

MALEDICTA:

"BAD" LANGUAGE, RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER IN AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE

REE 325, CL 323, MAS 363R, WGS 340

COURSE SYLLABUS

Instructor: Thomas Jesús Garza (he/him)
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Office hours: Virtual Hours: T 11:00am - 12:30pm
In person: M 2:30pm - 4:00pm and
any other time by appointment in BUR
458
Class time: MW 1:00pm-2:30 pm in BUR 224

Teaching
Assistant: _____
Office: BUR 582
Office hours: TBA
Phone: 471-3607 (Slavic Dept.)

RUDE

DIRTY

Required texts: [all texts for this course are made available on Canvas at no extra cost]

- *Bad Language: Are Some Words Better than Others?* [BL], E. Battistella. Oxford UP, 2007.
- *Expletive Deleted: A Good Look at Bad Language* [ED], Ruth Wajnryb. Free Press, 2005.
- Course packet of readings [CP], available on Canvas.

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Ma•le•díc•ta: (Latin. n., pl. *maledictum*, sg.), curse words, insults; profane and obscene language of all kinds.

Welcome all! What makes a word “bad?” Why does it seem that one person can use a particular “bad” word with impunity, and another cannot? Why are certain words used specifically to hurt, insult, or demean another person? How do race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, and gender identity play into the use of “bad” language in the US? This course undertakes the examination of modern usage of language that has been designated as “bad” through social convention and “norm.” We will examine usage of various forms of obscenities, profanities, and invectives in common usage to arrive at an understanding of how the products of popular culture portray *maledicta* in situational contexts. Through an examination of various popular texts culled from print, film, and music, participants will study the context and use of “bad” language and attempt to determine the underlying principles that dictate its social effect and determine its impact on the intended audience. Though most texts and usage will be taken from English-language sources, several non-English examples of *maledicta* from Mexican Spanish and Russian will also be considered for contrast and comparison.

CONTENT WARNING: The materials and discussions in this course will, necessarily, expose participants to language and images that may be considered offensive, abusive, and/or denigrating.

i. LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT STATEMENT

I / We acknowledge the Alabama-Coushatta, Caddo, Carrizo/Comecrudo, Coahuiltecan, Comanche, Kickapoo, Lipan Apache, Tonkawa, and Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo, and all Indigenous People's lands on which the University of Texas is situated. I also acknowledge the Tribal Sovereignty of all Native Nations past, present, and future, whose collective experiences inform the work we do.

ii. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and Participation: You are asked to attend class meetings regularly, and are invited to participate **vigorously** in discussions, do all assigned readings and film viewings, and prepare written and revision assignments. Critical analysis, synthesis, and cogent argumentation are essential to the success of the course; precise articulation – orally and in writing -- of your understanding of the various “texts” we consider this term is essential to your own success. REES or MALS participants in this course will be required to work with a significant number of the texts in the original Russian or Spanish.

- 1) **Response Paper:** Each participant will submit a very brief (no fewer than 2, no longer than 3 pages) response paper to one of a series of quotations (posted on Canvas in *Assignments*) from the required readings presented in class. This paper is to be uploaded to Canvas by the beginning of class on **Monday, September 25**.
- 2) **Infographic:** A single-poster graphic representation of **one** of any of the following topics: • The use of the F-word in everyday situations and environments; • The role of status and power (boss vs. employee; upperclassman vs. freshman, etc.) and the use of *maledicta*; • Women as targets of *maledicta*; • *Maledicta* in the context of comedy; • Challenges to the First Amendment through censorship; • The PMRC and the addition of warning labels on popular music; • The use of the N-word in American vernacular; • The shift in the perception of Carlin’s “7 Words You Can’t Say on TV” in 2023; • The legacy of Lenny Bruce and the use of *maledicta* in comedy today; • The case of rap and hip hop music /lyrics and the use of *maledicta*; • *Maledicta* as personal attacks, especially of an individual’s identity (race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc.); • The relationship between *maledicta* and sex (the act(s), *not* gender). Your infographic should be uploaded to Canvas by **Monday, October 16**. The infographic should, like an essay, present the data/images/ graphics you choose in a way that conveys your position/argument. Projects should be created on Canva or other web-based design platform.

