Sociology 403

Contemporary Social Theory

Instructor: Tom Semm

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Course Meets: TTH 2-3:15PM COM- 206

W 4-6:40PM CSQ-208

Office Hours: T 3PM-4PM

TH 11:15AM-12:15PM

W 3PM-4PM

**Text**:

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

Domhoff, G. William. *Who Rules America?* (Required)

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 arrive at different answers. However, important theoretical assumptions from classical theory still exist within the foundation of 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. Students 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. Students should understand how social and historical factors shape theory construction.

3. Students should have gained a better understanding of American society.

**Evaluation Process**:

Exams. There will be three exams; each exam will consist of approximately seventy (70) questions and be worth seventy (70) points for a total of two hundred and ten points and make up approximately two thirds 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 fifty (50) points each for a total of one hundred (100) points. The papers will be written in class. See Schedule for day and date.

**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, engaging in non class related e-activity during class, and leaving class early. 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 the use of laptops for note taking, but if this privilege is abused (social networking, for example), I will disallow it.

Class Schedule Topics, Reading Assignments, Exams and Papers

Section 1 Jan 17 Introduction

Week 1 Classical Origins of Contemporary Theory

Klein Intro, Ch 1

Week 2 Adam Smith and Free Market Theory

Klein: Chapter 2

Week 3 Structural Functionalism

Klein: Ch 3

Week 4 Theory of the Power Elite

Klein: Ch 4

Week 5 **Review and Exam #1 (Section 1 Thurs Feb 21, Section 2 Wed Feb 20)**

Week 6 Class Domination Theory

Domhoff: Intro, 1

Week 7 Class Domination Theory

Domhoff: Ch 2 and 3

Week 8 Neo-Marxism: Media Theory

Domhoff: Ch 4 and 5

**In class paper #1 (Section 1 Thurs March 14, Section 2 Wed March 13)**

Week 9 Neo-Marxism: Theories of Technology

Klein: Ch 6 and 7

Week 10 **Review and Exam #2 (Section 1 Thurs March 28, Section 2 Wed March 27)**

Week 11 (April 1-5) **Spring Break**

Week 12 Globalization Theory

Klein: Ch 8 and 9

Week 13 Globalization Theory

Klein: Ch 10 and 14

Week 14 Social Movement Theory

Klein: Ch 15

Week 15 Social Movement Theory

Klein: Ch 16 and 17

**In-class paper #2 (Section 1Thurs May 2, Section 2 Wed May 1)**

Week 15 **Exam #3 (Section 1 Tues May 7, Section 2 Wed May 8)**