Course Description
Learn the methods and theories that sociologists use to understand the mass societies that emerged out of 19th-century industrial and political revolutions. This young science’s insights will help us understand contemporary controversies around inequality, social change, gender, race and power. This course will familiarize you with the relationship between sociology and other disciplines, techniques for reading original research articles, basic sociological writing skills, and most importantly, the social origin of individual thought and action.

This course is a prerequisite for upper-division sociology classes and counts for Cultural Diversity (CD)

Contact info
Office hours: W 2-5; before or after most class days. Or by appointment
greggor.mattson@oberlin.edu
The best way to get in touch is before or after class. The second best way is during office hours. The worst way to get in touch is to send me an e-mail less than 24 hours before you need a reply.

Goals
1) learn how sociologists think and work
2) read and write like a social scientist
3) analyze specific research pieces, from book-length monographs to scholarly articles
4) locate sociology in relation to other sciences and the humanities
5) understand the social origins of individual thought and action
6) learn how tastes and preferences are tools of individuality and inequality

Assessment
Homework, attendance, quizzes 20%
4 assignments 60% (15% each)
Final Exam 20%

Participation
• come to class on time
• be engaged (no phones, laptops, knitting, grooming, knuckle-popping)
• having done the readings and brought them to class
• bring your reading notes
• volunteer answers to others’ questions
• come to office hours to discuss thoughts and ideas

Required Books
Office hours
Office hours are to discuss readings, grades or reading notes from classes you have missed. You should visit my office hours at least twice during the semester as a matter of habit: it helps you get the most out of the course, cement your learning, and build relationships.

Reading notes
It's better to skim each text than get stuck on a difficult page. Try skimming the whole selection in 5 minutes. Notice section headings, bold words, or highlighted quotations to get a sense of the story the author is telling. Then when you read the entire piece, you'll already know where the argument is going. To ensure your comprehension, answer the following questions:

- what are the main concepts this author is using?
- what is the point of this article—what is the author trying to explain?
- how convincing is the argument?
- how does it relate to the others we have covered?

Attendance & homework
Homework is not accepted late and quizzes cannot be made up. I will drop your 2 lowest grades. If you will be missing class events for approved College events, provide documentation two weeks before your absence. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get notes from a colleague and come to office hours to discuss what you missed.

Grading rubric
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thesis</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Underlined?</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concepts</td>
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<td>Organization</td>
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<td>Insight</td>
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<td>Conventions</td>
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Thesis: 20 (argument suitable for essay length, recapitulated in conclusion, formulated in one pithy thesis sentence in first paragraph)

Underlined?: 10 (yep, you get 10 points for underlining your thesis sentence)

Concepts 30 (synthesize theories from a variety of sources, in-text citations in APA format)

Organization 20 (ideas grouped in paragraphs around topic sentences backed by evidence)

Insight 10 (creativity, connections between texts, use of language, title, sparkle)

Conventions 10 (hard copy stapled, grammar, 1” margins, spelling, punctuated, 12-pt. font)

Grading policies
No late assignments or quizzes. No extra credit.

Final Exam
I will distribute a list of essay questions on the last day of class. From those I will choose the ones that will appear on the exam. They will be broad questions that will require you to draw on the breadth of the course and reflect on what you know about sociology.

Off-campus Assignments
Assignments may invite you to make observations or attend events off campus. Off-campus assignments are done at your own discretion; alternate assignments are available if you prefer.

Sources & Citations (APA format)
You need not make a works cited for course readings but you must cite them properly in the text in APA format. *Wikipedia is not an academic source, but may lead you to primary sources.*
Paraphrasing primary sources (preferred):
Media in the 1950s catered to the rising middle class, giving a misleading impression of America’s families (Coontz 1990, p. 31).

Direct quotations (use sparingly) must be introduced:
Stephanie Coontz cites the enduring power of the media for creating a new American tradition during the baby boom: “The happy, homogenous families that we ‘remember’ from the 1950s were... a result of the media’s denial of diversity” (1990, p. 31).

Disability Accommodations
If you are a student with a disability, register with the Office of Disability Services (Peters G-27/28 x55588) at least two weeks before any due date or exam.

Honor Code: http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/honorcode.html
Remember to sign the code on each assignment—it is your pledge to know the boundaries of cheating (not doing your own work) plagiarism (taking credit for someone else’s work) and fabrication (making up sources or observations). All quotations must be cited properly.

Assignments: 4 pages max.
The assignments are evidence of your comprehension of the course materials and your ability to synthesize them with our discussions. Do not mistake the length of these assignments for their importance. Each is worth 20% of your grade and deserves attention over several days (and editing!), not a last-minute dash the night before.

