

Pop Culture and Politics: Engaging Students in American Government through Art, Music, and Film

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ABSTRACT

Strategically and thoughtfully employing popular culture in teaching political science can enable students to better understand, analyze, and relate to the material. In a discipline that can be viewed by students as too boring, too distant, and too polarizing, the use of relevant music, TV/film clips, toys, memes, and other popular culture artifacts can engage otherwise unengaged students in a meaningful way. This paper argues that using popular culture in teaching political science can demonstrate relevance, serve as a generational translator, expose the bias of experience, and enable an expression of self. In demonstrating relevance, popular culture makes material fresh and applicable for students; by operating as a generational translator, the material transcends the time in which it originated; biased experiences are exposed through popular culture mediums through which students are comfortable projecting new and different ideas that challenge what they already know and believe; finally, students can learn to express themselves in relationship to the material by using these mediums with which they are already familiar but in a new and intentional way. Watching clips from the hit TV show “Parks and Recreation” (2009) can illuminate the complexities of the bureaucracy and the role of regulation in everyday life; likewise, listening to the award-winning Broadway musical “Hamilton” (2015) with clever lyrics regaling the debates of federalism demonstrate the passion and ideas behind such constitutional conflicts. This paper first provides an overview that establishes the value of applying popular culture specifically to political science pedagogy before reviewing the relevant literature. It then charts the four ways in which popular culture can be beneficial to teaching and learning political science, concluding with a larger analysis of the advantages and potential for such approaches.

Keywords: political science; politics; government; TV/Film; music; memes; cartoons; popular culture

1. INTRODUCTION

Popular culture and politics have always shared a mutually beneficial, if also somewhat parasitic relationship. Art, film, music, theatre, toys and other manifestations of popular culture interrogate and cajole politicians, their policies, their parties, and their power. They extend beyond providing simple entertainment for their audience and offer instead a clever and thoughtful opportunity for engagement. Politicians, campaigns, parties, and causes can all benefit from the adoption and popularization of their ideas through popular culture, making them more comprehensible and accessible to the masses. The effort is mutual and collaborative; popular culture uses politics as a topic through which they can engage their audience and politics benefits from the accessibility and interest that popular culture brings about.

Popular culture allows for the desanitization of the academic environment from its traditional focus on terms, theories, and concepts to lessons that are, instead, infused by incorporating these same components with exciting and often entertaining pieces that enhance the material. Employing clips from current popular television shows, providing a humorous and relevant meme, demonstrating the underlying message in lyrics of a musical hit all engage students with the material at a different level. With the inclusion of popular culture, classes become more exciting, accessible, easier to understand, and relevant to our students, meaning that the material is not only easier for students to grasp but its value is clear, and they are thus more likely to both retain and apply it.

Political science as a discipline has often suffered from afflictions familiar to many academic fields. Students complain about the material being boring or dry, unrelatable and inaccessible, challenging to master, and irrelevant in application. Civic education, though experiencing a cultural revival, is often secondary to vocational and technical training, which is aimed at helping students achieve post-graduate employment, and not necessarily a sense of civic engagement and an understanding of one's own role within it.

Applying popular culture artifacts and themes in political science courses can help illuminate the material, making it not only more engaging but also more valuable for the student. Showing a clever cartoon mocking the illness-inducing fad of eating tide pods can ignite discussion on the reasons why the founding fathers were distrustful of the masses and created various mechanisms (like the Electoral College and indirect selection of senators) to prevent the feared tyranny of their potential involvement in government. Conversations about the 4th Amendment can instantly incite participation and questions after listening and analyzing the lyrics of Jay-Z's rap hit "99 Problems" (2003) that recounts a racial profiling incident. Hence, by bringing in elements and artifacts from popular culture into the classroom, the material can become more relevant, the learning process can become more enjoyable, and students can become more engaged.

This paper examines the advantages of utilizing popular culture for teaching government and politics, providing four key arguments for how this pedagogical method can be beneficial to students' learning and offering examples of application to support those claims. First, it will provide an overview of the reasons why using popular culture as a teaching tool can be helpful for exciting and engaging students in material that might otherwise be viewed as dry or distant by incorporating current and seminal texts from the field in the review of current literature. Next, the paper will outline the four primary benefits of using popular culture in the classroom, specifically the demonstration of relevance, the service as a generational translator, the exposure of experience, and the expression of self. Finally, the paper will conclude with an analysis of why popular culture not only makes learning in the classroom easier and more enjoyable for students, but how it can also, from the standpoint of the educator, make the teaching process more engaging and provide a more meaningful educational experience for all involved.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The research examining the use of popular culture in the classroom has long argued about the benefits it can have on students. To situate this paper among the current literature, we must first agree on a working definition of the term “popular culture”. For the purposes of this paper, this research relies on the definition of referencing struggle between social groups, as outlined by numerous theorists (Adorno and Horkheimer, Docker, Hall, and J. Story). More specifically, using John Fiske’s (2010) analysis, popular culture can be seen as “deeply contradictory in societies where power is unequally distributed along axes of class, gender, and race, and other categories that we use to make sense of our social differences” (5). This struggle or conflict is replicated in various forms, such as in art, music, film, and other mediums.

From this conceptualization, it can be understood that popular culture, though traditionally excluded from pedagogical practices, is now embraced. Ernest Morrell (2002) believed that “popular culture can help students deconstruct dominant narratives and contend with oppressive practices in hopes of achieving a more egalitarian and inclusive society” when applied to adolescent literacy (72). Additional research demonstrates the benefits of using popular culture in children’s education (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2005), leadership curriculum (Callahan and Rosser 2007), religion (McDannell 1998), rhetoric (Brummett 2015), archeology (Holtorf 2016), critical media literacy (Alvermann et al. 2018), and even race and ethnicity (Hall 2006, Lee 1999, and Turner 1994).

The literature connecting popular culture and politics as part of a conscious and strategic curriculum is notably sparse. Numerous studies have upheld the merits of political science education as a “problem-driven discipline” (Isacoff 415) that provides real-world significance (Kohli et al.) and can address real problems (Dewey). Research by Robert Botsch and Carol Botsch has suggested that mandating American government coursework at the college level would significantly impact students, improving “factual knowledge, political interest, political efficacy” and even establishing long-term habits with regards to civic participation that would extend beyond graduation (121).

Disagreements have arisen over whether the influence of popular culture on politics has been detrimental (Postman) or influential (Coleman) for consumers of these various mediums. Though such influence on politics (and, inversely, the use of politics in popular culture) may have its drawbacks, the advantages are still evident. Liesbet Van Zoonen argued that popular culture is deeply related to politics and that “politics has to be connected to the everyday culture of its citizens; otherwise it becomes an alien sphere, occupied by strangers no one cares or bothers about” (3). Additionally, McCarthy and Anderson found that using active learning techniques, like incorporating popular culture and activities into the coursework, had a positive and lasting impact on students compared to their peers who were educated through a more traditional and passive mode.

This research suggests that including popular culture in a strategic and thoughtful manner can be beneficial for teaching content that can often be characterized as boring, challenging, or unimportant. By integrating popular culture into the method through which students learn, courses can become more engaging, accessible, and relevant, especially for students who are not naturally interested in the material and may struggle to connect its value to their lives. Popular culture can enhance teaching and learning in the political science discipline by demonstrating relevance, serving as a generational translator, exposing others to experience, and encouraging self-expression. Each of these benefits is outlined in terms of what they incorporate, why they are helpful, and examples of how they can be used with the curriculum are provided.

3. ANALYSIS

Demonstration of Relevance The discipline of political science itself encompasses a variety of different

fields in both content and the approach, often making it seem complicated for students adept in one area but challenged in another. The broad range of history, economics, sociology, psychology, and even anthropology are all interrelated in this material. Even in the most basic introductory course, a student will be exposed to content from each of these fields through their study of political science because of the interdisciplinary aspect of the concepts. To understand voting behavior, we rely on economic and psychological models; to analyze the constitution and our relationship to government, we reflect on history and analyze the impact of society and culture.

