

Patricia Gibbs Stayte
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Human Rights in Popular Culture Project (HRPCP)

Introduction:

The project will help students learn about Human Rights Issues, connect their everyday actions with a Human Rights Issue, and advocate for better, more sustainable, and just conditions and relationships through an image advertisement about the issue. Using C.Wright Mills' "Sociological Imagination" as a conceptual starting point, students will choose a popular culture product and analyze it in a global social context. Students will use the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights List of Issues as a resource.

Resources:

The idea for this assignment came from a number of sources.

First, seminal material for this assignment comes from C. Wright Mills' Sociological Imagination.

Second, I attended an American Sociological Association Meeting in Washington, D.C. and participated in a workshop on how to connect the Sociological Imagination to everyday objects, specifically to a pair of Michael Jordan running shoes. For more information on this see:

Michael Jordan Meets C. Wright Mills: Illustrating the Sociological Imagination with Objects from Everyday Life Peter Kaufman. *Teaching Sociology*. Vol. 25, No. 4 (Oct., 1997), pp. 309-314> Published by: American Sociological Association.

Last, my fellowship in the Stanford Human Rights Education Initiative allowed me to develop this assignment aimed at getting students to be exposed to the history of Human Rights and the UN's Human Rights Issues List, and to make important connections between Human Rights and their everyday lives.

They refer to the List of Human Rights Issues from the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights List of Issues at:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/ListofIssues.aspx>

Objectives

Upon successful completion of the assignment, students will be able to:

1. Connect an everyday life choice to a human rights issue.
2. Exercise critical thinking skills as they relate to everyday acts in American society.
3. Think about contemporary Popular Culture in social context and as it relates to international human rights.
4. Make important connections between sociological research and popular culture as it relates to international human rights issues.

5. Use empirical evidence of human rights abuses in connection with popular culture people, places or products.
6. Help build a repository of best practices in popular culture research as it relates to international human rights issues.
7. Examine current examples of critical popular culture analysis in new media as it relates to international human rights issues (inequality, slavery, poverty, environmental issues...).
8. See the context of American popular culture consumption and empower students to be aware of choices they have that are more, rather than less, sustainable.
9. See the potential of popular culture in progressive social change.

Project:

1. Research the United Nations Human Rights basic history and list of issues.
2. Explore the relationship between a Human Rights issue and a popular culture person, place, object or behavior (PPOB).
3. Conduct a literature and new social media review of Human Rights issues and popular culture.
4. Do a one to two page write up (persuasive, empirically based, and supported with strong sources that are academically cited and have licensing permission) on your findings about the connections between the popular culture PPOB you are focusing on and the Human Rights issue. Focus on how the PPOB or current arrangement specifically could be improved, or made more sustainable or just.
5. Create a one page or simple image advertisement for the new PPOB relationship. Share your findings with the class at the class website (PDF image, YouTube video, Internet, Twitter, Facebook, Social change organization, or social research organization).

SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION & HUMAN RIGHTS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

“Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both” Mills, C. Wright, 1959.

Compose a **two-paged, single spaced, typed** paper that analyzes a person, place, object or behavior (PPOB) from your everyday life using your **sociological imagination**. For more information on this, see your text and Mill’s “**The Promise**” article in your reader. Really work to “socially situate” your PPOB and show its connection to larger global patterns of social interaction, inequality, human rights and social institutions. The aim of this paper is to critically analyze a person, place, object or behavior– don’t convince us of the unending usefulness of it. Instead, tell us about what is problematic about it. Don’t just accept it as taken for granted.

Question it. Connect it to human rights abuses.

On the first page of your paper, cover items 1-7. On the second page, cover item 8.

- 1) **FIRST, learn basic information about the history of Human Rights and the UN Declaration of Human Rights at:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O8ME7kxMk4g>
<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/history.shtml>
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ABOUTUS/Pages/BriefHistory.aspx>

Choose and cite* (using an academic format) a Human Rights Issue:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/WhatareHumanRights.aspx>
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/ListofIssues.aspx>
<http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/humanrights/resources/plain.asp>
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Business/Pages/Tools.aspx>

2) DESCRIPTION (Be very, very, very brief here, ie. 1 short sentence max.)

Explain what Human Rights Issue AND person, place or object are under consideration?

3) HISTORICAL DIAGNOSIS (Be very, very brief here)

When did the PPOB come into existence? Why did it appear at this time? How has the PPOB changed over time? What other aspects of social life have changed as a result of this PPOB? How has your use/ understanding of this PPOB changed over time? What will this PPOB be like in the future? Will it still exist? Why or why not?