- 3) **Film Review:** A two-page critical review – with a focus on the use and impact of *maledicta* – of any one of the films treated in the syllabus is due on **Monday, November 6**.
- 4) **Revision Project:** Course participants, working in groups of three or four, are required to upload to Canvas by the end of our final class, **Monday, December 4**, a group revision project and write-up of no fewer than 2, no more than 3 pages, treating any of the films, music, or literary texts covered during the semester, **or** a “text(s)” chosen by the participants with the prior approval of the instructor. Sample treatments, which may include video, audio, or digital media, will be discussed well in advance of the due date. Groups are required to communicate with the instructor about the treatments well in advance of the due date, as well as to turn in a brief, one paragraph prospectus (via email or Canvas) justifying the choice of text(s) before beginning the revision project.

iii. COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students who participate fully in the course content will, by the end of the term, be able to:

- recognize and identify the cultural historic contexts in which *maledicta* occur;
- analyze, evaluate, and comment on various types of cultural and filmic texts that use *maledicta*;
- organize and present information on a specific issue or use of *maledicta* in a terse, vivid, graphic format;
- formulate an argument and respond in writing to cultural products (written texts, images, music, or film clips) related to *maledicta*;
- argue and present in writing a critical opinion/review of a film that incorporates *maledicta*;
- revise and present a reimagined version of a “text” originally performed with much *maledicta* into one that eliminates offensive language.

iv. ASSESSMENT

While your Teaching Assistant will do a great job of advising, assessing, and commenting on your various assignments, remember that **only** your professor is the instructor of record for this course. As such, he determines the final grades in the course. **Any questions you might have at any time in the semester about your grades or grading need to be brought to him *before* the last day of class.**

There are four components of the final course assessment. These components and their relative weight in the final course assessment are:

Response Paper (2-3 pp.)	20%
Infographic	20%
Film Review	20%
Revision Project (project, plus 3-4 pp.)	40%

Final grades will be determined based on the following University scale. The University does not recognize the grade of A+.

< 59	60-63	64-66	67-69	70-73	74-76	77-79	80-83	84-86	87-89	90-93	94-100
F	D-	D	D+	C-	C	C+	B-	B	B+	A-	A

V. HONOR CODE

The University of Texas Honor Codes reads:

“The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness and respect toward peers and community.”

This class provides a Safe Space™ for everyone in it, inclusive and respectful of all individuals, identities, and points of view. As such, ideas, opinions, and perspectives different from and, sometimes, in opposition to your own are expressed and always respected. Every participant is expected to adhere to the principles of the Honor Code throughout the course, in dealing with the instructors, TA, and fellow students in completing all assignments and interacting in class and offices. Your instructors will do the same.

VI. EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Occupants of buildings on the UT campus are required to evacuate buildings when an alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside. Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building. Students requiring assistance in evacuation should inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class. In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors. Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the following: The University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office. For other important Emergency Information, go to:

<http://www.utexas.edu/safety/preparedness/>

VII. COVID AND RECORDING PROTOCOLS

To help preserve our in-person learning environment, the University recommends the following.

- Adhere to University's current [mask guidance](#).
- [Vaccinations are widely available](#), free and not billed to health insurance. The vaccine will help protect against the transmission of the virus to others and reduce serious symptoms in those who are vaccinated.
- [Proactive Community Testing](#) remains an important part of the university's efforts to protect our community. Tests are fast and free. Visit protect.utexas.edu for more information.

Sharing of Course Materials is Prohibited:

No materials used in this class, including, but not limited to, lecture hand-outs, videos, assessments (quizzes, exams, papers, projects, homework assignments), in-class materials, review sheets, and additional problem sets, may be shared online or with anyone outside of the class unless you have my explicit, written permission. Unauthorized sharing of materials promotes cheating. It is a violation of the University's Student Honor Code and an act of academic dishonesty. Faculty are aware of the sites used for sharing materials, and any materials found online that are associated with you, or any suspected unauthorized sharing of materials, will be reported to Student Conduct and Academic Integrity in the Office of the Dean of Students. These reports can result in sanctions in the course.

