

## SOC 3309: American Society Mid-Winter 2017 Basic Information

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*\*You can call this number if you have trouble getting online, etc. You can also email me anytime.*

### Course Objectives and Skills

- Acquisition of a sociological perspective on human society: individuals, groups and power.
- Development of a sociological imagination and critical analysis of data, theory and texts
- Analyze meta queries: What is society? What is social power? If social life is constructed, what is our responsibility in changing injustices in society?

### The Americans with Disabilities Act

Sul Ross State University is committed to equal access in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1973. It is the student's responsibility to initiate a request for accessibility services. Students seeking accessibility services must contact Mary Schwartz in Counseling and Accessibility Services, Ferguson Hall, Room 112. The mailing address is P.O. Box C-171, Sul Ross State University, Alpine, Texas 79832, Telephone Number 432-837-8203.

## Introduction

**Welcome to our mid-winter Sociology course: American Society!**

**\*This is important to read and understand our course.**

In this short mid-winter class, we will examine several key concepts in sociology from the lens of American Society. This is an upper division sociology course, but anyone can join and there are no prerequisites.

American Society is an exciting and complex system of humans and the institutions we create. *Institutions in sociology are diverse. They are the human-made mechanisms that dictate social, political and economic life for us as citizens.* Institutions can be obvious like government, law, schools, prisons, military. But they are also cultural like film, art and music; and they are more obtuse like mannerisms, language, and social roles we all perform (depending on the setting and audience). Institutions reassert our values as a society.



This is our goal: we are going to look at how **power** operates in American Society, through **groups and individuals**, how power can be expressed in **authority** and **social change**. We will introduce the concept of **hegemony** from the Italian thinker, Antonio Gramsci. Hegemony means the power of a dominant group in society—and that power can be expressed in media, politics, military, law, economy and most importantly is formulated through ideas, or **ideologies**.

Our course consists of four modules and you have three days to complete each module—you can work at your own pace, simply use the discussion board and email questions as your deadline.

You have five components to every module: 1) a short lecture PPT, 2) the reading(s), 3) the media clips or film, 4) the discussion board, and 5) the email questions to the instructor.

You must respond to the discussion board questions twice, using the materials you have read and viewed in your response. Additionally, you will answer a few questions on the readings and email the answers directly to me, your instructor. This is an opportunity to share with me your insights, which I am thrilled to read!

### Okay, wait a minute. How do I do this class, again?

- First time, log into the course Blackboard site. There is an announcement explaining the course.
- Next, look on the left side panel under the tab “Content.” Click that tab.
- Under “Content” see there are folders for all four modules and a discussion board.
- For each module, click the folder to access the lecture PPT and readings.
- With each module:

1. **Read the lecture PPT found in module folder.**
2. **Do the reading(s) in module folder.**
3. **Watch clips or film (links on lecture PPT and on syllabus).**
4. **Participate in discussion board (on Blackboard).**
5. **Email answers to instructor questions (on this syllabus and at the end of each Module Lecture PPT).**

### When is everything due?

#### Module 1: Society and Hegemony

Discussion Board Deadline: Wednesday, Jan 4 Midnight CST

Reading Questions to Instructor: Wednesday, Jan 4 Midnight CST

#### Module 2: Groups and Individuals

Discussion Board Deadline: Saturday, Jan 7 Midnight CST

Reading Questions to Instructor: Saturday, Jan 7 Midnight CST

#### Module 3: Power and Authority

Discussion Board Deadline: Tuesday, Jan 10 Midnight CST

Reading Questions to Instructor: Tuesday, Jan 10 Midnight CST

#### Module 4: Power and Social Change

Discussion Board Deadline: Friday, Jan 13 Midnight CST

Reading Questions to Instructor: Friday, Jan 13 Midnight CST

Essay Emailed to Instructor: Friday, Jan 13 Midnight CST

### How are grades assigned?

#### Points are assigned to each assignment

Discussion Board (10 points each, total possible 40 points)

Reading Questions (15 points each, total possibly 60 points)

Final Essay (100 points)

#### Grade Scale

180-200 points- A

150-179 points- B

125-149 points- C

124-100 points- D

Less than 99 points- F

### What is this final essay?

#### Final Essay

**\*Topic due in email to instructor by Friday, January 6, 2017.**

**\*Due Midnight CST, Friday January 13, 2017.**

*Perimeters:* The essay should be 5-8 pages, using three course sources with additional sources. You must include a works cited page. Paper topics and outline are due the first Friday of the first week of the course via email to instructor. This will allow us a space to discuss your topic and me to help you with sources, etc. The paper is due by midnight on our last class day, January 13.

