

RYERSON UNIVERSITY
Department of Sociology
SOC 473
Classical Social Theory
Section 011

Thursday 9-10 a.m. MAIN-EPH-EPH201
Friday 9-11:00 a.m. MAIN-EPH-EPH207

Instructor: Amina Jamal
Office: JOR 310
Office Hours: Mon/Tue 2-3pm or by appointment.
Email: amina.jamal@ryerson.ca

ONLY RYERSON EMAIL ACCOUNTS WILL BE ACCEPTED FOR COMMUNICATION IN THIS COURSE.

1. Description: This course offers a critical overview of the formation of theoretical orientations used within the social sciences. Students will be given a grounding within classic sociological theories, ranging from the micro level to the macro level, and including functionalism, conflict theory, feminism, Marxism, and symbolic interactionism. Students will be introduced to the works of, among others: Burgess, Comte, Cooley, Durkheim, Mannheim, Marx, Merton, Michels, Mills, Park, Parsons, Spencer, and Weber. The emphasis is on thorough analysis and critical evaluation of a few theories, rather than on a short review of many theories.

2. Prerequisites: [SOC 104](#) or [SOC 105](#) or [SOC 107](#)

3. Objectives:

By the end of the course you should be able to:

- Identify some individuals and ideas that are deemed to be the major contributors to the development of social theory.
- Become aware of the specific social locations in which the discipline of Sociology developed and the cultural context which it sought to engage.
- Reflect critically about some implications of the above points using the lens of gender, race, class, sexual identity and other conditions of living.
- Get acquainted with contemporary debates about classical theory such as where, when, by whom and why has the notion of classical theory become a contested topic within the social sciences.
- Imagine how theory might be a tool not only for explaining but also for shaping our social world.

4. Structure:

In the first two weeks of the course we will consider important themes and questions related to the notion of classical social theory and different ways of approaching this field of study.

Thereafter each week will be devoted to a particular theorist/author or some of their important ideas and later developments/reformulations of these ideas in Europe and North America. In the later part of the course we will examine some important contemporary currents that build on, challenge or re-shape classical social theories.

The weekly course sessions will be organized in the following manner.

Thursday : Lecture.

Friday: Lecture + tutorial.

I will begin each week's topic with a lecture in which I will introduce a particular author or an important theme in the work of an author. In the two hour session the following day we will attempt to further clarify key ideas and constructs of the week through lecture-cum-discussion and films. This session will include small group work and /or an in-class writing assignment. In the writing assignment each student will write individually a one-page response to a question that I will pose based on that week's lecture, discussions and reading.

5. Required texts : Available for Purchase in the Ryerson University Bookstore.

1. Seidman, Steven. 2004. *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory Today*. USA: Blackwell Publishing.

2. Lemert, Charles. 2004. *Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classic Readings*. USA: Westview.

6. Grading: All grades will be posted on Blackboard.

- In Class Assignments: 1-page each. Best 5 out of 7 = 25% (5 marks each)
- Mid-term=20 %
- 2-page paper =10%
- 5-6 page paper = 20%
- Final Exam 25 %

Please come prepared to class. There will be in-class written work based on the readings, lectures and discussions.

7. Important dates:

- **Two page paper due: October 18.**
- **Mid Term Exam: November 2.**
- **5-6 Page paper due: November 23.**

- **Final Exams: Official Exam Week.**

8. Cheating and Plagiarism: Fraudulent or deceptive acts aimed at improving grades or obtaining course credit are considered cheating. Plagiarism is the use of another's work without proper acknowledgement or an attempt to pass it off as one's own work. Please note the penalty for plagiarism may be a 0 grade in the assignment and possible suspension from the course. *It is your responsibility to be informed about what constitutes plagiarism and the relevant policies of the University.* Please Read the Sociology Department Policy on Plagiarism and other forms of Academic Misconduct at www.ryerson.ca/soc/plagpol.html - 3k.

For help on how to avoid plagiarism go to www.ryerson.ca/learningsuccess/TipSheets/avoidingplagiarism.htm - 18k

9. Classroom Behaviour: In order to achieve the goals of this course and to promote collective learning it is essential to:

- respect the rights of other students to an orderly learning environment.
- appreciate the instructor's capability and experience.
- value the principles of academic freedom.

Differences in viewpoints are encouraged but must be expressed with regard to respect for others. Students must display attentiveness to differences of race, gender, sexual identity, ethnicity and other forms of social difference.

Cell phones must be turned off or set on silent. In an extreme emergency, if you must receive a phone call please leave the classroom quietly to do so.

