Ph.D. Reading List in Popular Culture

Being housed within an English Department means that this examination will center on critical analysis of texts (broadly defined and including material culture) and the application of relevant cultural theory and criticism. Students will be assessed on their ability to analyze examples of and trends in popular culture in a sophisticated and theoretically informed manner.

Because popular culture, as an area of academic study, is diverse and ever-changing, there is no set canon of texts for students to master. Indeed, the concept of canonicity is arguably antithetical to the popular. Instead, the Reading List for this Preliminary Examination area includes (1) forms and subject areas to be studied, (2) recommended historically significant scholarship.

1. Textual Forms/Subject Areas

Students should be prepared to write about diverse popular textual forms, concepts, and subject areas, informed by historical as well as contemporary study. While the U.S. may dominate this field of study, global popular culture and the concept of globalism should be a significant part of a student’s study for the examination.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form/Area</th>
<th>Examples of Textual Categories (Not to Be Considered Inclusive)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity</td>
<td>Idols/Icons in Music, Film, Politics, on the Internet</td>
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<td>Fandom</td>
<td>Conventions, Cosplay, On-Line Chat Groups, Fanzines</td>
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<td>Material Culture</td>
<td>Action Figures, Board Games, Sports Equipment, Collectables</td>
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<td>Popular Books</td>
<td>Graphic Novels, Young Adult, Romance, Science Fiction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Popular Film</td>
<td>Horror, Musicals, Chick Flicks, Cult</td>
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<tr>
<td>Popular Music</td>
<td>Rock, Rap, Country, R &amp; B</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>Text Messages, Social Networks, Microblogging, Image Sharing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>Sitcoms, Soaps, Reality, News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Games</td>
<td>1st-Person Shooters, Role-Playing, Multiplayer On-Line, Educational</td>
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For all areas, students should have facility with diverse theoretical/critical approaches to popular culture study, e.g. Marxist, post-structuralist, psychoanalytic, semiotic, feminist, postcolonial, queer.

2. Historically Significant Scholarship

Although there is no pop culture canon, there are theorists, critics, and texts that have shaped the study of popular culture in important ways. We recommend students read the essays and books in this list as an effective starting point for deeper and broader exploration of popular culture in its myriad forms. This list is not exhaustive. Students should read from within it as well as beyond it to achieve the depth and breadth necessary to write on diverse forms, categories, texts, and approaches to the study of popular culture.

Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*.
Bobo, Jacqueline. *Black Women as Cultural Readers*.
Clover, Carol. *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*.
Dyer, Richard. *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*.
Fiske, John. *Understanding Popular Culture and Understanding Television*.
hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*.
Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.
Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*.
Johnson, Steven. *Everything Bad is Good for You: How Today's Popular Culture is Actually Making Us Smarter*.
Mulvey, Laura. “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.”
Sontag, Susan. “Notes on ‘Camp’.”