*Topic:* You can analyze a film or T.V. show, **or** a social process in American society through the lens of Groups and Individuals; Power and Authority; or Power and Social Change. For your essay, you need to use the main course concepts and at least three of the readings. You may use one of the films we viewed in the course.

**All the essays should use the terms: hegemony, society and power. From there you can use different ideas from each module to expand your paper. You should also incorporate outside research and during our one-on-one email conversation about your paper, we will discuss what other sources to use.**

For example, you could write an essay on the code-switching of the American teenager and his/her language patterns within their social group. Conceptually, you could talk about hegemony of teenage life—what are the mainstream ideals of beauty, being cool and/or athletic, popularity, teen sub-cultures (emo, punk, hunting, jocks, Young Life, mean girls, etc.). You could write on how those ideals develop and are reasserted (clothing, cell phones, cars, recreation, media, music, films, etc.). Then you could discuss how teens talk differently around their parents, teachers, best friends, crushes, bullies, etc. And you can talk about the difference between oral teen speak and texting languages, including uses of emoji, sexting, cyber-bullying, selfies and photos (the visual presentation of “self” versus the reality). Finally, you would link how the language reveals code-switching by teens to appear beautiful, cool, popular or connected to their friends. You could also do this paper by analyzing a teen television show or movie like *Gossip Girl*, *Pretty Little Liars*, *Mean Girls*, *Friday Night Lights*, *Vampire Diaries*, *Drumline*, etc.

## Plagiarism

Plagiarism will not be tolerated at any level.

## Communication

When you working through the readings, film and media clips, writing and discussion boards, always feel free to email the instructor for clarification. Although we are not meeting in the real world, we are sharing a virtual space and I am here for you! I will have open skype office hours on Sunday, January 8 from 7pm-8pm (you can also schedule an appointment if that time doesn't work).

## Course Schedule

### Module 1: Society and Hegemony

#### Readings:

1. "Antonio Gramsci and the idea of 'hegemony'"  
Nutshell Biographies #2, Center for Learning Through Community Service, University of Michigan.  
<http://www-personal.umich.edu/~hfox/gramsci.html>
2. "Civil Disobedience" Henry David Thoreau, 1849.  
Website: University of Virginia  
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper2/thoreau/civil.html>  
**\*This is the most important piece in this module and a good one to use in your essay.**
3. "Newspapers" from *Society in America*. Harriet Martineau, 1837. London: Saunders and Otley.  
Website: The Dead Sociologist's Society, Pfeiffer University  
<http://media.pfeiffer.edu/lridener/DSS/Martineau/siatoc.html>

#### Lecture Links and Discussion Notes:

Watch each of these mini-lectures on the ideas of society, hegemony, ideology, identity and codes. Think about how these examples expand your understanding of the terms and begin thinking of your own examples. I have included discussion points for each link to help you know what major points I want you to know from each mini-lecture---you may have more and/or different points and that is wonderful. This will help you in the discussion board conversations and your short essay.

1. "Hegemony: 10 Minute Philosophy" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=js8E6C3ZnJ0>

Discussion Notes: Can you think of times or places where you code switch? School? Work? Family? Friends? Think about how you speak and what you talk about. Do you cuss more with certain people? Are you more polite with others? If you are bi-lingual or have a regional "accent", do you code switch with language depending on who you are talking to and how connected you want to be to that person?

For example, I lived in England and worked at a photo studio. My English co-workers were working class people, like myself, and when we talked they used their regional accents. But when the boss came to check on us, they would switch to their "posh" accent---an accent you know from listening to British news or movies.

The posh accent is called “Received Pronunciation.” Even in its name, it refers to a hegemonic idea: received pronunciation or mainstream, non-regional or “normal”---the “educated” sounding accent. Here is an example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bIemPxHSb6Q> (the speaker talks about public schools which in England are actually expensive boarding schools—not like public schools in the U.S.) *You do not have to watch this full clip on English accents and R.P., but the first three minutes are helpful and point to English hegemony in social class, speech and media, like the BBC. Can you think of the American equivalent of R.P.?*

## 2. “Examples of Hegemony in Pop Culture”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wxOkukIWFs>

Discussion Notes: Examples of hegemonic ideas or ideologies in American advertising. Think about the multiple ideologies in this collection of advertisements: size/amount (more, bigger, larger IS better); masculinity (who proposes, how men smell compared to women), femininity (all women love chocolate, women link cars to men and when they desire or find “hot”, consumption (value, amount, appearance). Consider the last advertisements you viewed outside class, what hegemonic ideologies or mainstream ideas are expressed in them?]

