

San José State University

Department of Anthropology ANTH 136: Thought Control in Contemporary Society Spring 2023

Course and Contact Information

Instructor: Professor Marlovits

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M/W 1:30-2:30

Office Hours: Zoom:

<https://sjsu.zoom.us/j/92340427867?pwd=U3l1Yk95U2tKZU1qS1FsREg0TjNvZz09>

Class Days/Time: M/W 12-1:15

Classroom: Clark 204

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

Antidemocracy in America: Truth, Power, and the Republic at Risk, Eric Klineberg, Caitlin Zaloom, and Sharon Marcus, eds.

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 and use the template distributed by the instructor. (5% of final course grade)
2. *3 Film Review Assignments*. Research clusters will develop key concepts in class media. (30% of final course grade)
3. *Research cluster exegesis papers*. Research clusters are required to five seminar papers throughout the semester. (30% of final course grade)
4. *Participation*. This grade will be assessed based on class participation as well as peer- and self-evaluations. (5% 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 – or one that you choose to research. Term papers are due on the date of the last regular class meeting. (30% 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	1/25	Introduction Begin George Orwell, <i>1984</i>
2	1/30 & 2/1	Haunted Science? What are controlling processes and how do they shape knowledge? Monday: Laura Nader, excerpts in “Controlling Processes” and “The Phantom Factor” Discuss Gramsci, Lefebvre, Foucault, Williams Wednesday: Catherine Lutz, “The Psychological Ethic and the Spirit of Containment”

3	2/6 & 2/8	<p>1984 George Orwell, <i>1984</i></p> <p>Wednesday: research clusters work on control mechanisms assignment Control Mechanisms in 1984 Due</p>
4	2/13 & 15	<p>Consumerism, Labor Discipline, Commodity Fetishism Monday: Stuart Ewen, excerpt in <i>Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture</i> Lizbeth Cohen, “A Consumer’s Republic” Rebecca Solnit, “The Silence of the Lambswool Sweater” Astor, excerpt in <i>Amusing Ourselves to Death</i></p> <p>Wednesday: Wednesday: Jenny Odell, excerpt in <i>How to Do Nothing</i> Viewing: <i>Generation Like</i></p>
5	2/20 & 22	<p>Propaganda Monday: Watch: <i>The Great Hack</i> Rebecca Solnit, “Politics and the American Language” William Astore, “Bread and Circuses in Rome and America” Edward Bernays, <i>Propaganda</i></p> <p>Wednesday: Richard Sennett, “Rule by Misrule” (AIA) Michael Taussig, “Terror as Usual: Walter Benjamin’s Theory of History as a State of Siege”</p> <p>Research Cluster Questions about Consumerism Due</p>
6	2/27 & 3/1	<p>The Public Sphere and Corporate Capture Monday: Higdon and Huff, “How Did We Get Here,” “A Crumbling Fourth Estate,” and “Breaking News, Broken News” Victor Pickard, “The Misinformation Society” (AIA)</p> <p>Wednesday: Notes on Jurgen Habermas and the Bourgeois Public Sphere Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere”</p> <p>Great Hack Quiz due</p>
7	3/6 & 8	<p>Predatory UX Design and Technology Natasha Schull, <i>Addiction by Design</i> (whole book)</p> <p>Research Cluster Questions about Public Sphere Due</p>
8	3/13 & 15	<p>Elite Power, the Neoliberal Offensive, and Destruction of the Commons Monday: Viewing: <i>Requiem for the American Dream: Ten Principles of the Concentration of Wealth and Power</i> Read: Andrew Ross, “Education for Free People” in <i>Creditocracy and the Case for Debt Refusal</i></p> <p>Wednesday: Thomas Sugrue, “Predatory Real Estate” (AIA)</p>

		<p>Margaret Levi, “The Devastated House of Labor” (AIA)</p> <p>Research Cluster Questions about Schull Due</p>
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9	3/20 & 22	<p>Dismantling the Commons and Privatization</p> <p>Monday: Peter Linebaugh, “The Incomplete, True, Authentic, and Wonderful history of May Day,” and “X2: May Day in the Light of Waco and LA” Viewing: <i>Capitalism: A Six Part Series</i>, episode 1</p> <p>Wednesday: David Graeber, “Ferguson and the Criminalization of American Life” Michelle Wilde Anderson, “Resource Extraction” (in AIA)</p> <p>Requiem Quiz due</p>
10	3/27 & 3/31 Spring Break	
11	4/3 & 5	<p>Dismantling the Commons II: Prisons, Criminalization, and Capitalist Restructuring</p> <p>Monday: Viewing: <i>13th</i> Alina Das, “Criminalizing Immigrants” (AIA) Patrick Sharkey, “Violence and Criminal Justice” (AIA)</p> <p>Wednesday: Angela Davis, excerpts in <i>Are Prisons Obsolete?</i></p> <p>Research Cluster Questions about Dismantling the Commons Due</p>
12	4/10 & 12	<p>Subjectivity at the Extremes I: Paranoia and Conspiracy</p> <p>Monday: Richard Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics” Robert Jay Lifton, “Cult Formation” William Bainbridge and Rodney Stark, “Cult Formation: Three Compatible Models”</p> <p>Wednesday: Susan Harding, “Heaven’s Gate” Viewing: Jello Biafra and the Unarians</p> <p>13th quiz due</p>
13	4/17 & 19	<p>Hysterical Epidemics, Mental Health, and Abandonment</p> <p>Monday: Elaine Showalter, “Multiple Personality Disorder,” “Satanic Ritual Abuse,” “The Hysterical Hot Zone,” and “Defining Hysteria” View: <i>Dialogues with Madwomen</i></p> <p>Wednesday: Jenkins and Csordas, “Angry Boy, Angry Girl” Lorna Rhodes, “Panoptical Intimacies”</p>

14	4/24 & 26	<p>Extremism</p> <p>Monday: Seymour Martin Lipset, “The Radical Right: A Problem for American Democracy” Fred Turner, “Trump on Twitter” (AIA) Spencer Ackerman,</p> <p>Wednesday: Christopher Vials, “Adorno’s <i>The Authoritarian Personality</i>” Open Culture, “Hannah Arendt Explains how Propaganda Uses Lies to Erode Truth and Morality” Hugh Raffles, “Against Purity”</p> <p>Research Cluster Questions about Paranoia and Mental Illness Due</p>
15	5/1 & 5/3	<p>The Culture War</p> <p>Monday: Barbara Ehrenreich, excerpts in <i>Hearts of Men</i> Linda Gordon, “Women Voters, Left and Right” (AIA)</p> <p>Wednesday: Harel Shapira, “Gun Culture” (AIA) Douglas Massey, “Confederate Revisionist History” (AIA) Karen Cox, “What Trump Shares with the ‘Lost Cause’ of the Confederacy” <i>NYT</i></p>
16	5/8 & 10	<p>Insubordinate Spaces</p> <p>Barbara Tomlinson and George Lipsitz, excerpts in <i>Insubordinate Spaces</i> Solnit, “Naïve Cynicism” Hardt and Negri, excerpts in <i>Assembly</i></p> <p>Viewing: <i>The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers</i></p>
17	5/15	Term Paper Due
FINAL	05/19	Wednesday, May 17 9:45 AM-12:00 PM