Assignment #1: The sociological story of a name DUE Tuesday 2/19 at noon
Using your name or the name of a close friend, find out the story of the name (ask parents/grandparents). Use the texts and internet data sources we have used in class to construct a sociological story of your name—what does this name say about the person? Into what trends does it fit? If it defies trends, speculate upon sociological reasons why. 2-3 pages

Assignment #2: Peer interview about childhood activities DUE Tuesday 3/12 at noon
Use Lareau to analyze class position and trajectory. Interview someone who is NOT a friend about their upbringing and elementary school extracurricular experiences. Use concepts from Unequal Childhoods to put your interviewee’s experiences into a broader sociological context. 4 pages max

Assignment #3: Rates of change over time DUE Tuesday 4/11 at noon
Reproduce a table from Fischer and Hout. After that, choose at least one control variable for which you have a hypothesis about its effect on the relationship in the table. Recode variables as necessary. Describe your results in a 2-3-page memo that explains what you investigated, why it is sociologically interesting, and a hypothesis that explains the results.

Assignment #4: Observations in public DUE Thursday 4/30 at noon
Using Grazian as a model, make observations of a group of Oberlin students to make a sociological argument about the interactions you witness. How do social roles influence the “personal” decisions made by your colleagues? 4 pages max

Off-campus Assignments
Assignments may invite you to make observations or attend events off campus. Off-campus assignments are done at your own discretion; alternate assignments are available if you prefer.
UNIT ONE: FASHIONS AND SOCIAL FORCES (key concepts in **bold**)

Baby names and other preferences allow us to explore how collective behavior—shared cultural and institutional "structures of meaning"—guide our (seemingly) individual choices and feelings. Key figures include W.I. Thomas’ **theorem**, Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of **cultural capital**, and Robert Bellah’s insights on **voluntarism** and American **individualism**.

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**Week 1: Feb 4-8**

**Welcome: Course outline and guidelines**

WEB That Cerulean Sweater from *The Devil Wears Prada*
WEB Thrift Shop, Macklemore. 2013.

**The sociology of baby names**

BOOK “Prologue” and pp. 1-17; 23-30 of Chapter 1 from Lieberson’s *A Matter of Taste*

*What is the difference between fashion, custom and aesthetics? What three "types of influence" does Lieberson describe? What are internal vs. external mechanisms?*

HOMEWORK Review the file “Most Popular Baby Names 2008; NYC Bureau of Vital Statistics.” On a typed piece of paper with your name on it, identify at least three trends. Here are a couple of hints: what is special about the names Jennifer and Joshua? How do names reflect racial assimilation or segregation? Print two copies; turn one in at the beginning of class.

**Fashions, customs and social forces**

BOOK Chapter 2 from Lieberson’s *A Matter of Taste*

*To more fully understand what it means for something to be a fashion, consider naming practices where there is little choice. In some communities, the day of a baby's birth determines their name, such as the Catholic Saint’s Feast Day. In days past, a similar practice happened in Finland based on the name day on which a child was born. What external events does Lieberson discuss? What evidence is there that they affect baby naming fashions? What kind of influence is "individualism?"*

HOMEWORK Using the links above, turn in a piece of paper showing what your parents would have named you had you been born in a very traditional Catholic or Finnish household.

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**Week 2: Feb 11-15**

**Individualism, Fashion and Choice**

BOOK Chapter 3 from Lieberson’s *A Matter of Taste*
WEB McKinley, James 2010. "A Name for Newborns, Thanks to Vampires," NYTimes. May 7


WEB “You're All Individuals!” Monty Python’s The Life of Bryan

What would Lieberson say about the influence of Twilight? What do naming practices say about what Bellah calls the paradox of individualism? What evidence does he give that individuals are made by society and not the other way 'round? What evidence does Lieberson provide that individuals are influenced by society in naming?

**Internal mechanisms: fashion in society**

BOOK Chapters 4-5 from Lieberson’s A Matter of Taste
WEB "A Boy Named Sue," Johnny Cash

What is the ratchet mechanism, and is it an internal or external mechanism? In what ways are fashion changes predictable? How does gender affect names? Don't lose sight of the bigger question: why do fashions change, again? What would Lieberson hypothesize about the effect of the Clinton scandal on the name "Monica?"

HOMEWORK: Bring an analysis of "Monica" to class based on the SSA and Baby Name Wizard

**Individual names, group identities**


What evidence does Lieberson provide that there is indeed some broader American culture? What makes subcultures different? How do names reflect acculturation to American society? Go back and look at the NYC baby names. How do even “creative” names signal important aspects of social identity to strangers? And now consider the case of E and Yo... What happens when a name is too individualistic?