## 3. “Gall-Peters Projection” (from the West Wing)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVX-PrBRtTY>

Discussion Notes: Example of how hegemony can be portrayed as a form of “scientific knowledge” and in this case, specially, a spatial idea or the Mercator Projection. The Mercator projection is an example of how one way of visualizing the earth is not only inaccurate presentation of a 3-D sphere but also how the projection contains ideas about power: the North is better than the South, Europe and the U.S. are bigger than Africa and South America, etc. Consider about how something like a map can be an expression of socio economic, cultural and colonial power---and it’s just a flat picture of land!]

## 4. “The White Savior in Film: Implications for Individualism and White Hegemony:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M1JaT6cl1NY>

Discussion Notes: Here we see how hegemony can be expressed in terms of race and class---in the film clips chosen, both white men and women are portrayed as the “savior” for other ethnicities. The irony, of course in many of these examples, is that white or European society have created societies where power is linked to whiteness, and yet in film, the white savior is also rescuing the different ethnic groups. How does the white savior idea reflect mainstream ideas about white guilt? Is this guilt connected with a need for mainstream or hegemonic society to rewrite history, in other words---does this help a portion of society deal with a racist U.S. history?

As the narrator of this clip notes, a positive white figure is not in and of itself negative, but what happens when this is the perspective that dominates and/or monopolizes a specific film? What about when it is the perspective of most films and film industry in general? In the film clips, the narrator also makes another argument about hegemony in film: by having a white savior presented in contrast to white villains, a diversity of white people and perspectives is introduced. White characters are diverse and different. At the same time, non-white characters are often portrayed as “the voice of their race” or all very similar---they are not shown as full and complex people.

Secondly, think about the economic angle of this argument which the narrator of this clips discusses—in the expensive medium of film, why is the white angle is the story repeatedly told? How is this perspective argued as the “marketable” perspective on a story? Compare the way a film like Lincoln tells the story of slavery and the civil war, AND makes a lot of money and wins a lot of awards—compared to a story from Harriet Tubman or Sojourner Truth’s perspectives? Both women were former slaves, brave and incredibly intelligent—but their stories are not sold as blockbuster movies.

Thirdly, think about how portraying people of color as downtrodden and incapable of saving themselves reasserts hegemonic ideas of power, race and goodness in a society. Why do you think this image continues to be reasserted in film? How does this image correspond to real-life examples of social power by non-white people in America? Is there a message, conscious or subconscious about power, justice and freedom—when the savior is always white? Think even of how Jesus is often painted in America. Does he look Middle Eastern or African, as he was in real-life? Or is he portrayed physically as a European?

Finally, how does the narrator argue that the “white savior and white villain” ideas contradict institutions of racism in America? This is a key sociological question—we look not simply at individual behaviors in sociology, but also group and institutional ideologies.

For example, the narrator uses clips from “The Help” in which Miss Hilly is seen as an evil racist and Skeeter as a white savior, but segregation in American societies was not just a contest between good and evil individuals. There is complicity in racism—when one is not an evil villain but still benefits from an unequal system. Examples from history include segregated schools and neighborhoods, redlining and voting access, preferential job hiring and promotion. What are other historical and/or current institutions ordered around race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class or religion? How do these institutions reassert ideologies of American hegemony?

#### **Discussion Board:**

- A. **What is hegemony---and how does it operate in YOUR life?** (Think about an idea that is accepted as “natural”, “common sense”, “just the way things are” and yet, what you have thought, observed or experienced shows that while it is a powerful idea, it is not an absolute. Instead it may be a social “truth” because it is an idea that has power and repetition asserted behind it)
  
- B. **Can you think of an example of hegemony works in American Society and how it is reasserted?** (media, film, maps, law, policies, speeches, institutions—family, school, prison)

#### **Email Questions to Instructor:**

1. What is one observation Harriet Martineau had of American society in “Newspapers”? How do you think her observations are still relevant?
2. In *Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau writes that some men serve the state as machines, some with their heads and some with their conscience. What professions is he talking about with each example?
3. Thoreau writes: “Cast your whole vote, not a strip of paper merely, but your whole influence. A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority; it is not even a minority then; but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight. If the alternative is to keep all just

men in prison, or give up war and slavery, the State will not hesitate which to choose.” What do you think he means by this?

4. Choose a sentence from Thoreau’s *Civil Disobedience* that you find interesting or powerful about American society or governance. Why did you choose that one?

## Module 2: Groups and Individuals

### Reading:

“Eichmann in Jerusalem” Hannah Arendt, 1961. *The New Yorker*.

