporary Society Spring 2021

Course and Contact Information

Instructor:	Professor Marlovits
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Office Hours:	Tuesday/Thursday 12:00-1:00 or by appt.
Class Days/Time:	Tuesday and Thursday 10:30-11:15 pm
Classroom:	Online
Prerequisites:	None

Course Description

In this course we will analyze the means by which different institutions and individuals control the actions, behaviors, and thoughts of people in contemporary modern societies—including our own. We will also analyze the dynamics of control—how control mechanisms change over time, as well as the means by which people are able to resist or escape such controls. The course should help you think critically about controllers, their targets, the mechanisms they employ, and the goals they seek to accomplish. It should also help you understand controlling processes affecting your everyday life.

For more than a century, social scientists and others have taken an interest in mechanisms of cultural and social control including "brainwashing" or coercive persuasion, indoctrination, groupthink, and propaganda, among others. Some argue that increasing political and economic centralization on a global scale—together with the wide reach of today's global communication technologies—have led to more efficient

and total social and cultural controls. Controllers may use these techniques in an undemocratic (and sometimes dangerous) fashion to convince others to modify their behaviors, to reform their thoughts and values, or to compel them to act in predictable ways.

In this course, we will be particularly focused on analyzing control from an anthropological perspective. We will examine the use of culture as a tool—in other words, the instrumental uses of culture. To help us think critically about processes of social and cultural control, we will begin by reading the classic novels *1984* and *Brave New World* as ethnographic accounts. Then we will focus upon mechanisms of social and cultural controls in various realms including schools, families, government, science, media, and business. Although much of the course material is set in the US, we will also examine other regions. Finally, we will discuss how processes of control influence everyday life and how we might effectively deal with them.

Learning Outcomes

Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)

Over the course of the semester, I intend to help you meet the following learning objectives:

1. Identify various mechanisms of social and cultural control operating in contemporary societies (including the US) and dynamic processes that transform them over time.
2. Analyze the ways in which institutions such as governments, corporations, religious groups, and other organizations have compelled members to behave and act in specific ways.
3. Understand the processes by which mass media, government officials, social scientists, and the advertising industry have interacted to design new means of influencing public opinion, shape habits and tastes, and create mass consumers.
4. Gain insight into the ways by which nationalism, ethnicity, and other forms of identity and membership have been incorporated into controlling processes.
5. Trace the development of communication, pharmacological, and surveillance technologies for behavior modification, and other inventions which might potentially be used for control.
6. Identify how and why individuals and groups resist or revolt against forms of social and cultural domination, and how mutual aid, education, political mobilization, direct action, and other means might be used as a means of countering social and cultural controls.

Required Texts/Readings

Textbooks

Brave New World by Aldous Huxley (any edition)

1984 by George Orwell (any edition)

Addiction by Design: Machine Gambling in Las Vegas by Natasha Dow Schull

United States of Distraction: Media Manipulation in Post-Truth America, by Nolan Higdon and Mickey Huff

Students should purchase low-cost student subscriptions to *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, or both

In addition, we will use a supplemental materials distributed through Canvas.

Course Requirements and Assignments

Course grades will be derived from six assignments:

1. *List of control mechanisms in 1984*. This assignment should be typewritten. Instructions will be distributed in class by the instructor. (5% of final course grade)
2. *List of control mechanisms in Brave New World*. This assignment should be typewritten. Instructions will be distributed in class by the instructor. (5% of final course grade)
3. *Bi-weekly Group Seminar Papers*. Research clusters are required to compose five Seminar Papers throughout the semester. (50% of final course grade)
4. *Participation*. This grade will be assessed based on class participation as well as peer- and self-evaluations. (10% of final course grade)
5. *Term Paper*. In this assignment, you will research and write an 8-page (double-spaced, not including cover page or references) term paper that analyzes a mechanism of social control, cultural control, or ideological control that has affected your own life. The instructor will give you more information about this assignment in Week 4 of the course. Term papers are due on the date of the last regular class meeting. (25% of final course grade)
6. *Contribution to discussion threads*. Students must participate actively on class discussion threads (5% of final course grade)

Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally 3 hours per unit per week with 1 of the hours used for lecture) for instruction or preparation/studying or course related activities including but not limited to internships, labs, clinical practica. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus.

Final Examination or Evaluation

You will take one final exam, consisting of identifications/definitions, essays, and maps. (Final exam counts for 25% of final grade. CLO 1,2,3) . Final exam will be administered in the usual class meeting room (see Course

Schedule at the end of this syllabus for the date and time).

[University Policy S06-4](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S06-4.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S06-4.pdf>) states that “There shall be an appropriate final examination or evaluation at the scheduled time in every course, unless the course is on the official List of Courses in which a final is optional.”

