Sociological Theory
SOC 22400-02 (2922)
Hunter College
Fall 2025

Instructor: Viktor Bensus
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Lectures: in-person**,** TuFr 2:30PM - 3:45PM
Classroom: North Bldg C106
Office Hours: by appointment, Tuesdays, 1.00 pm – 2.00 pm.

Course Description:

This course introduces students to various classical and contemporary sociological approaches, theories, and debates. The theories you will read in this class are relevant to ubiquitous discussions about inequality, social reproduction, and social change. Furthermore, the authors in this syllabus developed concepts to explain social action and interaction, the constitution of the self, power, domination, the social construction of gender and race, capitalism and capitalist societies, and many more topics.

The readings will provide students with theoretical frameworks, concepts, ideas, and ways of thinking that characterize what Wright Mills called "the sociological imagination." However, the main goal is that every student can apply these different perspectives to the analysis of social phenomena they are interested in. You are expected to think critically about these issues and read, with a critical eye, the theories we will explore. That is, you will learn social theories by reading, discussing, and using them from a critical standpoint.

Course objectives:

- Students will be able to apply theories in sociology to understand power, culture, social change, socialization, stratification, social structure, and social institutions.
- Students will be able to identify and analyze the influences of social structure on individuals and groups (especially age, religion, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, class, and economic inequality), and the effects of individual thought and behavior on society.
- Students will be able to identify, analyze, and critique sociological arguments in research papers and monographs and be able to discuss their primary claims, strengths, and weaknesses.
- Students will be able to identify, analyze, and critique major sociological theories, compare and contrast the underlying assumptions of those theories, and apply those theories to social phenomena.
- Students will be able to construct a sociological argument orally and in writing.

Readings, Canvas and Blackboard:

We **will not use Blackboard**. All the required readings will be available through Hunter College's library website (see below), or at the course's Canvas site. Most recommended readings will also be available at the course's site. ***Please read the course schedule carefully to know what texts are required and which ones are suggested*.**

Readings: this course is designed to be of no additional cost to you. We will mostly read short selections from:

Lemert, Charles C. 2018. Social Theory: The Multicultural, Global, and Classic Readings. Sixth edition. New York: Routledge.

You can access the e-book version of this social theory reader remotely at any time, from any location, via the Hunter College library website. https://cuny-hc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01CUNY_HC/m880uq/alma9994741366206133

Additional materials can be found in the item ***"Modules" on CANVAS***. Modules are organized by week. **Please read in the syllabus where you can find each reading**.

Class Policies:

Learning Environment

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. You are expected to treat participants in the course with courtesy and respect in all interactions.

Academic Integrity Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., inadequate use of AI, plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures.

I want to emphasize that this is a *writing-intensive theory* class. The whole purpose of the class is that every student can exercise critical thinking and reading to understand theoretical approaches to social reality, identify their uses, contradictions, and limitations, and use concepts and theoretical formulations to analyze concrete social issues. *The use of generative AI thwarts any possibility of developing these skills*. Although AI checkers' precision is limited, I will be reading more than one of each student's submissions, which will familiarize me with your writing. Furthermore, the use of generative AI tends to become obvious because more than one person uses it and because of how AI phrases ideas (e.g., use of specific words). Thus, I will most likely identify who uses it and when. If I do so, the student will receive zero (00) points in the assignment without the possibility of extra credit. However, and most importantly for this class, even if I don't identify the use of AI,

consider that you would be wasting a valuable opportunity to develop academic and professional skills, and you might also miss the opportunity to take advantage of stimulating class discussions. As a side note, I want to say that I don't have problems with the use of software *exclusively* to correct grammar and spelling errors.

All people have the right to be addressed and referred to in accordance with their personal identity. Class rosters are provided to me with your legal name. I will gladly honor requests to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun, and support classmates in doing so as well. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

ADA Policy

ADA Policy "In compliance with the American Disability Act of 1990 (ADA) and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational parity and accommodations for all students with documented disabilities and/or medical conditions. It is recommended that all students with documented disabilities (Emotional, Medical, Physical, and/or Learning) consult the Office of AccessABILITY, located in Room E1214B, to secure necessary academic accommodations. For further information and assistance, please call: (212) 772-4857 or (212) 650-3230."

