

Sociological Theory: Problems of Modern Society

Summer 2020
M T Th 1:30-3:35 pm
Location: The Internets

Professor Paul Heideman
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I got a lotta problems with you people. - Frank Costanza

Course Description: This course is an introduction to the history of sociological thought, broadly conceived. While definitions of sociology abound, from C. Wright Mills' famous declaration that sociology is the intersection of history and biography to more anodyne descriptions like "the study of human behavior and groups," this class takes a particular perspective on sociological theory, viewing it as one stream of thought attempting to grapple with the problems of modern society.

Sociologist, in other words, study social problems. What, then, is a social problem? Much of sociological theory can be read as an attempt to answer this problem. Theorists from Marx to Weber to Mills have attempted to diagnose the problems of modern society, lay bare the mechanisms responsible for their existence, and often propose remedies as well. This course will exam sociological theory through this lens, looking at the different ways different thinkers have defined the problems of modern society. It places an emphasis on the continuity of this tradition, as various thinkers have often developed their theorizations of social problems in argument against earlier thinkers.

Along the way, we will consider questions such as: Is inequality the key problem of modern society? What allows people to live together in large groups successfully? Is freedom part of the problem with modern society? Are forms of unfreedom such as racial or gender oppression problems that can be solved? Do societies evolve?

This is a reading-intensive course. A great deal of the intellectual work of this class will consist of reading often-dense texts and attempting to understand the course of a theorist's argument. While in-class discussion will often center on this work of exegesis, students will be expected to grapple with the texts on their own outside of class as well.

Electronics Policy: Use of laptops, tablets, cellphones, or any other device with a screen is strictly forbidden in my classroom. The [research on this subject](#) is clear: students who use devices in class both learn less, and cause those around them to learn less as well. In this class, there will be no books to purchase. I expect you to use the money saved from this to print off readings and bring them to the class where they will be discussed. I also encourage, though cannot mandate, that you read them on printed off paper rather than off screens, since there is also a [large body of research](#) that indicates that you will learn more by reading this way. If you have any concerns about this policy, please contact me and we will discuss them.

Assignments: There are three basic components to your grade in this class. The first is a midterm that will be administered in class July 23rd. The second is a final paper due at the end of the class. The third is participation. This is a discussion-based class; your presence and participation in class discussions is a vital part of your grade. I also reserve the right to assign things like pop quizzes on the readings if I feel the class is slipping on this front.

The broad weighting of assignments is as follows:

Midterm:	July 23 rd	40%
Paper:	August 12 th	40%
Attendance and discussion:		20%

COURSE SCHEDULE

July 6th

Course Introduction: The Problem of Sociology

- Martin Nicolaus, “Fat-Cat Sociology: Remarks at the American Sociological Association Convention” [Read in-class].

July 7th

Karl Marx: The Problem of Class

- *The Communist Manifesto*.

July 9th

Karl Marx: The Problem of Class, II

- *Wage Labor and Capital*.
- *Capital*, Ch 25.

July 13th

George Fitzhugh: The Problem of Freedom

- *Sociology for the South; Or, The Failure of a Free Society*, pgs iii-95.

July 14th

Herbert Spencer: The Problem of Evolution

- Selections from *On Social Evolution*.

July 16th

Emile Durkheim: The Problem of Social Integration

- Selections from *The Division of Labor in Society*.

July 20th

Emile Durkheim: The Problem of Social Integration, II

- Selections from *Suicide*.

July 21st

In-Class Midterm

July 23rd

Anna Julia Cooper: The Problem of Women

- *A Voice From the South*, Chs 3 & 5.

July 27th

Max Weber: The Problem of Rationalization

- *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Chs 1, 2, & 5..

July 28th

Max Weber: The Problem of Rationalization II

- *Politics as a Vocation*.

Paper proposal due.

July 30th

W.E.B. Du Bois: The Problem of the Color Line

- *The Souls of Black Folk*, Chs I, III, & VIII.

August 3rd

W.E.B. Du Bois: The Problem of the Color Line II

- *Black Reconstruction*, Ch XIV.

August 4th

George Padmore: The Problem of Colonialism

- *How Britain Rules Africa*, Introduction, Chs I, XIII, & XIV.

August 6th

C. Wright Mills: The Problem of the Middle Class

- *White Collar*, Chs 1, 4, 11, 12, 13, & 15.6.

Paper draft due.

August 10th

Simone de Beauvoir: The Problem of Gender

- *The Second Sex*, Part II, Ch 5 & Part VII, Ch 1.

August 11th

Barry Commoner: The Problem of Ecology

- *The Closing Circle*, Chs 1, 7, & 10.

August 13th

John Rawls: The Problem of Justice

- Jonathan Wolff, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, 168-195.
- John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness."

Paper due.