Because of the merging contributions from other fields into the study of government and politics, the material can often feel irrelevant to students who are not well-versed or necessarily interested in these fields. Understanding the role of history and societal relationships is critical to the comprehension of the principles of government yet it also means that the discussion and lecture will center on important events and issues that occurred over two hundred years ago—hardly recent nor relevant for a college student in the 21st century. Connecting these historical themes to similar but recent debates through popular culture can illuminate the importance and relevance of the material to current issues, essentially demonstrating to students why this still matters.

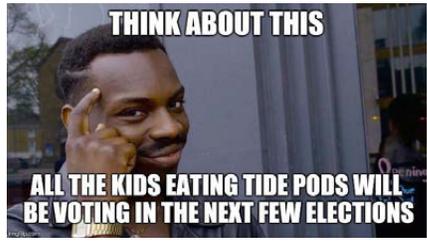
The demonstration of relevance shows students why the sometimes century-old material they are analyzing still affects their lives today. This answers the larger question of “why does this matter?,” a very broad but equally imperative issue that such a course needs to address. As higher education has become more available to a wider range of students, it can no longer assume that they enroll and study simply for a greater pursuit of knowledge; indeed, many of our students are vocationally-focused and want to see the direct value of the work they are completing for their degree. As such, we should aim to illustrate the worthiness of the content and help students make the connections of how seemingly less relevant material may actually be very salient in current debates and discussions for themselves.

Using popular culture as a mechanism for making material relevant and related to current issues provides the perfect bridge through which students can begin to understand, analyze, and apply the content. Teaching the role of the Electoral College, the original indirect selection of senators, and the general distrust of the masses our founders felt serves as a great example of how applying popular culture can make both teaching and learning more meaningful.

The founders shared a wariness of the public that stems from ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato, who also characterized his dislike of direct democracy as a fear of the people (Plato 71). Individuals would not always be educated or care about politics and could easily make unsound decisions that would have horrendous results if they were not carefully restrained (Madison 58). Thus the US Constitution included the Electoral College to ensure that the masses would not overrule presidential elections, that senators would be selected by the state government (not individual voters), and that no popular initiative or referendums (both examples of direct democracy) at the national level would exist, so that all policy changes would have to go through the elected officials.

While the arguments of the extent to which you can trust the public and how much power they should have may seem old, strategically selecting popular culture artifacts for class discussions can suddenly show how the contemporaneity and relevance of these debates. Arguments against direct democracy and giving too much power to voters can be summarized in memes poking fun at the tide-pod eating craze and a nationwide study that found that many Americans believe chocolate milk comes from brown cows (see figure 1). On the other hand, cartoons mocking the low approval ratings of Congress and questioning the belief that if we believe all people can't be trusted, why would we give some people more power, challenge the preference for representative democracy (see figure 2). When incorporated alongside public opinion polls showing how few people can name their elected officials and basic constitutional processes, these popular culture artifacts can

make the centuries-old arguments relevant to the current political climate and provoke students into thinking about their preferences for good governance.

	
<p>Figure 1. Think about this: All the kids eating tide pods will be voting in the next few elections</p>	<p>Figure 2. Congress: You had one job</p>

Generational Translator

Making the material more relevant to students, based on their specific peer group, helps them understand not only why something matters, but why it matters at the present time. Popular culture can serve as a translator across generations, allowing students to view the same concept from different historical lenses, and then use that context to consider the current issue from a more critical perspective. Particularly for disciplines that encompass contributions from other fields, as political science does with the social sciences and humanities, using popular culture artifacts from previous points in history and comparing them to those from current times can enable students to gain a greater understanding of the magnitude of change and similarities in the subject matter.

Teaching gender politics, for example, can show how using popular culture as a generational translator makes the material more accessible while simultaneously providing a historical and cultural comparison for students to assess. In American government, women have traditionally been either underrepresented or entirely excluded from participation. Until the 19th Amendment, women could not vote or engage directly in the election process at all in most states. Even after suffrage was won, female candidacies continue to lag disproportionately behind their male counterparts, and no branch of government at the federal level (nor most at the state) have equal proportionality of women serving in public office respective to the general population. This phenomenon, of course, is not limited to just government but follows a cultural pattern in our country in which women are treated differently and often unfairly compared to men.