4) IMMEDIATE DIAGNOSIS (Make sure you cover this)

How does the PPOB relate to other aspects of social life? How is the PPOB used, bought and sold? In what context does it exist? **WHO BENEFITS FROM THE PPOB? WHO SUFFERS FROM IT?** Why does it appear the way it does? How does it directly relate to your life? Here, really try and discuss it in a political – economic light, that is – where does it fit in the “big picture” of things? How is the PPOB connected to a Human Rights abuse?

5) GLOBAL DIAGNOSIS (An opportunity to bring in the “big picture”)

Does this PPOB exist in other countries? If so, in what form? How is it used there? How is this use different from its use in the U.S.? Is it altered in any way when used elsewhere? **Does it affect life on the planet in any significant way? Where and how is it made or experienced? What PATTERNS OF INEQUALITY exist globally to do with the PPOB? What human rights abuses is the PPOB related to?**

6) MILLS’ SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION (This is optional) Locate the PPOB in relation to Mills’ pairings of: Biography – History; Self – Society; Personal Troubles – Public Issues

7) YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION (Be sure to cover this)

Why do you think developing a sociological imagination is important? How has doing this exercise developed your sociological imagination? Explain.

8) IMAGE – On the second page of your paper, **create** an image that illustrates the relationship between the PPOB and the human rights abuse. Use your sociological imagination. If you use a web or other image created by someone else, cite the source and personalize it.

*** For writing assistance, please see Foothill’s Teaching and Learning Center located in Room 3526 adjacent to the library. Call them at 650-949-7444.**

REFLECTION:

Proposed questions...

1. Why did you decide to incorporate HRE into your intro/ gateway course?

I decided to incorporate HRE into my courses specifically because of my exposure to the SHREI fellowship. I have always been interested in HRE, but never had the direct opportunity to substantively consider it and work on a concrete project in this area.

**2. What pedagogical innovations, learnings or changes did this require?
(social media, incorporating multiple forms of narrative, syllabus design)**

It required me to create a short paper / image exercise that ties into the course through C.Wright Mills' concept of The Sociological Imagination. As part of this, I made an HTML page at my course companion websites that provided resources for students to learn the basic history of the UN and the UNDHR. It also required me to explore how to have students both write about and create an image using a Sociological Imagination to connect a Popular Culture person, place, object or behavior to human rights abuses.

3. What are your successes?

Overall, the exercise helps develop students' Sociological Imaginations and an awareness of Human Rights in their everyday lives. It also helps them think about how they could begin to change negative relationships. Students make important connections between concepts (such as the sociological imagination) and their everyday lives – and they begin to understand the global and human rights implications of these. One student said “When I did the exercise, something just clicked. It’s like the scene from “The Gods Must Be Crazy,” when the Coke bottle enters the society. At first everyone sees it as a good thing but then it starts to destroy the society. I never really considered that in my own life. But when I did the paper, I made the connection that my everyday life choices are like that Coke bottle. Worse, that they are connected to human rights abuses. I never saw that before. I never thought of Nike in that way. And now I do.”(Soc 8(1), Sp 14)

4. What are the challenges and obstacles faced?

Some students take a rational choice approach to understanding social life and these students reject the idea that inequality or human rights abuses are problematic because they see individual actors as having complete or majority control over their circumstances.

Some students lack the academic (research, writing, critical thinking, and/or conceptual) skills to do the exercise well.

All students are encouraged to visit the Foothill Teaching and Learning Center where they can get free writing and other academic tutorial assistance.

5. How do you source materials?

The conceptual root of the exercise is C. Wright Mills' “The Promise” (chapter 1) from the book, *The Sociological Imagination*. (Mills, C. Wright. “The Sociological Imagination.” New York, Oxford University Press, 1959.) In class, we use a reader, “Mapping the Social Landscape” by Susan Ferguson. “The Promise” is a reading in this reader. (Mills, C. Wright. 2013. “The Promise.” In Susan J. Ferguson (Ed.) ‘Mapping the Social Landscape: Readings in Sociology.’ Pp 1-7. Seventh Edition. McGraw Hill. New York., New York.) We read this as a group and then discuss the main points of the reading. We go through information on the html page, that has several short videos and

an explanation and some examples of the UNDHR. I then go over the assignment criteria using the example of a running shoe. Students are then asked to choose a person, place, object or behavior for their own analysis and application exercise. Through my SHREI participation, I have researched Human Rights materials and use them – see section 1 above.