

**BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY**  
**SOCIOLOGY 154A**  
**COMMUNITY STRUCTURE AND YOUTH SUBCULTURE**

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*Instructors:*

David Cunningham  
dcunning@brandeis.edu  
x62633 (office – Pearlman 207)  
781-752-6062 (cell)

*Graduate Teaching Fellows:*

Jennifer Girouard (girouard@brandeis.edu)  
Miranda Waggoner (waggoner@brandeis.edu)

*Class:* M W Th 11:10-12:00  
in Schwartz Auditorium

*Peer Teaching Assistants:*

Kimberlee Bachman (bachmank@brandeis.edu)  
Blake Hyatt (bhyatt@brandeis.edu)  
Mike Martin (mmartin@brandeis.edu)  
Casara Nemes (casara@brandeis.edu)  
Cesar Olivier (colivier@brandeis.edu)  
Lauren Shapiro (ljshap@brandeis.edu)

*Community Engaged Fellow:*

Lindsay Markel (lmarkel@brandeis.edu)

*Office hours* (in Pearlman 207):

M 2:00-3:00  
Th 10:00-11:00 & by appointment

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This course will focus on community structure generally, and especially on how the patterning of relations within any community generates predictable outcomes at the individual and small-group level. We will begin by introducing a framework for analyzing both subcultures and communities, and then deal in more detail with three generalizable community types: 1) small towns or rural communities, 2) cities or urban communities, and 3) suburban communities. A special focus of this course will be on youth subcultures found in various spaces, as we will argue that the subcultures that emerge within each community type provide a tangible basis for an analysis of the community generally. We will draw on a wide range of sources – including books, articles, oral histories, films, and music – to explore these subcultures. Our main goal will be to apply generalizable theoretical ideas to actual communities. To this end, this course will have a community-engaged component, in partnership with members of the Brandeis, Waltham, and possibly Boston communities. With this community-based work, as well as in written assignments, you will have the opportunity to analyze how community structure shapes observable phenomena that we often interpret as the result of individual choice.

**Office Hours**

David has scheduled office hours on Monday from 2:00 to 3:00 and Thursday from 10:00 to 11:00. If these times are not convenient for you, we can make other arrangements – email is generally a good way to contact any of us, and our email addresses are listed at the top of this page. We encourage each of you to come to office hours to discuss problems with the class or any other issues that interest or concern you. Each of us will generally be available for quick questions immediately before or after class, and you can also leave messages in any of our mailboxes outside of the Sociology office in Pearlman. Additionally, if you need to contact David at other times, his phone numbers are listed at the top of this page.

## Readings

The following books are required for this course:

*Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team, and a Dream*, by H.R. Bissinger  
*Pretty in Punk: Girls' Gender Resistance in a Boys' Subculture*, by Lauraine Leblanc  
*Yes Yes Y'all: The Experience Music Project Oral History of Hip Hop's First Decade*,  
by Jim Fricke and Charlie Ahearn  
*Youth-Led Community Organizing: Theory and Action*, by Melvin Delgado and Lee Staples  
*No More Prisons*, by William Upski Wimsatt (currently out of stock; will post on LATTE  
page if necessary)

Additional articles and excerpts will also be required and available on our course LATTE page (each of those is referred to as an 'L' reading in the course outline). *Please note that reading assignments should be done by the date listed on the syllabus -- we will generally discuss them during that class period.*

## Assignments and Grading

Community portrait	20%
Artifact analysis	20%
Final essay	20%
Project reflection essay	15%
Contribution to group project	15%
Overall participation	10%

### Community portrait

Throughout the semester, we will stress the interrelationship between subcultures and their community-level surroundings. This assignment is intended to provide you with experience analyzing the broad settings within which subcultures sometimes take root. Following frameworks introduced in class and within various readings, you will develop an analysis of a community of your choosing, taking care to touch on key dimensions of community organization.