Laptops are discouraged but not banned. Students with laptops may be randomly called upon to share their notes with the class.

10. Accessibility. I will be happy to accommodate students with disabilities on the presentation of required documentation.

Students with a conflict between religious/cultural observances and exam or assignment dates should see me as soon as possible.

ASSIGNMENT GUIDELINES

Please submit all assignments on time.

1. In class exercises.

1-page. Best 5 out of 7 = 25% (5 marks each)

In class exercises are not meant to 'quiz' you. They are tools to enhance your skills in careful reading, analytical thinking and reflective writing. Questions for in-class assignments are included in this outline or will be explained in advance of the due date.

1. Two-page Assignment on Karl Marx due in class October 18.

10 % of total grade.

Select one of the following concepts/constructs:

- alienation/Estranged labour
- class conflict
- camera obscura(ideology).

This assignment requires you to undertake the following three steps:

Identify which concept/construct you are going to discuss. Select two passages of 1-2 lines each that helped you understand the concept. Both passages must be in THE EXCERPT ASSIGNED FOR THIS CLASS. Explain why you think these two passages best illustrate what Marx is trying to construct. Note any key images, metaphors or other figures of speech that you found particularly illustrative. Explain why you think these are important. (1/3 of the paper).

Connect this concept and these passages to other things you might have read, seen in a film, come across in other classes and in your own experience. For example if you have worked at a job or are working at the moment does your job experience remind you of Marx's Estranged Labour or an example of class conflict? If you consider yourself a member of a particular social economic class or cultural community do you see yourself positioned in a social or class conflict? (1/3 of the paper).

Evaluate the effectiveness of this concept for the conditions of your social life. In what ways does your chosen concept explain your own experience? In what ways is it lacking? What could Marx have considered that would make his theory more relevant to your particular situation? (1/3 of the paper).

2. 5-6 page paper due in class on November 23.

20% of Total Grade.

Select one of the following theorists:

Charlotte Perkins Gilman.
Anna Julia Cooper.
W.E.B. Dubois.

The aim of this assignment is to demonstrate your ability:

- to read carefully the argument/s in a given piece of text;
- to think analytically about the argument using other course material;

- to reflect critically using your understanding of theories included in the course and your own observations and experiences.

The following guidelines may help you.

1. First summarize in your own words the main argument that the author is making in this excerpt. What is the problem or issue that seems to be of most concern to the author in this excerpt? Why does she/he think it is important or pressing?
2. Evaluate the author's arguments using your understanding of other readings in the course. For example, how would Gilman's experience be understood from the viewpoint of Marx's theory of alienation or Simmel's ideas about The Stranger? How do their ideas resonate? In what ways are they different?
3. Reflect critically on why they are similar or different? What could account for the different ways in which these individuals theorize the social world? What would you theorize about the situation/problem from where you are situated in terms of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual identity, religious beliefs/identity, geographical location and so on.
4. The majority of your critique needs to be your own writing though you are expected to use the theories covered so far. Remember to cite all sources with page numbers and web pages etc.

Length : 5-6 double-spaced pages.

WEEKLY READINGS

NOTE: I may change some readings during the course if I consider it necessary. I will give advance notice through a class announcement and on Blackboard but if you miss a class it is your responsibility to follow up about any changes in the schedule.

WEEK 1 : INTERROGATING CLASSICAL SOCIAL THEORY.

September 6: INTRODUCTION

- a) Course syllabus and assignments.
- b) Texts.

September 7: Lecture/film: Setting the terms of the discussion.

Some key concepts: Modernity, The Enlightenment, Liberalism, Capitalism, Colonialism/Postcolonialism., Orientalism.

WEEK 2.: INTERROGATING CLASSICAL SOCIAL THEORY.

September 13: Social Historical Context of Social Theory

September 14: Contd.

READING:

- a) Seidman pages 1-10.
- b) Lemert: Social Theory: Its Uses and Pleasures. 1-20.

WEEK 3: DECONSTRUCTING THE CANON.

September 20: Lecture. "The Case of Harriet Jacobs."

September 21: Lecture and discussion. *In-class assignment #1.*

Read the following excerpts from Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Note how Jacobs theorizes/links her situation to existing social structures (e.g. race, gender, institution of slavery, poverty etc). What part does she assign to individual agency (e.g. acts of kindness, courage, wisdom, cruelty, luck etc)? Make notes of examples, quotes to support your answers. Write a one page response in class.