Viii. STUDENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- You have a right to a learning environment that supports mental and physical wellness.
- You have a right to respect.
- You have a right to be assessed and graded fairly.
- You have a right to freedom of opinion and expression.
- You have a right to privacy and confidentiality.
- You have a right to meaningful and equal participation, to self-organize groups to improve your learning environment.
- You have a right to learn in an environment that is welcoming to all people. No student shall be isolated, excluded or diminished in any way.

With these rights come responsibilities:

- You are responsible for taking care of yourself, managing your time, and communicating with the teaching team and with others if things start to feel out of control or overwhelming.
- You are responsible for acting in a way that is worthy of respect and always respectful of others.
- Your experience with this course is directly related to the quality of the energy that you bring to it, and your energy shapes the quality of your peers' experiences.
- You are responsible for creating an inclusive environment and for speaking up when someone is excluded.
- You are responsible for holding yourself accountable to these standards, holding each other to these standards and holding the teaching team accountable, as well.

Personal Pronouns

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name, unless they have added a "preferred name" with the Gender and Sexuality Center:

(<http://diversity.utexas.edu/genderandsexuality/publications-and-resources/>). We will happily honor your request to address you by a name that is different from what appears on the official roster, and by the gender pronouns you use (she / he / they / ze / zir / etc), as well as in Spanish (ella / él / elle) and Russian (она / он / они / оне/ и т.д.) Please advise us of any changes early in the semester so that we may make appropriate updates to our records. For instructions on how to add your pronouns to Canvas, visit <https://utexas.instructure.com/courses/633028/pages/profile-pronouns>.

Services for Students with Disabilities

The university is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive learning environment consistent with university policy and federal and state law. Please let me know if you experience any barriers to learning so I can work with you to ensure you have equal opportunity to participate fully in this course. If you are a student with a disability, or think you may have a disability, and need accommodations, please contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). Please refer to SSD's website for contact and more information: <http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>. If you are already registered with SSD, please get your Accommodation Letter to me *as early as possible in the semester* so we can discuss your approved accommodations and needs in this course.

Counseling and Mental Health Center

The Counseling and Mental Health Center serves UT's diverse campus community by providing high quality, innovative and culturally informed mental health programs and services that enhance and

support students' well-being, academic and life goals. To learn more about your counseling and mental health options, call CMHC at (512) 471-3515. If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, call the CMHC Crisis Line 24/7 at (512) 471-2255.

The Sanger Learning Center

Did you know that more than one-third of UT undergraduate students use the Sanger Learning Center each year to improve their academic performance? All students are welcome to take advantage of the Sanger Center's classes and workshops, private learning specialist appointments, peer academic coaching, and tutoring for more than 70 courses in 15 different subject areas. For more information, please visit <http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/slc> or call 512-471-3614 (JES A332).

Undergraduate Writing Center

<http://uwc.utexas.edu/Libraries:><http://www.lib.utexas.edu/>

Instructional Technology Services

<http://www.utexas.edu/its/>

Student Emergency Services

<http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/>

BeVocal

BeVocal is a university-wide initiative to promote the idea that individual Longhorns have the power to prevent high-risk behavior and harm. At UT Austin all Longhorns have the power to intervene and reduce harm. To learn more about BeVocal and how you can help to build a culture of care on campus, go to: <https://wellnessnetwork.utexas.edu/BeVocal>.

