

Pop Culture and World Politics/INTL 2005
University of Georgia, Fall Semester 2026

Dr. Eli Sperling

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Office Hours: Monday 10:30AM-12:30PM, Zoom meetings can also be scheduled throughout the week, depending on my availability—email to inquire.

Office Location: Candler 312

Course Description:

In this course, we will examine global political events and behaviors through the lens of popular culture. Throughout the semester, we will study top-down and bottom-up political messaging in American, Soviet/Russian, Middle Eastern and Korean popular culture, utilizing analytical tools and methods from the social sciences and cultural studies. Students will gain a clear understanding of the ways in which popular culture both reflects and impacts political phenomena worldwide and our four case studies will offer a practical overview of global political history from the start of the Cold War until today.

Grade Scheme

A: 93-100

A-: 90-92

B+: 87-89

B: 83-86

B-: 80-82

C+: 77-79

C: 73-76

C-: 70-72

D+: 67-69

D: 63-66

D-: 60-62

F: 00-59

Grade Composition

Short writing assignments: 15%

Group Presentation: 15%

Midterm: 20%

In class attendance and participation: 20%

Final exam: 30%

Assignments:

Short writing assignments:

There will be two short group writing assignments.

Presentation:

Students in the course will be divided into groups during the first half of the semester. During the last two weeks of the semester, each group will give a 20 minute presentation—details will be discussed in the first weeks of the semester.

Participation:

Students should regularly attend class, having read all the required readings. They should be prepared to both pose and answer questions about the readings and engage in discussion on the broader subject matter.

Midterm Exam:

Midterm exam covering the topics in the course so far.

Final Exam:

Final exam covering the topics and materials presented in the course .

Policies**Academic Integrity:**

Every student must agree to abide by UGA's academic honesty policy and procedures known as a Culture of Honesty and the University of Georgia Student Honor Code, which work together to define a climate of academic honesty and integrity at the university.

Use of generative AI:

Use of generative AI (i.e. ChatGPT, Perplexity AI, Claude etc.) is permitted only when explicitly allowed for specific assignments. When used, students must cite it appropriately and clearly indicate how it contributed to their work through a “Generative AI Disclosure” placed at the beginning of the assignment. Unauthorized or undisclosed use of AI tools will be treated as academic misconduct. If you're unsure whether AI use is allowed, ask before proceeding.

Attendance:

- You are allowed up to 3 unexcused absences without penalty. After that, each additional unexcused absence will lower your attendance/participation grade by 5 points. Excused absences (i.e. illness, family emergency, religious observance, university-sponsored activity) must be documented and communicated to me in advance or as soon as possible. You will have up to five days after an illness to provide a doctor's note.
- If you miss class, it is your responsibility to obtain any missed material or announcements from a classmate or the course website.

Special Needs:

This course is guided by the assumption of dignity and respect for all persons in the classroom. My hope is to support diversity of learners and to provide an inclusive environment. Students who need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential. To ensure that you receive

the most appropriate reasonable accommodation based on your needs, contact me as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first week of classes), and make sure that you have contacted the Disability Resource Center: <http://drc.uga.edu>

In-Class Discussion Guidelines:

Civility and respect are essential when engaging in productive academic discourse. All communications for this course should be conducted constructively, civilly, and respectfully. Differences in beliefs, opinions, and approaches are to be expected. Please bring any communications you believe to be in violation of this policy to my attention. Active interaction with peers and your instructor is essential to success in this course, paying particular attention to the following:

- Be respectful of others and their opinions, valuing diversity in perspectives, backgrounds, abilities, and experiences.
- Challenging ideas, phenomena and the scholars that we engage with is integral to critical thinking and the scholarly process. Please articulate your written and verbal communications carefully and thoughtfully, recognizing that a positive atmosphere of healthy discourse is encouraged.
- It is important to do the reading! We will be discussing nuanced and often complicated circumstances. Being a productive member of in-class discussions means doing the reading and being prepared to talk about those assignments and how they relate to lectures and concepts discussed in class.

Course schedule/sessions—please complete all readings below each session for that session, unless otherwise specified by Dr. Sperling

Week 1: Introduction

- Session 1: Course overview, goals, expectations
- Session 2: Scholarly frameworks and approaches
 - Nieguth, Tim. *The Politics of Popular Culture: Negotiating Power, Identity, and Place*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015, pp. 3–18.

Week 2: American Pop Culture and Politics I

- Session 1: 1950s
 - Bodnar, John. "Unruly Adults: Social Change and Mass Culture in the 1950s." *OAH Magazine of History* 26, no. 4 (2012): 21–23. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oahmag/oas031>
 - Nieguth, Tim. *The Politics of Popular Culture*, pp. 51–64.
- Session 2: 1960s
 - Frith, Simon. "Rock and the Politics of Memory." In *Music and Ideology*, 393–403. 2017.

- James, David E. “Rock and Roll in Representations of the Invasion of Vietnam.” *Representations* 29 (1990): 78–98.

