Sociology 403

Contemporary Social Theory Instructor: Tom Semm

Spring 2011 Office: NH 204 ` E-mail: psemm@mail.sdsu.edu

Course Meets: TTh 2-3:15

Office Hours: T 3:15-4

**Required Text**:

Ritzer, George. *Modern Sociological Theory*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2008. Ed. 7

Klein, Naomi. *Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism.*

Domhoff, G. William. *Who Rules America?*

Handouts

**Course Description**:

This course will examine contemporary social theories and theorists. The contemporary period is considered to have begun in the 1920s. The reason for the periodization of social theory into classical and contemporary has as much to do with historical events and social change as it does with theory itself. Contemporary theorists experience a much different world and have a much different worldview than the classical social theorists. Because of these social factors, contemporary theorists reject many of the assumptions of classical theory; they also ask different questions and they arrive at different answers. However, important theoretical assumptions from classical theory still remain in contemporary social theories. Therefore this course will first examine the historical conditions that gave rise to social theory and the assumptions of early (classical) social theory. Secondly, the course will examine the three major classical social theorists and their influence on the development of contemporary social theory. Next the course will examine the historical events and social changes that have given rise to contemporary social theory. The major portion of the course will be an examination of the contemporary social theorists and their theories. The course will examine the following theories: structural functionalism, conflict, globalization, neo-Marxism, feminism, post-modernism, and post-structuralism. And the theorists the course will examine are Talcott Parsons, C. Wright Mills, William Domhoff, Doug McAdam, Herbert Marcuse, Erving Goffman, Immanuel Wallerstein, Michel Foucault, and Jean Baudrillard.

**Course Goals**:

1. The student should understand what a theory is in general, what social theory is, and should have gained a general knowledge of contemporary social theories and theorists.

2. The student should understand how social and historical factors shape theory construction.

3. The student should have gained a better understanding of American society.

**Evaluation Process**:

Exams. There will be three exams; each exam will have approximately seventy (70) questions and be worth seventy (70) points for a total of two hundred and ten (210) points and 60% of the student’s overall grade. The exams will be based on the lectures, the readings, and in-class videos. The exams will consist of multiple choice, true/false, and matching questions. See Course Schedule for day and date.

Papers. There will be two papers worth seventy (70) points each for a total of one hundred and forty (140) points and forty per cent of the student’s overall grade. Assignment and due dates are on the Course Schedule. Late papers will be accepted until Thur May 5 but with at least a full grade reduction. The papers must be no less than four pages in length.

**Class Conduct**

I will treat you as adults and with respect, and I expect to be treated likewise. From my point of view, disrespect includes, but is not limited to, students having private conversations, reading the Daily Aztec, and engaging in non class related e-activity during class. I will give one polite warning, but if the activity continues, I will deduct enough points so that the student will fail the course. I allow students to use laptops for note taking, but if this privilege is abused (example, social networking), I will disallow it.

**Class Schedule Topics, Reading Assignments, Exams and Papers**

Week 1 Introduction

Jan 20 Ritzer: Chapters1

Week 2 Structural Functionalism

Jan 25-27 Ritzer: Chapter 2 and 3

Week 3 C. Wright Mills and the Power Elite

Feb 1-3 Klein: Introduction and Chapter 1

Week 4 Milton Friedman and Free Market Theory

Feb 8-10 Klein: Chapters 2 and 3

Week 5 **Review and** **First Exam Thursday Feb 17**

Feb 15-17 Klein: Chapters 4 and 5

Week 6 Domhoff and Class Domination Theory

Feb 22-24 Domhoff

**Paper 1 Assigned**

Week 7 Domhoff and Class Domination Theory

March 1-3 Domhoff

Week 8 Neo-Marxism and Media Theory

March 8-10 Ritzer: Chapter 4 (pp 139-166); Klein: Chapters 6 and 7

Week 9 Collective Behavior and Social Movement Theories

March 15-17 Klein: Chapters 8 and 9

**Paper 1 Due Thurs March 17**

Week 10 **Review and Second Exam Thursday March 24**

March 22-24 Klein: Chapter 10 and 11

**Paper 2 Assigned**

Week 11 **SPRING BREAK**

March 28- April 1

Week 12 Globalization Theory

April 5-7 Ritzer: Chapter 12; Klein: Chapters 14 and 15

Week 13 Globalization Theory

April 12-14 Ritzer: Chapter 4 (pp 166-172); Klein: Chapters 16 and 17

Week 14 Postmodern Social Theory

April 19-21 Ritzer: Chapter 13; Klein: Chapters 18 and 19

**Paper 2 Due**

Week 15 Race, Gender and Social theory

April 26-28 Ritzer: Chapter 9, Klein: Chapters 20 and 21

Week 16 **Review and Third Exam Thursday May 5 (last day for late papers)**

May 3­-5 Ritzer: Chapter 14: Klein: Conclusion

Week 17 Student Conferences

May 9