Mental Health

Hunter College Policy on Sexual Misconduct "In compliance with the CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Hunter College reaffirms the prohibition of any sexual misconduct, which includes sexual violence, sexual harassment, and gender-based harassment retaliation against students, employees, or visitors, as well as certain intimate relationships. Students who have experienced any form of sexual violence on or off campus (including CUNY-sponsored trips and events) are entitled to the rights outlined in the Bill of Rights for Hunter College. a. Sexual Violence: Students are strongly encouraged to immediately report the incident by calling 911, contacting NYPD Special Victims Division Hotline (646-610-7272) or their local police precinct, or contacting the College's Public Safety Office (212-772-4444). b. All Other Forms of Sexual Misconduct: Students are also encouraged to contact the College's Title IX Campus Coordinator, Dean John Rose (jtrose@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-650-3262) or Colleen Barry (colleen.barry@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-772-4534) and seek complimentary services through the Counseling and Wellness Services Office, Hunter East 1123. CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct Link: https://www.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/si

Grading:

15% Participation and attendance

40% Group Midterm Essay

45% Final Essay and Presentation

Grading distribution: A ≥93, A- 92.9-90, B+ 89.9-87, B 86.9-83, B- 82.9-80, C+ 79.9-77, C 76.9-73, C- 72.9-70, D+ 69.9-67, D 66.9-60, F ≤59.9

Participation:

Participation will be based on two items. First, you are expected to attend every lecture. You can justify up to 3 absences. Unjustified absences and late arrivals will affect your grading for this item. In addition, having more than three absences will imply that your written assignments will not be accepted (*see below for more details*). Second, in-class participation is essential for everyone's learning process. With your questions, comments, critiques, and thoughts, you are also helping your classmates. In that sense, active participation during class is highly encouraged. ***Every student should sign up for a session in which they are in charge of bringing questions/discussion ideas based on the session's assigned readings*** (More information will be given in class).

Group Midterm Essay

Each student will join a group of five (5) students. Together, the group members will choose a topic. Each group member will choose their own theoretical approach and research question. Each group member will write a short essay using theories and authors from the first three sections seen in class. The instructor will provide further guidance in class.

Since developing an essay is a process, you will have four previous written assignments to help you select and research your topic. ***You will only be allowed to submit each assignment if you have submitted the previous one and I, the instructor, have approved your submission***. Completing these assignments will give every student a basis of 15 points out of 40 points for the essay. The assignments are:

- Group topic selection,
- individual topic selection,
- annotated bibliography, and
- annotated empirical data.

Final Essay and Presentation:

Students will continue to work in groups, sharing materials and ideas. For the final essay, students will develop their mid-term essay topics, this time using authors and theories from the second half of the semester.

Additionally, the last two sessions of the semester will focus on group presentations. Each group will explain to the rest of the class the different questions, approaches, and understandings that each individual essay-research brought to the group discussions. The instructor will provide further guidance in class.

Course Schedule

(Subject to change)

SECTION 1: Power, class conflict, social reproduction, and social change

Week 1:

Tue 08/26: Introduction; Syllabus

Readings: NA

Fri 08/29: ***Marx I: Introduction + Conception of History***

Readings:

Marx, K. The German Ideology. *Read from the section titled "First Premises of Materialist Method" to the end of the section titled "The Essence of the Materialist Conception of History: Social Being and Social Consciousness."*

https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm

Week 2

Tue 09/02: ***Marx II: The labor theory of value***

Readings: Writings of Karl Marx. *In Lemert*, pp. 40-52.

Fri 09/05: ***Marx III: Alienation + Exploitation***

Readings: Marx, Karl. "Estranged Labour." In: Tucker, R. Ed. The Marx Engels Reader. Pp. 70-81. *On Canvas*.

Assignment due: Sun 09/07: Group selection

Week 3

Tue 09/09: ***Marx IV: Political Thought***

Readings: Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Manifesto of the Communist Party. *In Lemert*, pp. 34-40.

Fri 09/12: ***Race, Class, and Hegemony (Du Bois and Gramsci)***

Readings:

W.E.B. Du Bois. Selection from *Black Reconstruction in America*. In Lemert, pp. 191-193.

Selections from Antonio Gramsci. In Lemert, pp. 209-210.

Selections from The Antonio Gramsci Reader. Selected Writings 1916-1935. Read from "6. Concept of the State" to the end of "11. Statolatry." Pp 233-238. On Canvas.

Assignment due: Sun 09/14: Topic selection

SECTION 2: Theories of modern societies: social solidarity, bureaucracy, and mental life

Week 4

Tue 09/16: ***Emile Durkheim I: Introduction + Social Facts***

Readings:

Selections from Durkheim. In Lemert, pp. 63-70.

