

Soc 3b
Brandeis University
Fall 2009
M W Th 1:10-2:00
Pearlman 113

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Th 11:00-12:00
and by appointment

Social Theory and Contemporary Society

This course provides an introduction to the sociological perspective by examining the relationship between social theory and the institutions and processes of society. The course will focus on several of the classic sociological thinkers and texts, including works by Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, Max Weber, and George Herbert Mead. We will additionally be reading some more recent theoretical and empirical studies to gain a sense of the different ways in which core concepts in sociology have been used to understand social interaction, social problems, and social change. Throughout the course, we will also be looking at contemporary society to consider the current relevance of classic theory and how these ideas can be applied to our own world.

The TAs for this course are Casey Clevenger (cclev@brandeis.edu), Jenn Girouard (girouard@brandeis.edu), and Jill Smith (jmsmith@brandeis.edu). Their office hours will be announced in class.

This course fulfills the sociology major's introductory sociology requirement.

Requirements

Twice a week, the entire class will meet for lecture and discussion. On the third meeting of the week, students will be divided into discussion sections.

I expect courtesy in the classroom. That means arriving to class on time, turning cell phones off *before* class begins, no texting, and no side conversations. Please recognize how distracting these latter behaviors are for your classmates and your instructor. If you bring food or drink to class, remember to clean up after yourself.

Students are expected to keep up with the readings, attend lectures, and participate in class discussion. You will complete a short (4-6 page) paper based on course material, three newspaper analyses, and a take-home final consisting of an application of various concepts from the course to the final reading by Allert (detailed instructions to be passed out in November).

The newspaper analyses are meant to help you think about how a sociological perspective can be used to understand the world in which we now live. These assignments are also intended to show you the value of regularly reading a newspaper (if you do not do so already). Three times during the semester, you will choose a *New York Times* article and, in 2-3 pages, explain how sociological concepts we have discussed in class can be used to understand the issues and events described in the news article. In your analysis, you may want to point out how a sociological perspective is included in or is missing from the journalist's account. Be sure to attach the article that you are analyzing. For each analysis, the news article used must not be more than two weeks old. Each analysis should address a different set of sociological ideas. It is up to you to decide when to do each analysis (however, you cannot do more than one per week, and the last one must be turned

in by Dec. 2nd), but I strongly advise you to space them out evenly over the semester.

Evaluation

Midterm paper (4-6 pages)	25%
Newspaper analyses	30% (10% each)
Participation	15%
Take-home final	30%

Students are expected to uphold standards of academic integrity. Each student is expected to turn in work completed independently. It is not acceptable to use the words or ideas of another person without proper acknowledgement of that source. This means that you must use references and, where appropriate, quotation marks to indicate the source of any phrases, sentences, or ideas not your own -- whether they are found in written materials or on the Internet, and whether they are created by a published author, another student, or your parent. Violations of University policies on academic integrity may result in failure in the course or on the assignment, and could end in suspension from the University. Students with questions about standards of academic integrity are advised to consult Section 4 of Rights and Responsibilities from the Brandeis Student Handbook and/or speak to your instructor or TA. If you are in doubt about the instructions for any assignment in this course, you must ask for clarification.

If you are a student who needs academic accommodations because of a documented disability, you should contact me, and present your letter of accommodation, as soon as possible. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting academic accommodations, you should contact Beth Rodgers-Kay in Undergraduate Academic Affairs at 736-3470 (brodgers@brandeis.edu). Letters of accommodation should be presented at the start of the semester to ensure provision of accommodations. Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.

The following books are available for purchase from the university bookstore:

Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. New York: The Free Press, 1997.

Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, second edition. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999.

Katherine S. Newman, *No Shame in My Game: The Working Poor in the Inner City*. New York: Vintage, 2000.

Tilman Allert, *The Hitler Salute: On the Meaning of a Gesture*. New York: Picador, 2009 [2005].

These books are also on reserve in the library.

In addition, you should be regularly reading the *New York Times*. The current day's *New York Times* is available online at no cost at www.nytimes.com. Alternatively, if you live off campus, you can purchase a discounted print subscription by going to nytimes.com/student.

The reading for Week 2 is on the Latte site for this class. Look at the section titled "Readings."

All other readings are contained in a custom course packet.

Course Schedule

Introduction: What Is the Sociological Perspective

week 1
Aug 27 no assignment

week 2
Aug 31-Sep 3 C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1959, chap. 1.

The Individual, Community, and the Nature of Society

week 3
Sep 9-10 Durkheim, *Suicide*, Preface (pp. 35-39); Book 2, chaps. 1-3 (pp. 145-216).

week 4
Sep 14-17 Durkheim, *Suicide*, Book 2, chaps. 4-5 (pp. 217-276).

week 5
Sep 21-24 Eric Klinenberg, *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002, prologue, chaps. 1 & 2.

Socialization: The Formation of the Social Self

week 6
Sep 29-Oct 1 George Herbert Mead, *On Social Psychology: Selected Papers*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977, from "Self" (pp. 199-246) and "Society" (pp. 249-256).

Harry L. Gracey, "Learning the Student Role: Kindergarten as Academic Boot Camp." In Dennis H. Wrong and Harry L. Gracey, eds., *Readings in Introductory Sociology*, third edition. New York: Macmillan, 1977, pp. 215-226.

The Sociology of Everyday Life

week 7
Oct 7-8 Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-Face Behavior*. New Brunswick, NJ: AldineTransaction, 2005 [1967], "On Face Work," & "Alienation from Interaction."

midterm paper due Thursday, Oct. 8th

Labor: The Intersection of Power, Meaning, and Inequality

- week 8
Oct 12-15 Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844" (pp. 70-101); "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right: Introduction*" (pp. 53-65).
- week 9
Oct 19-22 Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, "Wage Labour and Capital" (pp. 203-217); "The Manifesto of the Communist Party" (pp. 473-491); German Ideology" (pp. 155-175).
- week 10
Oct 26-29 Katherine S. Newman, *No Shame in My Game: The Working Poor in the Inner City*. New York: Vintage, 2000, chaps. 1, 3, 4.

Rationalization: Power and the Loss of Meaning

- week 11
Nov 2-5 Max Weber, "Bureaucracy" (originally published 1921). In H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1946, pp. 196-244.
- week 12
Nov 9-12 Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation" (originally published 1919) and "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Discontents" (originally published 1915). In H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1946, pp. 129-156, 323-359.
- week 13
Nov 15-19 Debra J. Schleef, *Managing Elites: Professional Socialization in Law and Business Schools*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006, chaps. 4-5, 7.

Collective Action and Social Change

- week 14
Nov 23-25 Reread Marx, "Manifesto of the Communist Party" (pp. 473-491).
- Susan Eckstein, "Poor People versus the State and Capital: Anatomy of a Successful Community Mobilization for Housing in Mexico City." In Susan Eckstein, ed., *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements*, updated and expanded edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, pp. 329-350.

Putting It All Together: A Case Study in Meaning, Power, and Collective Life

- week 15
Nov 30-Dec 2 Tilman Allert, *The Hitler Salute: On the Meaning of a Gesture*. New York: Picador, 2009 [2005].

Wednesday, Dec. 2nd: meet in discussion sections

Take-home final due Wednesday, Dec. 9th