**Week 3: Feb 18-22**

**Individual names, group identities**

BOOK Chapter 8: Broader Issues pp 223-227; 230¶4-247
WEB Like the Dwights and Lyndons of Old, Baby Baracks All Over, New York Times

Read this chapter to see how Lieberson applies his mechanisms to explain the trajectories of Jennifer and Rebecca. What are the difficulties involved in determining whether or not a
celebrity influenced naming trends? Use the Baby Naming Wizard to test the claims presented in the New York Times article. What elements of fashion are present in Korean tacos—what would Lieberson say about them? Last chance to ask questions about assignment 1.

*** FEB 19: ASSIGNMENT #1 Due at Noon, hard copy, in my office door KING 305 ***

UNIT TWO: STRATIFICATION AND INEQUALITY  
Method: In-depth interviews (qualitative)  
Purely materialist approaches to inequality look only at money and property. Cultural accounts like Pierre Bourdieu’s look at the role of education on socio-economic status (SES). Annette Lareau’s book provides an account of social class reproduction and class mobility by revealing the unbenefits parents bestow on children in childrearing practices, called cultural capital

Concerted Cultivation and the Accomplishment of Natural Growth  
BOOK Lareau, Chapters 1+2, appendix A, notes, acknowledgements

HOMEWORK Bring a list of key terms or unfamiliar words for discussion.

Theory and Methods with Pierre Bourdieu  
BOOK Lareau, Appendix B  
FILE Weiss, Robert S. “In Their Own Words: Making the Most of Qualitative Interviews.”  

Appendix B provides a mini theory lesson, illustrating how social theory underpins both the methods by which sociologists do their research, the way they interpret their data, and how they tie their conclusions into broader sociological questions. Weiss gives you information useful in completing assignment #2.

Week 4: Feb 25-Mar 1  
Social class organizes daily life (reading for content)  
BOOK Lareau, Chapters 3-5

What strategies are you going to use to get the content out of these chapters without spending too much of your weekend memorizing these kids’ names?

WRITE: Turn in your interview schedule for assignment #2

Language Use: Middle Class, Working Class  
BOOK Lareau, Chapters 6 and 7  

How can we see cultural capital at work in the way we speak? What would Lareau add to the debate in the New York Times article? How might middle class and working class students differ in their response to rewards?

Families and Institutions: Concerted Cultivation  
BOOK Lareau, Chapters 8-9

What have colleges and universities learned that Lareau’s work helps us understand?

Week 5: Mar 4-8

Educational Institutions and Middle Class Culture
BOOK Lareau, Chapter 10-11 (198-232)

Since Lareau is NOT saying that middle class childraising practices are BETTER than working class practices, how is it that one produces “better” results than the other?

The Power and Limits of Social Class—then and now
BOOK: Lareau, Chapter 12 + Chapter 14

What does Lareau mean by the “limits” of social class? How did you feel while reading her account of the families’ reactions to the book?

Institutional authority, social class and Oberlin
BOOK Lareau, pp 261-311 (Chapter 13)

How well do Lareau’s insights “scale up” from elementary school to the college environment?

Week 6: Mar 11-15

UNIT THREE: SOCIOLOGY AND MODERNITY: THE DEMOGRAPHIC HISTORY OF AMERICA
Method: Statistics (quantitative); comparative-historical
The possibilities of individualism were transformed by the modernity, social responses to the wrenching changes of the late 19th century. This unit looks at the way those changes played out in American lives by looking at how demographers group populations into cohorts to understand how meanings, resources and life chances are distributed in society.

Century of Difference
BOOK Fischer and Hout, Preface, Introduction, Appendices and Notes

Dissect the introduction and back matter of this statistical and historical sociological monograph. What is their research project? Their data source? Their thesis?

HOMEWORK Bring a list of unfamiliar terms to lecture

* * * MAR 12: ASSIGNMENT #1 Due at Noon, hard copy, in my office door KING 305 * * *
**Reading tables + How America Expanded Education**
FILE Mattson, Telling Stories With Graphs and Charts
BOOK Fischer & Hout, Chapter 2

*What are the major trends in US Educational history? Why is this interesting sociologically? What is the relationship between this data and the argument in Lareau’s book?*

**Using the General Social Survey**
FILE Mattson Using the General Social Survey
HOMEWORK Complete the exercises in the handout posted under my name on Blackboard

**Week 7: Mar 18-22**
**Where Americans Came From**
BOOK Fischer & Hout, Chapter 3

**How Americans Lived**
BOOK Fischer & Hout, Chapter 4

**Social Change in The UK: 49-Up by Michael Apted DVD-1975 in Mudd**

**Week 8: Mar 23-31 *** SPRING BREAK ***

**Week 9: Apr 1-4**
**How Americans Worked**
BOOK Fischer & Hout, Chapter 5

**What Americans Had**
BOOK Fischer & Hout, Chapter 6

**Where Americans Lived**
BOOK Fischer & Hout, Chapter 7

**Week 10: Apr 8-12**
**How Americans Prayed**
Fischer & Hout, Chapter 8

**Modernity in the American Present**
BOOK Fischer & Hout, Chapter 10
**APRIL 11: ASSIGNMENT #3 Due at Noon, hard copy, in my office door KING 305**

### UNIT ONE: RECREATION: CREATING AND RECREATING THE AUTHENTIC SELF

**Method: ethnography (AKA participant-observation)**

We continue our analysis of preferences as ways we distinguish ourselves and their relationship to inequalities. Grazian’s *Blue Chicago* teaches us about how sociologists think about **urbanism**, the limits of **authenticity**, and the paradoxes of **social roles**. He also provides more evidence for the social origins of the individual self.