Music, toys, and film can illustrate these themes for students and allow them to see the differences and similarities in gender politics throughout generations. Songs such as Dionne Warwick's "Wishin' and Hopin'" (1962) (that advises to "wear your hair just for him, do the things he likes to do") and The Crystals' "He Hit Me (It Felt Like a Kiss)" (1962) (unapologetically endorsing sexual assault and violence) provide a stark contrast compared to Helen Reddy's "I am Woman, Hear Me Roar" (1971) and Beyoncé's "Run the World (Girls)" (2011). Such lyrics illustrate an evolution of cultural attitudes. Women, once encouraged to be submissive and subservient, are then empowered to take charge and act on behalf of their own interests. Beyoncé's claims of "how we're smart enough to make these millions, strong enough to bear the children, then get back to business" relates to her own life's story and points to the balance in professional and personal achievements that have become a cultural norm for many women.

Mattel's Barbie doll, a cultural icon in and of itself, has lived through and reflected these cultural changes as gender politics has evolved over time, even directly in terms of Barbie being represented as a political candidate (see figure 3). The company introduced "Barbie for President" in 1992 with their doll outfitted in a blue-and-silver ball gown with gaudy silver stars and a coordinating red suit. Though no candidate would like to wear such an impractical ensemble on the campaign trail, Barbie made her debut as a candidate the

same year as hundreds of other female candidates in the “Year of the Woman,” as 1992 came to be known. Each presidential election year ushered in a new version of Barbie as a candidate, revealing the cultural shifts and fashion changes that accompany the times. Twenty years after her debut, “Barbie for President” arrived in 2012 with her own podium and abandoned the iconic high heels for slightly more sensible platform shoes. This was promoted on the box with the declaration, “she stands on her own (literally)”. In 2016 “Barbie for President” included two Barbie dolls, proclaiming “the first all-female ticket” and each was dressed smartly in a pantsuit and dress suit. Though the country has yet to elect a woman to the top of the ticket, these toys show just how seriously female candidates have changed over time and how our image of female candidates has as well.