### Artifact analysis

One of the key premises of this course is that subcultural products represent, among other things, reactions to their authors'/creators' surroundings. In class, we will examine elements of various products (artifacts), including zines, album packaging, and song lyrics. For this assignment, you need to select a set of artifacts of your choosing, and analyze how they connect to their community-level surroundings.

### Final essay

During the final week of the semester, you will receive 1-2 broad essay questions designed to tie together key sets of ideas about community structure and youth subculture. By a due date to be determined (sometime during finals week), you will need to hand in your written response.

### Contribution to group project, and project reflection essay

Beginning in late January, most of our Thursday meetings will focus on community-engaged work. You will meet in smaller sections focused on the development of a group project rooted in a particular community, or else on background research work tied to those community-based projects. Early in the semester, we will solicit your preferences for section assignments, and we will do our best to assign everyone to their first or second choices. Thereafter, you will work directly with your assigned TAs/TFs to propose and carry out a group project related (either directly, or through research support) to some sort of event of value to our community partners. Note that this community-engaged work will require that some, though not necessarily all, of you devote out-of-class time to working with community partners. We expect each of you to contribute to the collective project pursued by your group, and to submit an essay reflecting on the project generally, as well as your specific role and perspective on its development. We will spend lots of time throughout the semester discussing these projects, as well as the content of the reflection essay.

### Participation

Much of the benefit of this course will come through class discussion. It is therefore very important for each of you to keep up with the reading and come to class prepared to discuss issues you found interesting or want clarified. We understand that in-class participation is sometimes difficult in a large class, and we therefore view the 'participation' component of your grade very broadly -- meaning that we pay attention to your contributions *during* class, as well as whether you ask questions and/or suggest ideas, possible topics of discussion, connections between class topics and current events, etc. *outside* of class (i.e. before or after class, in office hours, or over email). Finally, we will play relevant music selections on most days immediately before class (between 11:05-11:10) – feel free to participate by suggesting or bringing in interesting songs.

**If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.**

### Course Outline

#### Weeks 1 & 2:

##### Wednesday, January 16:

- An introduction: the history of a scene  
-film: *Dogtown and Z-Boys*

##### Thursday, January 17:

- Film, con't.

##### Monday, January 21:

- No class (MLK holiday)

##### Wednesday, January 23:

- Understanding subcultures and scenes  
-film discussion

##### Thursday, January 24:

- Introduction to group projects

Week 3 (January 28-31):

- Social structure & community structure: key dimensions  
-readings: Emile Durkheim, "Egoistic Suicide" and "Anomic Suicide" (L)
- Thursday section meeting

Weeks 4-5 (February 4-14):

- Rural communities (cases: Odessa, TX, and Greene County, NC)  
-reading: H.R. Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights*
- Thursday section meetings

**Community portrait due 2/14**

Week 6 (February 18-21): No class (Midterm recess)

Weeks 7-8 (February 25- March 6):

- Inequality and subcultural expression  
-readings: Andy Bennett & Keith Kahn-Harris, "Introduction" to *After Subculture* (L)  
Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (L)  
Geoff Stahl, "'It's Like Canada Reduced': Setting the Scene in Montreal" (L)  
Lauraine LeBlanc, *Pretty in Punk*  
Zine excerpts (L)
- Thursday section meetings

Weeks 9-12 (March 10-April 3):

- Urban subcultures in historical perspective (case: New York City)  
-reading: William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (L)  
Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop* (L)  
Jim Fricke & Charlie Ahearn, *Yes Yes Y'All*  
Tricia Rose, *Black Noise* (L)
- Thursday section meetings

**Artifact analysis due 3/12**

Weeks 13-14 (April 7-17):

- Structure and subculture in suburbia (case: California's Antelope Valley)  
-reading: William Finnegan, "The Unwanted" (L)
- Group project presentations

**Group project reflection essay due 4/17**

Week 15 (April 21-24): No class (Passover and Spring recess)

Week 16 (April 28-30):

- Integrative wrap-up (case: Amarillo, TX)  
-reading: Chris Ziegler, "Death in Texas" (L)

**Final essays distributed 4/30**