**Observing and interpreting social life: the Chicago Blues**

- **BOOK** Grazian, Prologue + Chapter 1

What does Grazian mean by the search for authenticity? What is it, why is it important, how do we know who has it, and what does it mean to have a symbolic economy of it? What is the relationship between nocturnal capital and cultural capital?

#### Week 11: Apr 15-19

**Inventing authenticity in the nocturnal city**

Grazian, Chapter 2-3

What is the relationship between the city and authenticity in American culture? What is a social role? How does a social role help realize an individual’s identity? What is the brotherhood of strangers, and what does nocturnal capital help to realize the (authentic) self when consuming urban nightlife?

**Blues musicians and the search for authenticity**

- **BOOK** Grazian, Chapter 4
- **FILE** Weininger and Lareau, “Cultural Capital.”

What is subcultural capital? What barriers prevent performers from converting their subcultural capital into profit? What is the relationship between art and commerce among performers – is it the same for old timers and white lions?

**The rise of the Blues Club as a tourist attraction**

- **BOOK** Grazian, Chapter 5

Thinking back to Fischer and Hout and even Chapter 2 of Lieberson, what world-historical changes were necessary that Mississippi Delta blues could be enjoyed by suburban white couples from Wichita?

#### Week 12: Apr 22-26

**Selling authenticity in the urban metropolis**
What does it mean to invent a tradition and why is it so important to urban centers to have tradition to sell? What’s the matter with tourism anyways – who has access to which social roles?

**Selling (and stealing?) authenticity**

BOOK Grazian, Chapter 7
WEB Moby, *Natural Blues*

*How are the inequalities discussed by Hesmondhalgh similar to or different from the ones Grazian discussed?*

**Selling (and stealing?) authenticity**

Play all the games at [So What Class Are You?](#)

In class we will watch portion of FILM: *People Like Us* DVD-5295 in Mudd

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**RECAP: THE SOCIAL ORIGINS OF THE SELF, OR WHY EVEN HIPSTERS HATE HIPSTERS**

In each of the units we have considered the social forces that shape our individual lives. We have looked at how creativity both enabled and constrained by what is already “out there” in culture. In this unit, we revisit the ways in which our tastes both form our identities and give us away, telling others who we are and where we’re from.

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**Week 13: Apr 29-May 3**

**Everybody hates hipsters, she said**

WEB [Thrift Shop](#), Macklemore. 2013.

*Here comes our friend Pierre Bourdieu again*! Greif makes several interesting observations: why does everyone swear that the hipster cannot be defined? Is hipster like pornography—you only know it when you see it? Why do hipsters not self-identify as hipsters?

**APR 30: ASSIGNMENT #1 Due at Noon, hard copy, in my office door KING 305**

**You’re Not the Boss of You Recap: Class, classy, classless**


*Now let’s look at an academic article from a top journal. Don’t read it like a book: first read the abstract, and then leaf through the article and read the charts. When you start reading it,
just skim the sections that are involved in scholarly debates. What is Bryson’s argument about social boundaries, and why is it sociologically interesting? How can it inform our earlier discussions of baby names, childrearing strategies... and hipsters?

Tastes and Hidden Inequality in American Society
Wolcott, James. 2009. “What’s a Culture Snob to Do?.” *Vanity Fair.*
Peterson R.A. “Roll over Beethoven, there’s a new way to be cool.” *Contexts* 1 (July 1, 2002): 34-39.

Week 14: May 6-10

Is America Fragmenting?

*Given the proliferation of social tastes, of media niches, and of different kinds of habitus, is America falling apart? What is their argument, and why is it surprising to most folks? Is their evidence persuasive? Why or why not?*

Individualism and Social Change

*What are Bellah’s insights for how American culture changes? Now, consider the story about hipsters told by Lorentzen: like the poor, they have been with us for a long time. How can it possibly be that the more things change, the more they stay the same—or have they?*

*EXTRAS: Norman Mailer’s original piece is on FILE; Anatole Brouard’s is [here](#).*

Review for final exam

* * * FINAL EXAM Thursday, May 16, 7-8:10pm in same room * * *