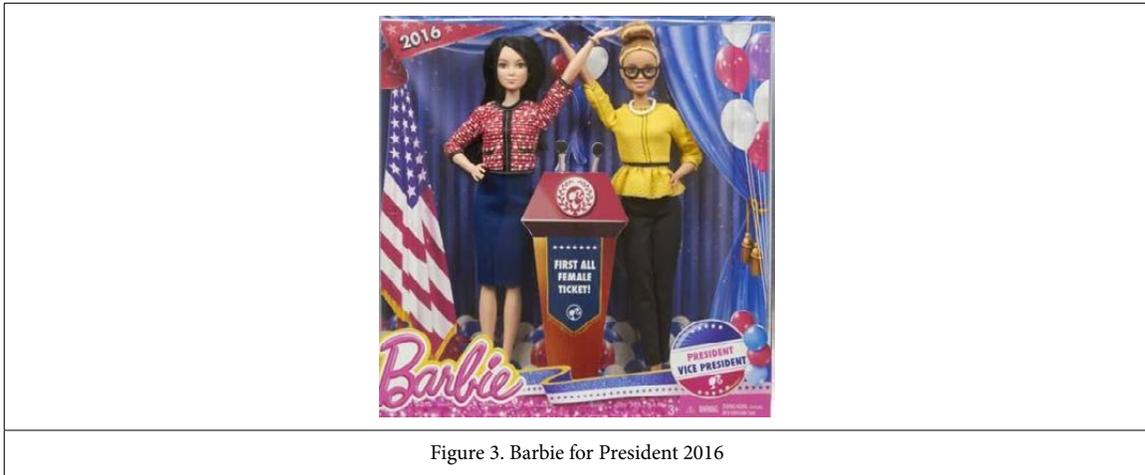


Figure 3. Barbie for President 2016

Watching excerpts from various films and TV shows also helps show students how gender politics has evolved across generations despite some recurring themes. Issues of working women and the balance between their personal and professional lives reappear frequently throughout films and TV episodes. Comparing episodes from “The Dick Van Dyke Show” (1961-1966) to “The Mary Tyler Moore Show,” (1970-1977) to “Murphy Brown” (1988-1998) and “The Good Wife” (2009-2016) reveals the ways women’s roles and our expectations of them have changed, with each show and episode representing different takes on issues of balance, femininity, and sexism. When high-powered attorney Diane Lockhart (played by Christine Baranski) demands, “I want what I am worth” in a negotiation, her claim reveals the gender inequity that remains while also highlighting the cultural acceptability for such a demand (“A Precious Commodity,” Season 5, Episode 3, *The Good Wife*).

Using popular culture as a generational translator provides students with the connection between the reason why something matters to them now and an indication of how that has changed over time. It goes a step above demonstrating relevance because it is not simply answering “why this matters” but instead adds the element of “how” to provide a historical perspective. By using popular culture artifacts to bring concepts to life, those concepts become rooted in a cultural context and enable students to see past their own moment in time into a previous one, allowing them to analyze the evolution of that concept. For a topic like gender politics, popular culture can make the material more poignant and relevant to the students, allowing them to critically analyze it in the context of time and place.

Exposure of Experience

Showing students how others’ experiences are valuable and worthy in and of themselves can serve as one of the biggest challenges in higher education. Thinking outside one’s own lived experience requires introspection and self-awareness which are paramount to good citizenship, but also difficult to teach and

learn. Exposing students to different perspectives and helping them critique their own privilege allows them to see their own biases and recognize how their views are shaped by their experiences, which are different from others.

This need for widening students' perspectives and considering privilege is particularly important in discussions involving government and politics as the views individuals and groups hold are deeply rooted in their own experiences. Political socialization focuses on the role that family, schools, and religious institutions play on a person's upbringing; the differences across these will likewise result in different views and ideas. Particularly in the current political climate, as the electorate seems increasingly polarized and debate becomes more acrimonious, teaching students how to understand general differences in lived experiences and perspectives, empathize with others, and debate matters with respect and insight.

Using popular culture can help expose students to different experiences and allow them to question their own biases by demystifying concepts that may feel to be otherwise distant or unimportant. Racial politics serves as a great topic through which popular culture can be used to expose students to others' experiences. As the frequency of racial issues continues to rise within the country, divisions across racial lines can easily become exacerbated, especially when students feel unable or are unwilling to understand the perspective of others. For white students, the problems of racial profiling and the police shootings of unarmed young black men may feel irrelevant to their daily life, but for students of color, these events may feel so real that the emotions and responses are raw and haunting.

Movies, music, and artwork chronicling racial politics can provide a great platform to initiate dialogue about race barriers in politics among students. *Fruitvale Station* (2013) followed the last day in the life of Oscar Grant as he played with his daughter at daycare, went to work, and then enjoyed a night out with his fiancé and friends before it ended in his brutal murder on a subway station platform. The film is earnest and emotional, inviting viewers in to see this man's life and his work and relationships before they all came to a screeching halt when a subway police officer reportedly confused his gun with his taser and shot Grant once in the chest, ultimately leading to his death.

Jay-Z's hit "99 Problems" (2004) traces his own experience with racial profiling in the lyrics which, accompanied by a catchy beat, makes listening enjoyable and simultaneously informative. In the song, he relates an incident in which he was pulled over by a police officer for a meaningless infraction and how the officer was surprised that he knew his legal rights.