Week 3: American Pop Culture and Politics II

- Session 1: 1970s
 - Waxman, Olivia B. “Elvis Presley and Richard Nixon: The Story behind the Photo.” *Time*, August 15, 2017. <https://time.com/4894301/elvis-president-nixon-photo/>
 - Williams, Paul. “Serialization, Solipsism, and Swarming: American Politics and the Graphic Novel in the 1970s.” *American Literary History* 35, no. 1 (2023): 259–275.
- Session 2: 1980s
 - Spiegelman, Art. *Maus*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt-Taschenbuch-Verlag, 2004.

Week 4: American Pop Culture and Politics III

- Session 1: 1990s
 - Wilson, Joshua C. *The Street Politics of Abortion: Speech, Violence, and America’s Culture Wars*. Stanford: Stanford Law Books, 2013, pp. 1–38.
- Session 2: 2000s
 - Ferrence, Matthew J. *All-American Redneck: Variations on an Icon, from James Fenimore Cooper to the Dixie Chicks*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2014, pp. 1–37.

Week 5: American Pop Culture and Politics IV

- Session 1: 2010s
 - Rabaka, Reiland. *Hip Hop’s Inheritance from the Harlem Renaissance to the Hip Hop Feminist Movement*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011, pp. 1–48.
- Session 2: Wrap-up

Week 6: Russian/Soviet Pop Culture and Politics I

- Session 1: 1950s
 - Lovell, Stephen. *The Soviet Union: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 1–36.
- Session 2: 1960s
 - Von Eschen, Penny M. *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006, pp. 1–56.

Week 7: Russian/Soviet Pop Culture and Politics II

- Session 1: 1970s
 - Von Eschen, Penny M. *Satchmo Blows Up the World*, pp. 148–184.

- Session 2: 1980s (Midterm review)
 - Von Eschen, Penny M. *Satchmo Blows Up the World*, pp. 185–222.
 - Midterm review

Week 8: Midterm Week

- Session 1: Midterm Exam
- Session 2: Film

Week 9: Russian/Soviet Pop Culture and Politics III

- Session 1: 1990s
 - Wojnowski, Zbigniew. “The Lives and Afterlives of a Soviet Misfit: Volodymyr Ivasiuk, the Emotional Crisis of Late Socialism and the Anti-Soviet Turn in Ukrainian Popular Culture.” *Contemporary European History* 32, no. 1 (2022): 61–78.
- Session 2: 2000s
 - Prokhorov, Alexander, Elena Prokhorova, and Rimgaila Salys. *Russian TV Series in the Era of Transition: Genres, Technologies, Identities*. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2021, pp. 8–47.

Week 10: Russian/Soviet Pop Culture and Politics IV

- Session 1: 2010s
 - Prokhorov, Alexander, Elena Prokhorova, and Rimgaila Salys. *Russian TV Series in the Era of Transition*, pp. 48–75.
- Session 2: Wrap-up
 - “The Global Controversy over Pussy Riot: An Anti-Putin Women’s Protest.” University of Michigan. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/p/pod/dod-idx/global-controversy-over-pussy-riot-an-anti-putin-womens.pdf>

Week 11: Korean Pop Culture and Politics I

- Session 1: 1950s
 - Gwon, Gwisook. “Reframing Christianity on Cheju during the Korean War.” *Journal of Korean Religions* 6, no. 2 (2015): 93–120.
- Session 2: 1960s
 - Kim, Pil Ho, and Hyunjoon Shin. “The Birth of ‘Rok’: Cultural Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Globalization of Rock Music in South Korea, 1964–1975.” *Positions: Asia Critique* 18, no. 1 (2010): 199–230.

Week 12: Korean Pop Culture and Politics II

- Session 1: 1970s

- Klein, Christina. “Why American Studies Needs to Think about Korean Cinema, or, Transnational Genres in the Films of Bong Joon-Ho.” *American Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (2008): 871–898.
- Session 2: 1980s
 - Dong, Wonmo. “University Students in South Korean Politics: Patterns of Radicalization in the 1980s.” *Journal of International Affairs* 40, no. 2 (1987): 233–255.

Week 13: Korean Pop Culture and Politics III

- Session 1: 1990s
 - Lee, Chae-Jin. “U.S. Policy toward North Korea in the 1990s.” *Korean Studies* 16, no. 1 (1992): 13–28.
 - “North Korea’s Musical Environment.” Clark University. <https://wordpress.clarku.edu/musc210-cgr/music-censorship-and-piracy-in-north-korea-2/north-koreas-musical-environment/>
- Session 2: 2000s
 - Messerlin, Patrick A., and Wonkyu Shin. “The Success of K-pop: How Big and Why So Fast?” *Asian Journal of Social Science* 45, no. 4–5 (2017): 409–439.

Week 14: Korean Pop Culture and Politics IV + Course Wrap

- Session 1: 2010s
 - Kerr, Sari Pekkala, William Kerr, Çağlar Özden, and Christopher Parsons. “Global Talent Flows.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 30, no. 4 (2016): 83–106.
- Session 2: Course wrap-up

Week 15: Presentations

- Session 1: In-class presentations
- Session 2: In-class presentations

Final