

SOC5328 Social Theory – Spring 2023

M 6-8.50pm

Sociology Conference Room

Prof Denis O’Hearn

Old Main 201

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 11-12am and by appointment

Land Acknowledgement

As members of the University of Texas at El Paso community, we acknowledge that we are meeting on unceded Indigenous land. We would like to recognize and pay our respects to the Indigenous people with long ties to the immediate region: Lipan Apache, Mescalero Apache, Piro, Manso, Suma, Jumano, Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, Piro/Manso/Tiwa Indian Tribe of the Pueblo of San Juan de Guadalupe, and Tortugas Pueblo. We also acknowledge the nations whose territories include present day Texas: the Carrizo & Comecrudo, Coahuiltecan, Caddo, Tonkawa, Comanche, Alabama-Coushatta, Kickapoo, and the peoples of Chihuahua and northern Mexico from whom most/many of our students descend, such as the Rarámuri, Tepehuan, Wixarrika and Nahuatlaca peoples. Finally, we recognize all of the American Indian and Indigenous Peoples and communities who have been or have become a part of these lands and territories here in Paso del Norte, on Turtle Island. The University of Texas at El Paso honors your history and cultures and we seek greater awareness of the myriad ways in which your legacy can guide us in fruitful partnerships and mutually fulfilling relationships.

Welcome to Soc. 5328, our core graduate course in social theory. Social theories are the ways we look at the world. They should not be seen as static things but, rather, as dynamic bodies of thought that are modified and updated as we study the real world. We never change the facts we observe to fit our theories – as in “alternative facts” – rather we challenge and adapt our theories as they fail to fully explain what we observe. Social theories are idealized pictures of how the world works, meaning that they cannot be applied directly to any research project or problem, but they give us guidance for our research and for our understanding of the world.

This course concentrates on “classical” sociological theory. Thus, we will be reading the “founding fathers” of the discipline (yes, they were practically all *men* and *white* men at that). But we read them with the understanding that

their works are the basis of many of our contemporary approaches to studying societies. Therefore, throughout the course, we will be thinking about (1) how theories guide our understanding of the real world, and (2) how the theories have changed since they were first introduced. Especially with regard to Karl Marx and Max Weber, I will introduce some of the controversies and real-world changes that have led to “*neo-Marxism*” or “*neo-Weberianism*”. We will also read work by the eminent sociologist WEB DuBois to see how theories of class and race have been reconciled. In the process we will talk about “critical race theory” and examine how it has been misconstrued and attacked in an attempt to deny the true impact of race and racism in contemporary society.

The course is organized into lectures and student-led discussions. The lectures will closely cover course readings, but my style is conversational so I will always welcome interruptions and discussions. We always learn more by discussing things and asking questions than we will if I hand down “truth” from the front of the classroom.

Discussions are primarily a place for you to come with questions and ideas from the week’s readings that you want to explore further. To promote useful discussion, we will provide a list of shorter excerpts from the list of readings for each week (below). You will be required to read these shorter excerpts before each week’s section and provide a short written comment or question on them. More information about this will be provided in your first section.

Your grade will depend on section participation and two essays. Suggested topics for essays will be provided but you are welcome to negotiate alternative topics with me. More information will be provided in class.

All readings are available from the bookstore or on blackboard. Feel free to order course books from on-line sources and also feel free to read additional materials that you think might be useful.

Finally, enjoy the course. Social theory can be seen as a chore. It can also be viewed as something that opens our minds toward the possibilities of social research, and that will enable us to have a better understanding of the world around us. I hope that we can achieve the latter point of view and, for that purpose, I invite you to read the excerpt on blackboard from C. Wright Mills’ *Sociological Imagination* and to take seriously his assertion that we

study sociology to understand the world, and that we seek such understanding in order to change the world for the better.

Learning outcomes:

1. The ability to critically read texts and analyze the social world around them using basic sociological concepts and ideas derived from significant sociological thinkers drawn from the past and contemporary periods.
2. The ability to communicate effectively in writing that is coherent, well-developed, and expressive of concepts, ideas, and themes derived from sociological thinking.
3. The ability to express your thoughts orally and to lead discussion.
4. Knowledge of themes, perspectives, and paradigms in particular areas of sociological thought.

Outline of course meetings

Jan 23 Week 1: Introduction, Approaches to Social Theory:

Consensus/Conflict; Modernization/Imperialism

Readings: Mills, excerpt from *Sociological Imagination* [BB]; Macpherson on Hobbes and Locke [BB]

Jan 30 Week 2: Hobbes and Locke, Possessive Individualism

Readings: Macpherson on Hobbes and Locke [BB]

Feb 6 Week 3: Durkheim on social fact and suicide

Readings: Coser on Comte [BB]; Coser on Durkheim [BB]; Durkheim, *Rules*, introduction, chs 1-6 [BB]
Durkheim *Suicide*, Books 2 and 3

Feb 13 Week 4: Working week: directed work on first essay

Feb 20 Week 5: Marx on class, state, rise of capitalism

Readings: Coser on Marx [BB]; Wright, *Class, Crisis and the State*, chs.2 and 4 [BB]

Feb 27 Week 6: Weber on class and state

Readings: Coser on Weber [BB]; excerpts from Weber, *Economy and Society* [BB]

Mar 6 Week 7: Weber on the rise of capitalism

Readings: Weber, Protestant Ethic

Mar 13 – Spring Break

Mar 20 Week 8: Marx's Kapital 1

Readings: Marx, Capital Vol 1, pp. 89-93, 125-344

Mar 27 Week 9: Marx's Kapital 2

Readings: Marx, Capital Vol 1, pp. 411-26, 429-517, 544-64, 643-72

Apr 3 Week 10: An anarchist sociology?

Readings: O'Hearn and Grubacic, "Exilic Spaces and Practices in World Capitalism" [BB]; Kropotkin, Mutual Aid, chs.3-5 [BB]

Apr 10 Week 11: Race and class I

Readings: DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk [BB]

Apr 17 Week 12: Race and Class II

Readings: Edward Taylor, "A Primer on Critical Race Theory", The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, Spring, 1998, No. 19 (Spring, 1998), pp. 122-124

Carbado and Roithmayr, "Critical Race Theory Meets Social Science", Annu. Rev. Law Soc. Sci. 2014. 10:149-67 [BB]

Apr 24 Week 13: Gender I

Readings: Amy Wharton, The Sociology of Gender, chs.1-3 [BB]

May 1 Week 14: Gender II and review, second essay due

Readings: Amy Wharton, The Sociology of Gender, chs. 4-7 [BB]

Important dates:

Jan 17th	Spring classes begin
Jan 17th-20th	Late Registration (Fees are incurred)
Feb 1st	Spring Census Day Note: This is the last day to register for classes. Payments are due by 5:00 pm.
Feb 13th	20 th Class Day Note: Students who were given a payment deadline extension will be dropped at 5:00 pm if payment arrangements have not been made.
Feb 17th	Graduation application deadline for degree conferral
Mar 13th-17th	Spring Break
Mar 30th	Spring Drop/Withdrawal Deadline Note: Student-initiated drops are permitted after this date, but the student is not guaranteed a grade of W. The faculty member of record will issue a grade of either W or F.
Mar 31st	Cesar Chavez Holiday - No classes
Apr 7th	Spring Study Day
Apr 14th	Deadline to submit candidates' names for commencement program
May 4th	Spring – Last day of classes
May 5th	Dead day
May 8-12th	Spring Final Exams
May 13-14th	Spring Commencement
May 17th	Grades are Due