

**SOC 130a: Sociology of Families**  
**Brandeis University**  
**Summer Session I, 2009**  
**M, T, Th 11:15am – 1:45pm in Pearlman Hall 203**  
(Syllabus subject to alteration)

**Instructor: Miranda R. Waggoner**  
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**Office Hours: By Appointment**

**Course Description**

This course provides an introduction to the sociology of families, with a focus on American families. The character and composition of American families has changed throughout the past two centuries, and this course attempts to explain and analyze the implications of these changes for individuals and society. We will pay attention to how the family functions as a social institution and how the notion of the family has been socially constructed over time. In addition to the socio-historical constitution of the family, particular attention will be paid to race, ethnicity, class, motherhood, fatherhood, and alternative family units. We will address and analyze family, work, and welfare policies. We will also expressly discuss the influence of cultural, economic, and political factors as well as how family policy interacts with the meaning of the family and the family experience.

The course is divided in a way so as to facilitate our movement through various ideas about the sociology of families. We begin by theorizing “the family,” discussing definitions of the family and the historical context of this social institution. We then look more closely at the social construction of motherhood, fatherhood, and the family unit; then, we examine how families operate through and within networks and households. The myth of the nuclear family will be a salient theme throughout these first two sections. The course then transitions to family policy, and we will look in-depth at how family policies affect and construct the family experience. Here, we specifically examine the work-family agenda and policies affecting low-income families. We will end by discussing topics that form the bases for contemporary debates surrounding the family experience and family policy. By the end of this course, you should be conversant in the issues and debates surrounding the institution of the family.

**Course Readings**

**Books:**

- Coontz, Stephanie. 2000. *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. Basic Books.
- Gornick, Janet C. and Marcia K. Meyers. 2005. *Families That Work: Policies for Reconciling Parenthood and Employment*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Hansen, Karen. 2005. *Not-So-Nuclear Families: Class, Gender, and Networks of Care*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Hochschild, Arlie with Anne Machung. 2003. *The Second Shift*. New York: Penguin Books

**Additional Readings:**

- All other articles for the course will be available on LATTE.

## Evaluation

Because the summer session is short and intensive, attendance and participation will be a key component of this course, contributing 20% to your final grade. Participation includes your engagement with classroom discussions as well as coming to class prepared. Readings should be completed prior to the lecture, and you should come to class with a question or comment from the readings.

The course grade is calculated as follows:

Attendance and Participation	20%
Response Papers (5)	30%
Media Analysis Paper	20%
Final (Take-Home) Essay	30%

## Assignments

- **Response Papers:** During the course of the semester, you are required to turn in **five** response papers which address the set of readings for that day. Your paper should briefly summarize the key themes and/or arguments presented in one or more of the day's readings; following the summary, you should provide a critique or analysis of the reading in your own words. You may refer to other readings, personal examples, popular examples, or other sources to reinforce your point. You may choose which days to write response papers, but the paper should be handed in on the day that the reading is being discussed. These papers should be only 2 pages each.
- **Media Analysis Paper:** This paper will be completed outside of class and is due on Monday, **June 22**. You are to find an article, either in print or online (using LexisNexis or the paper's online archive), from a reputable newspaper or news magazine (e.g., *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, etc.) that addresses a family issue and write a brief essay about this article as informed by a sociological lens. Your analysis should address, though is certainly not limited to, the following points:
  - How is the family defined/depicted/framed in this article?
  - Are other social institutions important to the discussion of the family in this article?
  - If you were given the task of editing or rewriting this piece, what suggestions or changes would you make? Would you emphasize aspects of this article differently?
  - Use relevant class reading(s) to support your analysis. Please provide proper citations for these readings.

This paper should be 4-5 pages, double-spaced, and please attach the news article to your essay.

- **Final Exam:** The final exam is a take-home essay that will be due Friday, **July 3**. The question(s) will be broad and intended to tie together key themes or ideas about the sociology of families.

