Course Description

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. (Marx 1937 [1852])

Sociologists study societies. “Modern social thought was born proclaiming that society is made and imagined, that it is a human artifact rather than the expression of an underlying natural order (Unger 1997: 3).” But there are artifacts, and then, there are artifacts. Bigger than breadboxes, societies are still harder to see. Sociology is the discipline of making society visible. Most of us, most of the time, have a pretty good sense of how things work in the social worlds through which we make our ways. To a great extent, our common sense is a prediscursive resource, a tacit understanding of the way it is, and such understandings are often naturalized; we take for granted that the way things are is the way things have been (always and everywhere), perhaps the way things must be, and even the way things should be. Sociology invites us to question such assumptions—to render them discursive, to explore them imaginatively and empirically, and to see that things might be otherwise. “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it (Marx 1969 [1845]).”

In this course students are invited to study various artifacts of our society. As a class, we will study Steve Bruce's Sociology: A Very Short Introduction, and students have the option of studying one of several classic introductions to the field in small groups (like book clubs). Their choices are: The Sociological Imagination by C. Wright Mills, Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective by Peter L. Berger, or Social Things: An Introduction to the Sociological Life by Charles Lemert.

As a class, we also will study William G. Roy's Making Societies: The Historical Construction of Our World, which (together with a variety of other texts) encourages us to see that even the most basic categories of perception (time, space) and divisions of the social world (race, gender, class) are human artifacts (maybe not only artifacts, but artifacts nonetheless). We will devote a bit more time to class than to race and gender, but as these distinctions are correlated with class in interesting (and depressing) ways, we will not give them short shrift. In our study of class, we will look back at The Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, still intriguing today as an early and exemplary analysis of globalization. We will also reschedule some class time to watch some films that treat class themes: Charlie Chaplin's classic Modern Times and Fred Schepisi's screen adaptation of John Guare's play, Six Degrees of Separation.

One of the consequences of recognizing society as an artifact is an appreciation of its plasticity. While we are all constrained by history and habit, we often experience the trials and tribulations of our lives as public problems (rather than private troubles, divine justice, cruel caprice, or fatal destiny); and we see others around us doing the same, and acting collectively through various social movements to resolve various problems. Students have the option of studying the social problem/movement of their choice,
and discussing their research and analysis with other students in small groups (of problem students—it's not always a bad thing).

As the term draws to a close, and students are busy with their term papers and turkeys and tofu, we will open some breadboxes, share some recipes, and take a closer look at the social significance of food—and feasting, and fasting. In the final week of the term, we will turn our attention back to the social significance of time and space, attending especially to the long-run importance of claims-making practices in the many "third places" (Oldenburg 1999 [1991]) of this shrinking world of strangers.

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**Texts & Such**

The following texts are available at the Oberlin College Bookstore:


Other texts, including many that are listed in the Bibliography below, are (or will be) available in-class, online, or at the library.

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**Requirements & Grades**

Students are expected to attend class regularly, to participate actively and courteously, to abide by the rules of Oberlin College (especially the Honor Code), and to follow the instructions of Mr. Steward (including those set forth in the latest version of this Syllabus or the Frequently Asked Questions page).

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<tr>
<th>Grading Scale</th>
<th>097-100% A+</th>
<th>093-096% A</th>
<th>090-092% A-</th>
<th>087-089% B+</th>
<th>083-086% B</th>
<th>080-082% B-</th>
<th>077-079% C+</th>
<th>073-076% C</th>
<th>070-072% C-</th>
<th>060-069% D</th>
<th>000-059% F</th>
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Various printed texts, films, recordings, and other media (referred to generally as "texts") will be assigned and made available during the term. Students should engage these texts critically, assessing their validity against personal experience, common sense, and the methods of research and interpretation modeled by the sociologists and other scholars who authored these texts. Various exercises may be assigned from time to time over the course of the term to guide students in practices of research, writing, oral presentation, and critical interpretation. Such exercises may take the form of homework, in-class assignments, or small group projects. As a general rule, these exercises will not be graded; they may, however, be converted into graded assignments (e.g., pop quizzes) if and when this seems pedagogically appropriate to the instructor.
Each student will be evaluated (also known as "graded") on the basis of his/her: class participation, term paper, small group participation, and performance on each of two examinations. Each of these assignments is described in some detail below, including the rubrics/procedures that the instructor will use while grading them. Students should read this carefully and ask questions early in the term if they are confused about the instructor's expectations.