Title IX Reporting

Title IX is a federal law that protects against sex and gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, unprofessional or inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature, dating/domestic violence and stalking at federally funded educational institutions. UT Austin is committed to fostering a learning and working environment free from discrimination in all its forms. When unprofessional or inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature occurs in our community, the university can: 1. Intervene to prevent harmful behavior from continuing or escalating. 2. Provide support and remedies to students and employees who have experienced harm or have become involved in a Title IX investigation. 3. Investigate and discipline violations of the university's relevant policies. Beginning January 1, 2020,

Texas Senate Bill 212 requires all employees of Texas universities, including faculty, report any information to the Title IX Office regarding sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking that is disclosed to them. Texas law requires that all employees who witness or receive any information of this type (including, but not limited to, writing assignments, class discussions, or one-on-one conversations) must be reported. I am a Responsible Employee and must report any Title IX related incidents that are disclosed in writing, discussion, or one-on-one – including virtually online. Before talking with me, or with any faculty or staff member about a Title IX related incident, be sure to ask whether they are a responsible employee. If you would like to speak with someone who can provide support or remedies without making an official report to the university, please email advocate@austin.utexas.edu. For more information about reporting options and resources, visit

<http://www.titleix.utexas.edu/>, contact the Title IX Office via email at titleix@austin.utexas.edu, or call 512-471-0419. Although graduate teaching and research assistants are not subject to Texas Senate

Bill 212, they are still mandatory reporters under Federal Title IX laws and are required to report a wide range of behaviors we refer to as unprofessional or inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature, including the types of conduct covered under Texas Senate Bill 212. The Title IX office has developed supportive ways to respond to a survivor and compiled campus resources to support survivors.

Q Drop Policy

If you want to drop a class after the 12th class day, you'll need to execute a Q drop before the Q-drop deadline, which typically occurs near the middle of the semester. Under Texas law, you are only allowed six Q drops while you are in college at any public Texas institution. For more information, see: <http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/csacc/academic/adddrop/qdrop>.

COURSE OUTLINE

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER

When Language Strikes Back

- The History of "Bad" Language
- Defining Bad Language: "I Know It When I Hear It"
- The F-Word: What is "Bad" Language Linguistically?
- "Banned in Boston": Books, Language, and Censorship
- You Can't Say That! The Case of The US v. Lenny Bruce



👉 **Response Paper is due on Monday, September 25**



OCTOBER

Language, Comedy, and Music

- George Carlin: Seven Words You Can't Say on TV
- Tipper Gore v. MTV

👉 **Infographic is due on Monday, October 16**

- The Rise of Hip-Hop, Rap, and Spoken *Maledicta*
- The N-Word Reemerges
- Cable TV Pushes the Envelope

NOVEMBER**Bad Language, Race, and Gender in Film**

- MPAA Rating System

👉 **Film Review is due on Monday, November 6**

- *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966)
- *M*A*S*H* (1970) and the F-Word
- Quentin Tarantino v. Spike Lee

**DECEMBER****You Take That Back!**

- What is the Impact of “Bad” Language?
- “Bad” Rewritten

👉 **Video Projects are due on Monday, December 4!**

SYLLABUS OF ASSIGNMENTS

Monday, August 21

Introduction to “*Maledicta*”

Overview of syllabus, texts and course requirements

👂 Cee Lo Green’s “F*** You” vs. “Forget You”

For next meeting, read Ch. 1 “Falling Foul” and Ch. 2 “Precisely Foul” in *ED*

Wednesday, August 23

Definitions of Terms: Obscenity v. Profanity

- What are “*maledicta*” anyway?
- Why do “we” swear the way “we” do?
- 👁 View scenes from *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and *South Park* (1999)

For next meeting, read “Swearing: A Cursory Introduction” by Hughes, and “On Profanity” by Doroghazi in *CP*.

Monday, August 28

**Setting the Stage I: A History of “Bad”
Language in Western Civilization**

- The Historical Evolution of Bad Language
- 👁 View “Why Are Bad Words So Bad?”

For next meeting, read Ch. 1 and 4: “Bad Language: Realism versus Relativism” and “Bad Words” in *BL*, and “Swearing” by Anderson and Trudgill in *CP*.



Wednesday, August 30 **Setting the Stage II: What Exactly IS “Bad” Language?**

- Markers of *maledicta*
- Role of the listener/recipient
- 👂 Listen to excerpts from James Joyce’s *Ulysses*

For next meeting, read Ch. 4 and 5 “Where the F***” and “The Wild Thing” in *ED*, and Sheidlower’s “Introduction: About the F-Word” in *CP*.