So I, pull over to the side of the road
 I heard "Son, do you know why I'm stopping you for?"
 Cause I'm young and I'm black and my hat's real low
 Or do I look like a mind reader, sir? I don't know
 Am I under arrest or should I guess some mo?
 "Well you was doing fifty-five in the fifty-four", uh huh
 "License and registration and step out of the car
 "Are you carrying a weapon on you, I know a lot of you are"
 I ain't stepping out of shit, all my papers legit
 "Well do you mind if I look around the car a little bit?"
 Well my glove compartment is locked, so is the trunk and the back
 And I know my rights so you goin' need a warrant for that
 "Aren't you sharp as a tack? You some type of lawyer or something?
 "Somebody important or something?"
 Child, I ain't passed the bar, but I know a little bit
 Enough that you won't illegally search my shit

The artwork of Amit Shimoni, painting famous political leaders such as Abraham Lincoln and Barack Obama as hipsters with bold colors in the background and amusing imagery takes a different look at racial politics. The image of Barack Obama shows the former president with fake dreadlocks stacked neatly at the crown of his head, complete with a single gold hoop earring and a gold chain adorning a loose-fitting white tank top (Shimoni). The painting is both surreal and fantastic, as it portrays a one-time world leader as a basic nobody who could be walking down the street at any point in time. Obama is smiling his characteristic grin and clearly recognizable, but without his full suit or button-up shirt, he resembles an entirely different person.

Viewing this image can incite discussions of the role race played in Obama's election and politics. His election as the first African-American president broke a racial barrier to the highest elected office in the country, but racial politics became exacerbated during his administration and revealed the ugly history of racism from which our nation still clearly has not recovered. As the former president looks just like a normal young man, it can also encourage questions about racial differences and the role profiling plays in the treatment of racial and ethnic minorities.

The balance in these conversations is precarious but demonstrates the value of using popular culture to open and motivate discussion. Some of the films, music, and art can act as triggers for students who see their life experiences reflected all too clearly in them. The instructor must be strategic about the use of these mediums and the way they are introduced and explained to the class to avoid victimizing or fetishizing some experiences for the sake of the education of the others. The classroom should provide a safe and open space for an honest and clear dialogue, but that also means it should feel comfortable to everyone involved. Because the students will already be familiar with some of the popular culture artifacts, and they will have been primed throughout the course to understand the emotional weight associated with them, embracing film, art, and music can lighten and focus the conversations.

Exposing students to the experiences of others enables them to understand why something matters even when it may not affect them directly or explicitly. It enables them to transcend their own position and perspective and analyze alternatives that they might not have otherwise considered. Nothing, of course, will remove an individual from their biases, but popular culture can be used to render the act of challenging the privilege and perspective easier and more meaningful.

Expression of Self

More than anything else, popular culture can allow students to express themselves and their political ideas through mediums in which they are comfortable and fluent. Students can sing along to songs with lyrics that question the balance of government intervention and individual liberties, they can share memes joking about the limitations of a two-party political system, and they can watch movies and TV shows that highlight the dysfunctions of the legislative process. Even when the material presented through text feels distant or irrelevant, artifacts from popular culture can transcend the limitations in understanding such material and bring the course concept to life in an entertaining and engaging way.

Ultimately helping students connect the material with their own sense of self, understanding who they are and what they believe, and how they will contribute to the world serves as a goal that is essential to liberal arts education. It is simply not enough that we teach our students what something is and why it matters, we must also teach them why it matters to them and then help them make the connections necessary to understand how that is the case. This is especially true for students who find the research within the discipline or the historical texts to be difficult to decipher and apply. Using film, art, music, and other modes of popular culture can provide a medium for them to express their opinions and ideas about the material in an easier and more engaging way.

Using popular culture to express oneself can be particularly effective in addressing salient political issues that are complicated and divisive. Addressing the elusive balance between national security and

individual liberty, for example, poses fascinating questions to students as they consider the role of government, regulatory powers, and individual liberties. Using clips from TV shows, political cartoons, and memes can highlight the complexities of these arguments and also empower students to think critically about their own perspectives in them as they grapple with principles at odds with one another.

“Parks and Recreation” (2012) was a TV show that focused on an aspect of government often neglected in popular culture: local bureaucracy. Centered around local government and issues involving its role in the community made the show unique amid the political genre that is often dark and either dramatic or satirical and usually focused on the federal level and Washington DC. In the episode, “Soda Tax” from season 5, episode 2, protagonist Leslie Knope interrogates the spokesperson for a local restaurant, Kathryn Pinewood, on their new soda sizes that seem to promote the consumption of sugary soft drinks as a value to the consumer.