**Class Participation**

Students should attend class regularly and well-prepared, and should participate actively in our discussions. Attending class regularly means missing no more than two or three sessions over the course of the term, and *never* missing a scheduled examination or small group meeting.

Being prepared means doing the assigned readings (or viewings, or listenings) *before* the class session in which they are to be covered, and giving some thought to them. What is most intriguing? What is most confusing? Can you think of examples from your own life, or from your knowledge of world history or the contemporary world, that bolster an author's argument? Can you think of counter-examples that challenge the argument, inviting us to refine or reject it? Can you think of alternative theories and concepts that offer us a better grasp of the public problems and social relations we are studying?

Participating actively means speaking up, but it means more than that—it also means paying attention to others, listening to the instructor and to the other students, and staying on-task when we are doing in-class exercises. We all get bored or distracted sometimes, but we can work together to make this an invigorating class. If you find yourself feeling alienated from the class or the texts, please speak with the instructor. He can't fix everything, but he will try to help.

Class participation will be graded as follows: At the end of the term, a modal score will be assigned to everyone in the class; this will be 004% to 006%, depending upon the overall quality of class participation over the course of the term. For each student, this score will be adjusted to reflect his/her own contributions; individual scores will range between 000% and 010%.

**Small Group Participation**

Shortly after the Fall Break, students will be assigned to small groups based upon their individual choices regarding the subjects of their term papers (their *project elections*—see the discussion of term papers below). From time to time during the rest of the semester, we will spend all or part of our class sessions meeting in these groups. Basically, each student will find himself or herself either in a *book club* or a group of *problem students*.

Small group participation will be graded as follows: At the end of the term, each student will evaluate the other members of his/her small group. The peer evaluations will be conducted as follows: On confidential forms submitted to the instructor, each student will allocate points among the other members of his/her group, providing a brief justification for the *range* of scores assigned. Can you give *reasons* for distinguishing among your peers? What are they? Share them with the instructor. The number of points to be allocated among your peers will be equal to eight times the number of people in the group minus one. These peer evaluation scores will be averaged for each student, and the distribution of these scores will be used by the instructor to assign each student a score ranging between 000% and 010%. The instructor reserves the right to adjust scores in the interests of fairness, equity, and reason.
**Term Paper**

Students are expected to research and write a term paper *over the course of the term* (that's why it's called a "term" paper). Please do not wait until the end of the term to start. To encourage timely research and writing, students will be required to notify the instructor of their term paper topic by the date of the midterm exam. This is your "project election." Basically, it is a commitment to read and review one of the classic introductory texts or to research and analyze a social problem/movement of interest to the student. Students will be expected to provide an alternative election as well, because we face a collective action problem. There must be enough *other* students who also want to read/discuss a particular text before we can form a book club for it; similarly, there must be enough students who want to study social problems/movements to form a problem student group (but students need not be interested in the same problems/movements). The instructor intends to form groups of 4-5 students, so there will probably be multiple groups reviewing each of the classic texts, and perhaps several groups studying social problems. Towards the end of the term, students will exchange drafts of their term papers with other students in their groups, and class time will be devoted to providing each other with feedback. Students are invited to share drafts of their papers with the instructor as well.

Term papers will be graded as follows: Each paper will be read for both form and content, and assigned a score ranging from 000% to 010% for each aspect of the paper. Average/acceptable performance will be awarded a score of 007%, with downward adjustments made for papers that are disappointing and upward adjustments for papers that exceed expectations. Students will be given scores ranging from 000% to 020% for their term paper.

