Sociology 403

Contemporary Social Theory

Instructor: Tom Semm Office NH211

psemm@mail.sdsu.edu

Course Meets:

M 4-6:40PM

P148

Office Hours:

Mon 3:00-4PM

Tues 2:30-3:30PM

Wed 2:30-3:30PM

**Text**:

Chomsky, Noam. *Chomsky on MisEducation.*

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

Lewontin, R.C. *Biology as Ideology.*

Readings in Critical Theory (Blackboard)

Readings in Postmodern Theory (Blackboard)

**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 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 foundations 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, theory of the power elite, class domination theory, Neo-Marxism, post-modernism, and post-structuralism. And the theorists the course will examine are Talcott Parsons, C. Wright Mills, William Domhoff, Herbert Marcuse, 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 consisting of multiple choice, true/false and matching questions. The exams will cover all material, lectures, in-class videos, reading assignments and any out of class assignments. (Scantron 882) See Course Schedule for day and date for the exams.

Quizzes. There will be several in class quizzes to “encourage” students to keep current with the material. Bring Scantron 815 to each class.

Extra Credit. There may be extra credit opportunities.

**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, on-line shopping!! for example), I will disallow it.

**Class Schedule** **Topic** **Assignments**

Week 1 Classical Origins Klein: Intro, Ch 1

Week 2 **No Class Sep 5th Labor Day** **View: Inequality for All\***

Week 3 Free Market Theory Klein: Ch 2 **Quiz: Inequality for All**

Week 4 Structural Functionalism Klein: Ch 3

Week 5 Theory of the Power Elite Klein: Ch 4

Week 6 **Exam #1 Monday Oct 3**

Week 7 Class Domination Theory Klein Ch 6, 7

Week 8 Neo-Marxism Lewontin, Ch 1

Critical Theory (BB)\*

Week 9 Theories of Technology Lewontin, Ch 2, 3

Week 10 **Exam #2 Monday Oct 31**

Week 11 Postmodern Theory Klein: Ch 8

Postmodern Theory (BB)\*

Week 12 Neoliberal Theory Chomsky Ch 4

Klein: Ch 10

Week 13 **Thanksgiving Vacation**

Week 14 Theories of Education Chomsky Intro, Ch 1

Klein: Ch 14

Week 15 Radical Democracy and Collective Power Chomsky Ch 2

Klein: Ch 15

Week 16 **Exam #3 Monday Dec 12**

**\*Viewing Inequality for All is an out of class assignment to be complete by Monday Sep 12th.**

**Final Grade**: Total points and grade average will be posted on Blackboard.

A 92.5%-up B+ 87.5%-89.4% C+ 77.5%-79.4% F <60%

A- 89.5%-92.4% B 82.5-87.4 C 69.5%-77.4%

B- 79.5%-82.4% D <69.4%

To: All SDSU Faculty

From: Pamela J. Starr, Student Disability Services Director

Subject: Syllabus Statement for Students with Disabilities

With the fall 2014 semester approaching, I would like to remind you to include the below statement in your syllabus. The University Senate now requires that all faculty include this statement as written. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at (619) 594-6473. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated.