Sociology 403

Contemporary Social Theory

Instructor: Tom Semm Office: NH 204

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Course Meets: MWF 10-10:50AM

GMCS 316

Office Hours: MW 1-2PM

Or by appointment.

**Required Text**:

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

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

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 worth approximately seventy (70) points for a total of approximately two hundred and ten (210) points. 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.

Paper. There will be one paper worth seventy (70) points. Assignment and due dates are on the Course Schedule. Late papers will be accepted until Wed May 12 but with at least a full grade reduction. The paper 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, I will disallow it.

Class Schedule Topics and Reading Assignments

Week 1 Introduction

Jan 20-22 **Furlough Friday Jan 22**

Week 2 The Origin of Social Theory

Jan 25-29 Ritzer: Chapter 1; Klein: Intro and Chapter 1

Week 3 Adam Smith and Milton Friedman

Feb 1-5 Ritzer: Chapter 2; Klein: Chapter 2 and 3

Week 4 Structural Functionalism

Feb 8-12 Ritzer: Chapter 3

**Furlough Friday Feb 12**

Week 5 Mills and Domhoff

Feb 15-19 Ritzer: Chapter 2 (pp 75-78); Klein: Chapter 4

Week 6 Post-Colonial Theories

Feb 22-26 Ritzer: Chapter 14 (514-518); Klein: Chapter 5

Week 7 **Review and Exam Wed March 3**

March 1-5 **Furlough Friday March 5**

Week 8 Neo-Marxist Theories

March 8-12 Ritzer: Chapter 4 (pp 139-166); Klein: Chapters 14, 15.

**Furlough Wed March 10**

Week 9 Knowledge and Power: Michel Foucault

March 15-19 Ritzer: Chapter 13 (474-490); Klein: Chapters 16, 17, 18

Week 10 Collective Behavior and Social Movement Theories

March 22-26 Handout

**March 29-April 2** **Spring Break**

Week 11 Globalization Theory

April 5-9 Ritzer: Chapter 12; Klein: Chapter 7 and 8

Week 12 **Review and Exam Wed April 14**

April 12-16 **Furlough Friday April 16**

Week 13 Globalization Theory

April 19-23 Ritzer: Chapter 4 (pp 166-172); Klein: Chapter 19

**Paper Assigned**

Week 14 Modern Feminist Theory

April 26-30 Ritzer: Chapter 9

Week 15 Post-Modern Theory

May 3-7 Ritzer: Chapter 13 (pp 490-506), Chapter 11 (441-447)

**Paper Due Wed May 5**

Week 16 **Exam Mon May 10**

May 10-12 **Furlough Wed May 12**