LABOR DAY HOLIDAY



Wednesday, September 6 **The F-Word**

- Linguistic considerations
- Social considerations and the dilution of the word
- 👁 View scenes from *Blue Velvet* (1986), *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994)

For next meeting, read “Regulation of Indecent Speech” in *CP*.

Monday, September 11 **Regulating Language and The Slippery Slope**

- Problems in regulating language
- Coming to consensus on how and what to regulate

For next meeting, read “Banned Books: From *Harriet the Spy* to *The Catcher in the Rye*” by Brunner in *CP*.



Wednesday, September 13 **Banned in Boston! Literature under Siege**

- What were criteria for the bans?
- What does national culture say about profanity?
- Excerpts from Mexican and Russian literature

For next meeting, read the First Amendment of the US Constitution, and “Book Censorship” in *CP*.

Monday, September 18 **What Does the 1st Amendment Protect?**

- Free Speech v Freedom of Speech
- 👁 View scenes from *The People Vs. Larry Flynt* (1996)
- Examples of “protected speech” in the US

For next meeting, read “The Trials of Lenny Bruce” by Doug Linder.





Lenny Bruce Mug Shot

Wednesday, September 20 **The Case of Lenny Bruce**

- 👁 Lenny Bruce performances on obscenity
- Review case history and verdict
- Was Lenny Bruce a scapegoat?

For next meeting, read “Richard Pryor” and “Shock Jock” in *CP*.



Don't forget: Your Response Paper is due on Monday!

Monday, September 25 **Lenny Bruce's Inheritors: From Richard Pryor to Howard Stern**

- Breaking Barriers: Pryor's Standup
- “Shock Jocks” and Profanity
- **Response Papers are due today!**

For next meeting, read “N*****” [from Wikipedia (Yes, Wikipedia!)] in *CP*.



Chris Rock on Stage

Wednesday, September 27 **The N-Word: Does Comedy Excuse Language?**

- Humor v. Language
- Current models: Dave Chappelle, Chris Rock v. Louis C.K.
- The Case of Michael Richards (2006)

For next meeting, bring in examples of “controversial” language in current television media.

Monday, October 2 **Bad Language and the Media**

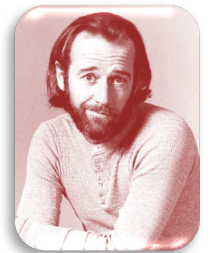
- Does it matter *where* bad language occurs?
- 👁 Watch segment from “The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour”

For next meeting, read transcript of George Carlin's “Filthy Words” and “A Tribute to George Carlin” in *CP*.

Wednesday, October 4 **Words You Can't Say on TV**

- Carlin's “Seven Words” and Why *Those* Words
- 👁 View stand-up “7 Words You Can't Say on TV”

For next meeting, read Lombardi's “Music and Censorship” in *CP*.



George Carlin

Monday, October 9 **Music, Lyrics, Performance, and Bad Language**

- Relationship between music lyrics, obscenity, and censorship
- 👂 Listen to selected early rock songs from various “banned lists”

For next meeting, read intro to *Raising Kids in an X-Rated Society* by Tipper Gore in *CP*.

Wednesday, October 11

Tipper Gore and the PMRC

- Rock music lyrics, profanity, and Capitol Hill Moms
- 👂 Listen to songs on PMRC “hit list”

For next meeting, read Ch. 6 “Bad Accents” in *BL*, and “Rap, Rock, and Censorship” by Deflem in *CP*.

👉 **Don't Forget: Infographic is due on Monday!**



Tipper Gore and PMRC



2 Live Crew LP cover 1986

Monday, October 16 The Rise of Hip Hop

- The creation of a new musical genre, and new language of criticism
- 👂 Listen to “Me So Horny” by 2 Live Crew
- **Upload in Infographic today!**

For next meeting, read “Congress Examines Hip Hop” and “The Language of Political Correctness” by Allan and Burrige in *CP*.