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1963/02/16/eichmann-in-jerusalem-i>

### Film:

“Stanford Prison Experiment” (either the 2015 movie or the free BBC documentary)

*The Stanford Prison Experiment* (2015) on Hulu: <http://www.hulu.com/watch/940096>

On Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B017ZTHH5Y>

If you don’t have access either of these sites, you may watch this free documentary on the Stanford Prison Experiment: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=760lwYmpXbc>

### **Discussion Board:**

- A. How powerful is conformity in American Society?**
- B. If we did the Prison Experiment at Sul Ross, what role would be more difficult for you to play, and why?**

### **Email Questions to Instructor:**

1. In the “Eichmann in Jerusalem” essay, Eichmann is written as a “joiner.” When Germany was defeated in May 1945, Eichmann said this: “I sensed I would have to live a leaderless and difficult individual life, I would receive no directives from anybody, no orders and commands would any longer be issued to me, no pertinent ordinances would be there to consult—in brief, a life never known before lay ahead of me.” How powerful is belonging to Eichmann and how did it influence his actions?
2. Make two observations about the Zimbardo experiment relating to group and individual power. Do you see the group(s) or individuals holding more power? How?
3. Do you think the institution of “prison” and our society’s hegemonic expectations of prisoners, guards and authority influenced the student participants? Why or why not?
4. If you were in the Stanford Prison Experiment, would you have chosen to be a prisoner or a guard? How do you think you would have acted compared to the actual participants?

## Module 3: Power and Authority

### Readings:

1. “Military Industrial Complex Speech” President Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1961, Public Papers of the Presidents  
<http://coursesa.matrix.msu.edu/~hst306/documents/indust.html>
2. “Why we are living in an age of fear” Neil Strauss, October 6, 2016 *Rolling Stone*  
<http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/features/why-were-living-in-the-age-of-fear-w443554>

Film:

*Kumaré*, Vikram Gandhi, 2011

Netflix (if you do not have a Netflix account, contact me and I will hook you up!)

**Discussion Board:**

- A. Do you think we live in an age of fear? Why or why not?**
- B. Give an example of a charismatic leader in American Society and share why they are powerful. They can be famous or local, simply show how their charisma is a form of authoritative power.**
- C. What is the danger in this type of power over a group?**

**Email Questions to Instructor:**

1. What is the American “culture of fear” according to the Rolling Stone article?
2. In becoming a guru, a charismatic authority, Kumaré develops a following. Even though he is not a “real” guru, his followers think he is and have authentic spiritual experiences. What does this say about truth and spirituality? What does this say about his experiment?
3. Compare what Weber says about charismatic authority and Kumaré.
4. How much of authority IS illusion? How much charismatic power derived from people and not the leader? What are social expectations of leaders---essentially, how do we the people make our leaders?

**Module 4: Power and Social Changes**

Readings:

1. “Two Speeches” Dolores Huerta, UXL Hispanic American Reference Library, 2003  
<http://ic.galegroup.com/ic/suic/PrimarySourcesDetailsPage/DocumentToolsPortletWindow?jsid=a0e14f2137865354964c84a1fd9d60e0&action=2&catId=&documentId=GALE%7CEJ2130500012&userGroupName=full19951&zid=5cf86d3caa99fcae3e1fbae383e7db8>
2. “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” Martin Luther King, Jr., August 1963  
[https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/Letter\\_Birmingham\\_Jail.pdf](https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/Letter_Birmingham_Jail.pdf)
3. “For America to Live, Europe Must Die” Russell Means, July 1980  
<https://unsettlingamerica.wordpress.com/tag/russell-means/>

Film:

“American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs” 2014

<https://www.amazon.com/American-Revolutionary-Evolution-Grace-Boggs/dp/B00STN7DSM>

\*If you have trouble accessing this documentary, email the instructor.

**Discussion Board:**

- A. What is one thing that Grace Lee Boggs said about social change that you found relevant, powerful or interesting?**
- B. How can you use Boggs’ approach in your everyday life?**

**Email Questions to Instructor:**

1. What social change in American Society does each of the readings pursue? Whose argument or speech was most powerful to you? Why?
  - a. Dolores Huerta-
  - b. Martin Luther King, Jr.-
  - c. Russell Means-
2. How is social change part of a society? How does this power interact with hegemonic power?
3. How was Grace Lee Boggs an outsider in multiple groups? How did she use that in social change?
4. What is Grace Lee Boggs' approach to change? How do we make social change? Who are the real leaders?
5. Jot down one quote from Boggs that you found powerful and why.