READING:

- a) Go to this Website:
http://www.pagebypagebooks.com/Harriet_Jacobs/Incidents_in_the_Life_of_a_Slave_Girl/

Read the following chapters:

Table Of Contents

- [Preface By The Author](#)
- [Introduction By The Editor](#)
- [The Slave Who Dared To Feel Like A Man](#)
- [Preparations For Escape Northward Bound](#)
- [Incidents In Philadelphia](#)
- [The Meeting Of Mother And Daughter](#)
- [A Home Found](#)
- [The Old Enemy Again](#)
- [Prejudice Against Color](#)
- [The Fugitive Slave Law](#)
- [Free At Last](#)
- [Appendix](#)

WEEK 4. COMTE AND THE SCIENCE OF SOCIETY.

September 27: Lecture:

September 28: Lecture and Seminar. *In-class assignment #2.*

READING:

- a) Seidman 11-21: The Idea of a Science of Society: The Enlightenment and Auguste Comte.
- b) Lemert: Modernity's Classical Age: 1848-1919. 21-27.

WEEK 5: THE REVOLUTIONARY THEORY OF KARL MARX.

NOTE: Two-page Assignment on Karl Marx due class October 18.

October 4: Lecture: Marx and his theories.

October 5: Key Ideas: Historical Materialism. Class Conflict. Alienation.

READING:

- a) Seidman: Chapter 2. 22-35.
- b) Lemert: Intro to Marx Page 29.
- c) Lemert: Class Struggle. Marx and Engels.

WEEK 6: THE REVOLUTIONARY THEORY OF KARL MARX.

October 11: Lecture: Ideology

October 12. Film excerpts. (Stuart Hall)AND *in-class assignment #3.*

READING:

- a) The Communist Manifesto (AVAILABLE ONLINE).
- b) Lemert: Estranged Labour Pages 30-36 & Camera Obscura 36-37,
- c) Seidman: Rethinking the Classical Tradition: European Theory. 134-141

Two-page Assignment on Karl Marx due class October 18.(Next Class).

WEEK 7: THE PROMISE OF SOCIOLOGY: EMILE DURKHEIM

October 18: Lecture.

October 19: Lecture and Seminar Discussion.

In class assignment #4.

READING:

- a) Seidman Chapter 3. EMILE DURKHEIM
- b) Lemert: Intro to Durkheim Page 70-71
- c) Anomie and the Modern Division of Labour 71-72
- d) Sociology and Social Facts. 73-75.
- e) Suicide and Modernity. 75-83
- f) The Cultural Logic of Collective Representation. 90-99
- g) Seidman: Rethinking the Classical tradition: American Sociology. Part III. Pp 67-85.

Week 8: THE IRONIC SOCIAL THEORY OF MAX WEBER.

October 25: Lecture.

October 26: FILM and Discussion: Roger and Me.

READING

- a) Seidman: Chapter 4. MAX WEBER
- b) All in LEMERT:
 - a. Max Weber 99-100
 - b. The Spirit Capitalism and the Iron Cage 100-104
 - c. The Bureaucratic Machine 104-110
 - d. Types of Legitimate Domination 112-114
 - e. Class, Status, Party 115-125

WEEK 9: WEBER (CONTD).

November 1: Lecture.

November 2: **MID TERM EXAM.(Durkheim & Weber).**

WEEK 10: THE WORLD OF GEORGE SIMMEL

November 8: Lecture: The Person and His Ideas

November 9: Lecture and Tutorial Seminar. *In-class assignment # 5*

READING:

- b) Lemert: 180-184

WEEK 11: THE VISION OF W.E. B. DU BOIS

November 15: Lecture.

November 16. Lecture/discussion and *in-class assignment # 6.*

READING:

- a) Lemert : William Edward Dubois: Double Consciousness and the Veil, 162-168
- b) Lemert: Black Reconstruction and the Racial Wage 238

WEEK 12: CLASSICAL THEORY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

November 22: Lecture

November 23: Lecture and *in-class paper # 7.*

READING:

- a) Seidman Chapter 14: Feminist Theory.
- b) Seidman: Chapter 16: Lesbian Gay and Queer Theory
- b) Lemert: Charlotte Perkins Gilman *The Yellow Wallpaper*, 168-170; *Women and Economics*, 170-174; Anna Julia Cooper: *The Colored Woman's Office*, 174-180

WEEK 13. CRITICAL REVIEW AND SUM UP.

November 29: Lecture.

November 30: Discussion and Review.

READING: These are available through JSTOR, an online journal archive which is available through the Ryerson Library.

- a) R.W. Connell (1997) "Why is Classical Theory Classical?" *American Journal of Sociology* 102: 1511-57.
- b) Randall Collins (1997) "A Sociological Guilt Trip: Comment on Connell" *American Journal of Sociology* 102: 1558-64.