Grading Policy

Your work will be assessed based on your effort and reasoning, as illustrated by your writing. Your assignments document your mastery of the skills critical to anthropological inquiry. More guidelines on grading information and class attendance can be found from the following two university policies:

- [University Syllabus Policy S16-9](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>)
- [University policy F15-12](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/F15-12.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/F15-12.pdf>)

Determination of Grades

- Grades will include minus and plus grades as illustrated below and are determined by percentage of total points possible.
- Short summaries and evaluations of instructor-approved public lectures may provide extra credit options up to 5 points.
- All assignments must be completed in order to pass. I will not accept late assignments nor will I administer makeup exams unless documents can be presented as evidence of illness, death in family, jury duty, etc. No assignments will be accepted via e-mail—I must receive hard copies of all assignments. The term paper will **also** be uploaded via Canvas and vetted through turnitin.com.
- NOTE that [University policy F69-24](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/F69-24.pdf) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/F69-24.pdf> states that “Students should attend all meetings of their classes, not only because they are responsible for material discussed therein, but because active participation is frequently essential to insure maximum benefit for all members of the class. Attendance per se shall not be used as a criterion for grading.”

Grading distribution is as follows:

100	-	97	A plus
96	-	93	A
92	-	90	A minus
89	-	87	B plus
86	-	83	B
83	-	80	B-
79	-	77	C plus
76	-	73	C
72	-	70	C minus

69	-	67	D plus
66	-	63	D
Below 63			F

Note that “All students have the right, within a reasonable time, to know their academic scores, to review their grade-dependent work, and to be provided with explanations for the determination of their course grades.” See [University Policy F13-1](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/F13-1.pdf) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/F13-1.pdf> for more details. If you have questions regarding your grades (including explanations for the determination of course grades, you should visit with the course instructor during office hours.

Classroom Protocol

Students are expected to attend and contribute to class discussions via Zoom. Students are encouraged to participate by leaving their webcam on. Finally, students are expected to *prepare for both class and research cluster meetings by reading and viewing course materials before meeting*. Debate and disagreement are essential elements of critical cultural analysis, and there is plenty of room for a diversity of opinions, however discussion that is disrespectful of others will not be tolerated.

University Policies

Per University Policy S16-9, university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, etc. will be available on Office of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs’ [Syllabus Information web page](http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/>”

Course Schedule

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
1	1/28	Introduction George Orwell, <i>1984</i> (Part I) Ron Charles, “Conservatives crying ‘Orwell’ are downright Orwellian,” <i>Washington Post</i> January 11, 2021 View: <i>Inequality for All</i>
2	2/2 2/4	From Citizens to Consumers: Advertising, Consumption, Work Ethic Stuart Ewen, excerpt in <i>Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture</i> Christopher Turner, “The Hidden Persuader: Ernst Dichter, the Freud of Madison Avenue” Mari Ruti, “The Creed of Pragmatism”

		David Graeber, “On the Phenomenology of Bullshit Jobs” View <i>The Corporation</i> Continue 1984 (Part II)
3	2/9 2/11	Propaganda George Orwell, finish 1984 Rebecca Solnit, “Politics and the American Language” George Packer, “Political Obituary for Donald Trump” Notes on the “Big Lie” Hugh Raffles, “Against Purity” William Astore, “Bread and Circuses in Rome and America” Watch: <i>Good Night and Good Luck</i> Watch: clips on <i>Triumph of the Will</i> Recommended: Edward Bernays, <i>Propaganda</i> Seminar Paper Due – Group A
4	2/16 2/18	Fear, Disinformation, Violence Michael Taussig, “Terror as Usual: Walter Benjamin’s Theory of History as a State of Siege” Open Culture, “Hannah Arendt Explains how Propaganda Uses Lies to Erode Truth and Morality” Hannah Arendt, <i>The Origins of Totalitarianism</i> “A Classless Society” pp. 305-340 Timothy Synder, “The American Abyss: A Historian of Fascism and Political Atrocity on Trump, the Mob, and What Comes Next” <i>New York Times</i> 1.9.2021 Anna Funder, excerpts from <i>Stasiland</i> Seminar Paper Due – Group Z Control Mechanisms for 1984 Due
5	2/23 2/25	Media Structures Higdon and Huff, “Prologue” and “Introduction” in <i>United States of Distraction: Media Manipulation in Post-Truth America</i> Notes on Jurgen Habermas and the Bourgeois Public Sphere Lois Beckett, “Facts won’t fix this” <i>Guardian</i> Carole Cadwalladr, “Fresh Cambridge Analytica Leak ‘shows global manipulation is out of control.’” <i>Guardian</i> Jan 4, 2020 Paul Farhi, “Talk-radio owner orders conservative hosts to temper election fraud rhetoric,” <i>Washington Post</i> Jan 11, 2021 Viewing <i>The Great Hack</i> Begin <i>Brave New World</i> Seminar Paper Due – Group A
6	3/2 3/4	Media Structures II Higdon and Huff, ch 1, 3, & 5 in <i>States of Distraction</i> Jayson Harsin, “Regimes of Post-Truth, Postpolitics, and Attention Economies” Continue <i>Brave New World</i> Seminar Paper Due – Group Z
7	3/9 3/11	Distraction, Memory, Attention Marita Sturken, Introduction to <i>Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering</i>