**Examinations**

There will be two examinations in this class: a midterm and a final. Both exams will be given in class. They will be open-book and open-note, but not collaborative and not open-computer. These exams will include essay questions (students will be given several questions from which they must select one), so you will need to bring blue books. These exams will also include non-essay questions (matching, short answer, fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, etc.). Students will be expected to select the best answers to such questions, bearing in mind that they are designed to test your understanding of the texts and class lectures, and not your beliefs or the way things really are. The final will be cumulative.

Examinations will be graded as follows: Essays will count for between a third and a half of each exam, and will be graded on both form and content. All questions will be assigned point values that students can see on the examination forms. Sometimes partial credit may be awarded on short answer questions, but as a general rule students should give a correct answer to be awarded points. Students will be given scores ranging from 000% to 030% for each of these exams.

**Schedule**

The following schedule is subject to change. Students will be given sufficient advance notice of all required readings to obtain the readings and study them in advance of the week in which they will be covered. Students are expected to read assigned texts before the class session in which they are to be discussed.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Dates</th>
<th>(R): Add/Drop</th>
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<tr>
<td>2007.09.13</td>
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<td>Deadline</td>
<td>2007.10.18</td>
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<tr>
<td>(R): Midterm/Project Ele</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007.11.01</td>
<td>Midterm Grades</td>
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<td>on PRESTO</td>
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<td>2007.11.06 (T): F/NP, CR/NE,</td>
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2007.09.02 - 2007.09.08 (Week 01)
- Review Syllabus.

2007.09.09 - 2007.09.15 (Week 02)
- Bruce 1999.

2007.09.16 - 2007.09.22 (Week 03)
- Roy 2001: 30-47.
- Other readings TBD.

2007.09.23 - 2007.09.29 (Week 04)
- Other readings TBD.

2007.09.30 - 2007.10.06 (Week 05)
- Other readings TBD.

2007.10.07 - 2007.10.13 (Week 06)
- Other readings TBD.

2007.10.14 - 2007.10.20 (Week 07)
- Review.
- Midterm/Project Elections.

2007.10.21 - 2007.10.27 (Week 08)
- Fall Break.

2007.10.28 - 2007.11.03 (Week 09)
- Marx & Engels 1998 [1848].
- Other readings TBD.
- Reschedule Tuesday's Class: Watch Modern Times.

2007.11.04 - 2007.11.10 (Week 10)
- Readings on Globalization/World Systems Theory.
- Readings from Veblen; Bourdieu; Goffman.

2007.11.11 - 2007.11.17 (Week 11)
- Reschedule Tuesday's Class: Watch Six Degrees of Separation.
- Other readings TBD.

2007.11.18 - 2007.11.24 (Week 12)
- Readings/video regarding families and food.
- Readings on Thanksgiving.

2007.11.25 - 2007.12.01 (Week 13)
- Readings on cuisines, cultures, and subcultures.
- Readings on food and in/humanity.

2007.12.02 - 2007.12.08 (Week 14)
- Book Clubs & Problem Students Meetings.

- Small Worlds, Third Places, Long-Runs.
- Review.
- Evaluations.

W/draw Deadline
2007.11.22 (R): Thanksgiving Holiday
2007.12.13 (R): Papers Due
2007.12.19 (W): Final Exam
2008.01.07 (M): Final Grades on PRESTO
Bibliography


Alvarez, Louis and Andrew Kolker. 2001. People Like Us: Social Class in America. PBS/WETA.


Barthes, Roland. 1972 [1957]. Mythologies. Selected and translated from the French by Annette Lavers. New York, NY: Noonday Press/Farrar, Straus & Giroux. (Selections available as PDF files: "Ornamental Cookery" (pp. 78-80), "Steak and Chips" (pp. 62-64), and "Wine and Milk" (pp. 58-61.).)