Wednesday, October 18

Hip Hop Music and the Written Word (Graffiti)

- The Language of Rap: Poetry, Lyric, Message
- 👁 Watch segment from *Style Wars* (1983)

For next meeting, read “The Blue Tube: Foul Language on Prime Time Network TV” and “PTC Study Shows Almost 70% Jump in Bad Language on Broadcast TV” in *CP*.



Monday, October 23 Language, Cable, and TV Culture

- Ratings v. Language
- 👁 View scenes from *The Sopranos* and *Dexter*

For next class, read “FCC Regulation of Broadcast Obscenity, Indecency, and Profanity” and “High Court Weighs Policy against Curse Words on TV” in *CP*.

Wednesday, October 25

Cable Rewrites Bad Language

- Why does “pay TV” change all the rules?
- 👁 View scenes from *Breaking Bad*, *Game of Thrones*, *The Wire*, and *Entourage*.

For next meeting, read Beck’s “Hollywood Censored: The Production Code Administration and the Hollywood Film Industry, 1930-1940” in *CP*.



Monday, October 30 Censorship and Cinema

- Can language in film be controlled?
- 👁 View edited scenes from censored movies.



Wednesday, November 1 Early Cinematic Occurrences

- “Frankly My Dear...”
- 👁 View scene from *Gone with the Wind* (1939)
- For next meeting, read “Useful Notes: The Fifties” in *CP*.
- 👉 **Film Review is due on Monday!**

Monday, November 6 The 1950s and How Language is Managed

- The New Age of Television and Language

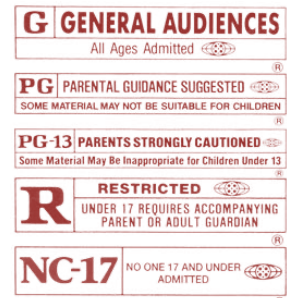
For next meeting, read “One Eternal Round - Movie Ratings and Content Judging Profanity in Film” by Kevin B. and “Motion Picture Association of America Rating System” in *CP*.

- **Upload in Film Review today!**

Wednesday, November 8 Film Gets “Rated”

- Ratings: Utility v. Censorship
- 👁 View scenes from *Clockwork Orange*

For next meeting, read Legman’s “A Word for It” and Stewart’s “Male and Female Differences in Swearing and Taboo Language” in *CP*.



MPAA Rating System

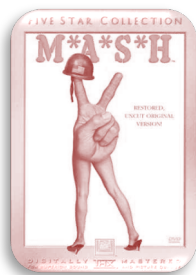


Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1966)

Monday, November 13 Women and Language in Film

- Women playing women – or men?
- 👁 View scenes from *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966) and *The Color Purple* (1985)

For next meeting, read Weiner’s “A Concise History of ‘Fuck’” in *CP*.



*M*A*S*H* (1970)

Wednesday, November 15 The F-Bomb Explodes on Film

- The F-bomb is dropped!
- 👁 View scenes from *M*A*S*H* (1970) and *Summer of Sam* (1999)

For next meeting, read “Swearing in the Cinema” by Cressman, et al. in *CP* and watch *Reservoir Dogs*.

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Monday, November 27

Postmodern Cinema, and a Leap in Language Use

- Why the shift in language use?
- 👁 View scenes from *Do the Right Thing* (1989) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994).

For next meeting, read Ch. 9 “Son of a Bitch” in *ED* and “Dialogue Graffiti” in *CP*.



Pulp Fiction (1995)

Wednesday, November 29

Post-Porn: Women, Language, and the B-Word

- The rise of the b-word and its appropriation / dilution
- 👁 View scene from *Aliens* (1986)
- 🎧 Listen to songs by Madonna, Britney Spears, Tech N9ne, Trisha Paytas

For next meeting, read Ch. 11 “Bootleggers and Asterisks” in *ED*, and wikiHow “How to Stop Swearing” (in *CP*).

👉 **Final Video Projects are due on Monday!**

Monday, December 4

Can Bad Language Be Rewritten?

- 👁 View “How to Stop Swearing” videos and scenes from *Ted* (2012) and *Bad Words* (2014)
- Closing Comments
- **Final Video Projects due**



Spike Lee



HAVE A F*ING GREAT HOLIDAY!**