		<p>Ibram X. Kendi, “Denial is the Heartbeat of America” in <i>The Atlantic</i> Brent Staples, “The Myth of American Innocence” <i>New York Times</i> 1/9/2021 Jenny Odell, excerpts in <i>How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy</i> Amelie Hastie, “Mediating Time” in <i>Cabinet</i> Aldous Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i> (Chapters 1-8) View “Generation Like” and Situationist International documentary Finish <i>Brave New World</i> Seminar Paper Due – Group A Recommended: Bifo Berard, “Global Skin: A Trans-Identitarian Patchwork”</p>
8	3/16 3/18	<p>Cults Susan Harding, “Living Prophecy at Heaven’s Gate” Susan Lepselter, excerpts in <i>The Resonance of Unseen Things</i> pp. 1-5 & 15-19 Robert J. Lifton, “Cult Formation” William Bainbridge and Rodney Stark, “Cult Formation: Three Compatible Models” Adrienne LaFrance, “The Prophecies of Q: American Conspiracy Theories are Entering a Dangerous New Phase” <i>The Atlantic</i> June 2020 Katherine Stewart, “The Roots of Josh Hawley’s Rage,” <i>New York Times</i> Jan 11, 2021 Elizabeth Diaz and Ruth Graham, “How White Evangelical Christians Fused with Trump Extremism,” <i>New York Times</i> Jan 11, 2021 Viewing: “What’s the Matter with Kansas?” Seminar Paper Due – Group Z Control Mechanisms for BNW Due Recommended: June 2020 Issue of <i>The Atlantic</i></p>
9	3/23 3/25	<p>Paranoia and Conspiracy Richard Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics” Mark Fenster, excerpts in <i>Conspiracy Theories</i> George Marcus, “Introduction to the Volume: The Paranoid Style Now” Viewing: Jello Biafra and the Unarians Viewing: <i>Good Night and Good Luck</i> Seminar Paper Due – Group A</p>
10	4/6 4/8	<p>Designing Counterpublics Natasha Schull, <i>Addiction by Design</i> Seminar Paper Due – Group Z</p>
11	4/13 4/15	<p>Militarization and Security (Designing Counterpublics II) Joseph Masco, “Survival is your Business” and “Life Underground: Building the Bunker Society” Roberto Gonzalez, <i>Militarizing Culture</i> pp. 13-35 & 35-56 Seminar Paper Due – Group A</p>
12	4/20 4/22	<p>Race (Designing Counterpublics III) View <i>13th</i> -- documentary available on Netflix David Roediger, Introduction in <i>The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class</i> George Lipsitz, “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness” Henry Giroux, “Racism, Violence, and Militarized Terror in the Age of</p>

		Disposability” Seminar Paper Due – Group Z
13	4/27 4/29	Dismantling the Commons Watch <i>Requiem for the American Dream: Noam Chomsky and the Principles of Concentration of Wealth and Power</i> Andrew Ross, Introduction and “Education for Free People” in <i>Creditocracy and the Case for Debt Refusal</i> Henry Giroux, “Class Warfare and the Advance of Austerity Policies Under the New Authoritarianism” Seminar Paper Due – Group A
14	5/4 5/6	American Extremism Seymour Martin Lipset, “The Radical Right: A Problem for American Democracy” Christopher Vials, “Adorno’s <i>The Authoritarian Personality</i> ” David Niewert, excerpts in <i>Alt-America</i> David Blight, “How Trumpism May Endure” <i>NYT</i> Karen Cox, “What Trump Shares with the ‘Lost Cause’ of the Confederacy” <i>NYT</i> Seyward Darby, “The Far Right Told us what it had Planned. We Didn’t Listen” <i>NYT</i> 1.7.2021 Seminar Paper Due – Group Z
15	5/11 5/13	Deprogramming Howard Zinn, “A Quiet Case of Social Change” Higdon and Huff, “Make America Think Again” Rebecca Solnit, “Naïve Cynicism” Viewing: <i>The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers</i> Recommended: Howard Zinn, <i>A People's History of the United States</i> Term Paper Due Friday
FINAL	05/19	Wednesday May 19 Peer-Review and Self Evaluation Due