**More information will be given about the assignments as the course progresses.**

**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 course, please see me immediately. Please keep in mind that reasonable accommodations are not provided retroactively.**

### **Course Outline**

(may be subject to alterations)

**Monday, June 1:** Class Overview and Logistics – An Introduction to the Sociological Study of Families

**Tuesday, June 2:** Theorizing and Defining the Family

- Engels, Friedrich. (1884). "The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State" in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. by Robert C. Tucker. 1978. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. (Only pp. 734-751 required)
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1996. "On the Family as a Realized Category." *Theory, Culture, & Society* 13:19-26.

**Thursday, June 4:** The American Family: Historical and Comparative Context

- Coontz, Ch. 1, 2 (pp. 8-41)
- Gornick and Meyers, Ch. 2, 3 (pp. 24-83)

**Monday, June 8:** Race and Family in the U.S.

- Coontz, Ch. 10 (pp. 232-254)
- Patricia Hill Collins. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge. (Chapter 3)
- Maxine Baca Zinn. 1998. Family, Feminism, and Race in America. Pp. 33-40 in *Families in the U.S.: Kinship and Domestic Politics*, ed. by Karen V. Hansen and Anita Iltis Garey. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

**Tuesday, June 9:** The Impact of Parenting and Class

- Lareau, Annette. 2002. "Invisible Inequality: Social Class and Childrearing in Black Families and White Families." *American Sociological Review* 67:747-776.

Film: "49Up" (2006)

**Thursday, June 11:** Households and Class Considerations

- Hansen, Chs. 1-5 (pp. 1-123)
- Coontz, Ch. 4 (pp. 68-92)

**Monday, June 15:** Family Networks and Care

- Hansen, Chs. 6, 7, 8, Conclusion (127-217)
- Gornick and Meyers, Ch. 5 (112-146)

**Tuesday, June 16:** Constructing Motherhood and Fatherhood

- Garey, Anita. 1995. "Constructing Motherhood on the Night Shift: 'Working Mothers' as 'Stay-at-Home Moms'." *Qualitative Sociology* 18:415-437.
- Townsend, Nicholas W. 2002. *The Package Deal: Marriage, Work and Fatherhood in Men's Lives*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. (Chapter 3)

**Thursday, June 18:** Reproduction and the Family

- Coontz, Ch. 8 (pp. 180-206)
- Yuval-Davis, Nira. 1996. "Women and the Biological Reproduction of "The Nation"." *Women's Studies International Forum* 19:17-24.

**Monday, June 22:** Low-income Families, Welfare Policy, and Single Motherhood

- Nelson, Margaret K. 2006. "Single Mothers "Do" Family." *Journal of Marriage & Family* 68:781-795.
- Edin, Kathryn and Laura Lein. 1996. Work, Welfare, and Single Mothers' Economic Survival Strategies. *American Sociological Review* 61:253-266.
- Blank, Rebecca M. March 2006. Was Welfare Reform Successful? *Economists' Voice*. The Berkeley Electronic Press.

**\*Media Analysis Paper Due**

**Tuesday, June 23:** Family Policy

- Gornick and Meyers, Chs. 6-9 (pp.147-303)

**Thursday, June 25:** Work and Family

- Hochschild, Chs. 1-11 (pp. 1-180)

**Monday, June 29:** Work and Family (continued)

- Hochschild, Chs. 12-17 (pp. 181-283)
- Maureen Sullivan. 1996. "Rozzie & Harriet?: Gender and Family Patterns of Lesbian Coparents." *Gender & Society* 10(6): 747-767.

Film: "Chore Wars" (1995)

**\*Final will be distributed in class**

**Tuesday, June 30:** Looking Forward and Contemporary Debates: Opting Out?

- Belkin, Lisa. 26 Oct 2003. "The Opt-Out Revolution." in *The New York Times Magazine*.
- Stone, Pamela and M. Lovejoy. 2004. "Fast-Track Women and the "Choice" to Stay Home." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 596:62-83.

**\*Final Due Friday, July 3 by email attachment.**