Fri 09/19: ***Durkheim II: Types of social solidarity***

Readings:

Selections from Durkheim. In Lemert, pp. 59-63.

Week 5

Tue 09/23: **[NO CLASSES]**

Assignment due: Wednesday, 09/24: Annotated bibliography

Fri 09/26: Max Weber I: The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

Readings:

Excerpt from Max Weber's "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" and "Class, status, and Party." In Lemert, pp. 83-86, 94-101.

Week 6

Tue 09/30: ***Max Weber II: Types of authority and modern bureaucracy***

Readings:

Excerpt from Max Weber's "The Bureaucratic Machine" and "The Types of legitimate domination." In Lemert, pp. 86-90, 92-94.

Assignment due: Wed 10/01: Annotated empirical data

Fri 10/03: ***Georg Simmel***

Readings:

Simmel, Georg. (1971 [1903]). The Stranger. In On Individuality and Social Forms – Selected Writings. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Pp.143-149. On Canvas.

Simmel, G. (1950 [1903]). "The Metropolis and Mental Life." In Lin, J., Mele, C., & Lin, J. V. (Eds.). (2012). The urban sociology reader. On Canvas.

Week 7

Tue 10/07: ***Interpreting the Self***

Readings:

Du Bois. W.E.B. Chapter 1, "Of our Spiritual Strivings" In The Souls of Back Folk. On Canvas.

Mead. G.H. (1913) "The Social Self", Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods 10,: 374- 380. On Canvas.

Fri 10/10: Review Session.

SECTION 3: Self and Symbolic Interaction

Week 8

Tue 10/14: CUNY Monday—No Classes.

Assignment due: Tue 10/14: Midterm paper

Fri 10/17: ***Erving Goffman I: Dramaturgy***

Readings:

Goffman, E. 1959. *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*. Pp. 1-24, 106-112. On Canvas.

Week 9

Tue 10/21: ***Erving Goffman II: Frame Analysis***

Readings:

Goffman, Erving. Excerpt from Frame Analysis. Pp. 40-47, 251-254. On Canvas.

Fri 10/24: [NO CLASSES—CUNY Monday]

SECTION 4: Contemporary theories of power and domination

Week 10

Tue 10/28: ***Pierre Bourdieu I: Habitus and social fields***

Readings:

Bourdieu, Pierre. (1990). The logic of practice. Stanford university press. On Canvas. Read pp. 52-60, 66-69

Fri 10/31: ***Pierre Bourdieu II: Domination, Social Reproduction, and Social Change***

Readings:

Bourdieu, Pierre. (1990). The logic of practice. Stanford university press. On Canvas. Read pp. 112-121 (skip 115-116).

Assignment due: Sat 11/01: Feedback to groupmate

Week 11

Tue 11/04: ***Foucault I: Discipline***

Readings:

Michel Foucault. Excerpts from *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*. In Lemert, pp. 322-325 and 361-365.

Fri 11/07: ***Foucault II: Governmentality and Biopower***

Readings:

Foucault, Michel. 1991 [1978]. "Governmentality" in Burchell, Gordon and Miller (eds.) The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pp. 87-104. On Canvas.

SECTION 5: Theories of gender and racial domination

Week 12

Tue 11/11: ***Gender and performance***

Readings:

Judith Butler. "Imitation and Gender Insubordination." In Lemert, pp. 429-437.

Fri 11/14: ***Matrix of domination***

Readings:

Patricia Hill Collins. Excerpt from Black Feminist Thought. In Lemert, pp. 413-421.

Week 13

Tue 11/18: ***Racial Capitalism I: Introduction***

Readings:

Levenson, Z., & Paret, M. (2023). The three dialectics of racial capitalism: from South Africa to the US and back again. Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race, 20(2), 333-351. On Canvas.

Fri 11/21: ***Racial Capitalism II: Nancy Fraser***

Readings:

Fraser, N. (2023). "Preface+Chapter 1" in Cannibal capitalism: How our system is devouring democracy, care, and the Planet and what we can do about it. Verso Books. On Canvas.

Week 14

Tue 11/25: ***Racial Capitalism III: Critiques***

Readings:

Go, J. (2021). Three tensions in the theory of racial capitalism. Sociological Theory, 39(1), 38-47. On Canvas.

Wacquant, L. (2023). The Trap of "Racial Capitalism". European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie, 64(2), 153-162. On Canvas.

Fri 11/28: No Classes.

Week 15: *Final Group Presentations*

Tue 12/02 + Fri 12/05

Fri 12/12: *Final paper due*