Leslie Knope: Well, Paunch Burger just recently came out with a new 128-ounce option. Most people call it a gallon, but they call it the regular. Then, there is a horrifying 512-ounce version that they call child size. How is this a child-sized soda?

Kathryn Pinewood: Well, it’s roughly the size of a two-year old child, if the child were liquefied. It’s a real bargain at \$1.59.

Knope questions the value from a public health standpoint, arguing about the role this might play in the community’s obesity epidemic while Pinewood maintains that “it’s not our place to speak for the consumer but everyone should buy it” (“Soda Tax”). As the episode title implies, this clip can serve as a segue into a discussion over the New York City soda tax, what the details of the policy were, what was included and excluded, and what principles are ultimately at odds in this policy. It challenges the students to think about the role government plays in their lives and what the balance should be between government and individuals in a harmonious and productive society.

Students can express their attitudes and ideas on government regulation and individual liberties through various cartoons and memes as well. When discussing the changes in public policy after 9/11, the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and the introduction of the PATRIOT ACT, memes that joke “I am so sick of the government looking at, but never liking, my Facebook status” or “You know what really grinds my gears? People who post every detail of their life on social media then complain about the NSA.” Students are forced to consider the strengths and limitations of such policies and explore their feelings towards them.

As social media becomes more ubiquitous and far-reaching, questions about information, privacy, government access, and the discretion of the individual become more complicated but also more imperative to discuss. Popular culture can provide students with a medium through which they can challenge and determine their own ideas on these issues. As these artifacts are presented in tandem with the themes of policy prioritization, security vs. liberty tradeoffs, and governmental influence, students are able to consider these concepts and apply them to their own lives and experiences.

4. CONCLUSION

Incorporating popular culture into a political science curriculum proves to be beneficial, especially to the student who is unfamiliar or less interested in the material. By approaching this type of inclusion in a strategic and thoughtful manner, selecting pieces that specifically speak to the issue at hand, introducing them beforehand and explaining them afterward with enough background to enable students’ full comprehension, popular culture proves to be an effective teaching tool. It can break down barriers of understanding and interest, igniting engagement and encouraging students to critically analyze routine aspects of their life that they might have only considered to be entertaining rather than educational.

Employing popular culture artifacts like music, film and TV, art, cartoons, and others facilitate students' connection to key course concepts through experiences they extend beyond the traditional confines of education. It is particularly important in communicating the value of the course, not just as another general education requirement or credit hour, but as the beginning of a lifelong quest to ignite civic interest and political participation.

As students consider the value of their college coursework, especially those courses not directly related to the major, they may ask why material matters, why it is important now, why it is important to others, and why it should matter to them. Forgoing a self-indulgent tirade extolling the worthiness of a liberal arts education, these questions are important to our students, and thus, should be important to us as educators as well. We serve to help them make sense of a complicated world and to teach them critical and analytical thinking skills that they will use for the rest of their lives.

Interjecting popular culture into the curriculum can make it easier for the teacher and more exciting for the student as they answer these questions about the value of their classes and their experience within them. Demonstrating relevance provides an answer to the question of "Why does this matter?" while using popular culture as a generational translator offers a response to "Why does this matter now?" Being exposed to other experiences suggests an understanding of "Why does this matter to others" just as employing popular culture to express oneself answers "Why does this matter to me?" These questions are relevant to student needs and curriculum values, utilizing popular culture as a pedagogical tool to bridge this gap.

This paper argues that applying popular culture to the political science discipline can enhance and excite the learning process. Though the examples and explanations given here focus on the political sciences, the principles are undoubtedly applicable to a variety of disciplines and provide the same role in each application. Popular culture can cause concepts to become more engaging, more accessible, and more exciting, and thus, demonstrates the incredible value of the material being learned, making it more relevant and meaningful for student engagement.

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