

SOC 3309: American Society
Summer II: July 6th-August 10th, 2017

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Introduction

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

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

In this short ~~mid-winter~~summer ~~class~~course, 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.



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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**.

Student Learning Outcomes

- Acquisition of a sociological perspective on human society: individuals, groups, ~~and~~ power, social change, authority, culture, sub-culture and identity.
- Development of a sociological imagination and critical analysis of data, theory and texts.
- Ability to analyze and understand basic sociological theory and then apply to original student research.

- [Develop an original research paper using a theoretical frame work, media content analysis and original writing.](#)
- 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 Schwartze 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.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism will not be tolerated at any level.

Texts

No textbook is required to purchase. Instead, all readings have been made into PDFs and are available on the course Blackboard site. We will be reading a diversity of sources (detailed below). All readings are in module folders for that week and **required** to pass that week's assessment.

Projects and Assessment

Breaking headline: NO EXAMS!

In this course, I am grading you on **full completion** of each week's assignments on time (**missing components and last minute emails with no goods is NOT a wise move**). This is a summer critical geography course, which means I am grading you all on your ability to take in diverse information in several mediums:

- lecture power point (ppt),
- readings (both popular and academic articles), media clips and films,
- your critical writing to questions and original essays,
- discussion board commentary (2 posts per module), and
- an original research paper using the sociological imagination to analyze and American television program (story or episode arc) of at least 12 pages, with citation page.

Each week's assignments take a minimum of 6-8 hours, with extra time for writing and researching your original paper. **Assignments are due to the professor by email by midnight of that week's deadline, CST. Use my [sulross](#) email as first attempt, my [gmail](#) is also noted above for issues with attachments. You can send much earlier if you are going away or want to get assignments done ahead of time.**

Waiting until the last minute to complete work is just going to give yourself a nervous breakdown. I highly recommend reviewing everything required of you for that week's module by the Friday and then you have 6 days to organize your time and do the assignments in sessions at your own pace. **Every Thursday by midnight CST is your deadline for that module (see calendar below).** Thus, we begin on a Thursday and you have a whole week for that module, and so forth.



I respect you all as adult scholars and humans with work, family, life—many commitments. At the same time, you have registered and committed to a summer course. **This format offers you considerable flexibility, and with that trust are expectations of on-time, thoughtful, complete work. Always email if you have questions about an assignment. I am here for you, as you are here for your career. Invest in yourself and produce high quality work!**

Grading

There are five weeks in Summer 2 and five modules. Complete, well-done work for each module is all you have to do for this course. Each module is worth 100 points, and the final research paper is worth another 100 points. I deduct points for: missing components, copy and paste answers, lack of showing your critical analysis, and lack of engagement with materials. **Late is a serious matter and will require a professor-to-student conversation.**

The materials are diverse and show not only a spectrum of sociology; but are also **examples of college level scholarship and major contributors to the debates in this field.** We are examining primary and secondary sources, and popular and academic writers.

Primary sources provide direct first hand evidence about a person, event, etc. They can be historical or current, and can be letters, declarations, speeches, manifestos, data, maps, interviews, surveys, audio or video recordings, experiments, etc. In this course, you will read some speeches and interviews from diverse political and social leaders like Stokely Carmichael, Russell Means, Angela Davis and Dolores Huerta—these are primary sources. **Secondary sources** interpret, explain, describe, evaluate, summarize, etc. the primary source. Any article you read analyzing one of those leaders' speeches or a social experiment would be an example of a secondary source.

Popular sociology articles are those that contain social science information, but are written for the general public. You don't have to be a college sociology student or professor to deal with the language. We take the complex theory and translate it out of the disciplinary specific language for everyone to read. Examples are *Scientific American*, *Psychology Today*, *The Guardian*, *The Atlantic*, *Harper's*, *The New Yorker*, *Rolling Stone*, *Texas Monthly* etc.

Academic sociology will be the most complex readings: they will have a theoretical framework, data and analysis and are written with geography language at a college reading level. These articles are reviewed by other scholars in the field before publication and published without compensation, like the journals *Social Problems*, and *Media Culture and Society*. This category also includes major works in critical social theory, including Harriet Martineau's *Society in America*, Henry David Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* and Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*.

It's **your job** to intellectually engage each source I have selected—you will be inspired by some readings, and you won't like others. But that's not my objective, professors aren't chefs trying to please your palate © We are here to make you think and work out your brain like a coach. Stretch your mental pre-conceptions, biases and comfortability. Trust me, you will come out of these five weeks ready for action!



Point System

Module 1: 100 points
Module 2: 100 points
Module 3: 100 points
Module 4: 100 points
Module 5: 100 points
Final Paper: 100 points

Final Grade Tally

550-600 points: A
500-549 points: B
450-499 points: C
400-449 points: D
Below: Failing Grade

Research Paper

In addition to the critical writing analysis questions and discussion boards for each module, you will be writing an original research paper on hegemonic values in American television. Through the course, you will learn about hegemony as a concept, resistance against hegemonic values and changing ideas or ideologies in society. Your data source to analyze these ideas will be an American television show of at least a five-episode story arc. A story arc means a narrative that continues in some way through at least five episodes (the “big game”, a romance, a mystery, a health crisis, a contest—any kind of dramatic conflict or situation and resolution).

We will work on this paper through an iterative process. That basically means in stages, so you can write organized and deep, and with help from me along the way. For each module, you will have a component due for the paper (see schedule below) and then the final paper by the last day of class.

The television show is your data source and you can pick any show that deals with an aspect of American society and gives you material to construct an analysis of hegemony. The show can reject or resist hegemony; the show can reassert mainstream power ideas; or the show can change actual American society by existing (this happens a lot in the U.S., popular imagery on television can reinforce stereotypes or demolish them, pop culture can make certain conversations more acceptable or show how an idea or language becomes outdated). For example, *Ellen* and *Will & Grace* helped Americans think and talk about LGBTQ issues, desires, families and policy issues.



All the essays should use the terms: hegemony, society and power. From there you can use different ideas from each module and your show to expand your paper.

For example, you could write an essay on the code-switching of the American teenager and his/her language patterns within their social group (this is something you will learn more about in Module 1). Conceptually, you could discuss the hegemony of teenage life—what are the mainstream ideals of beauty, being cool and/or athletic, popular, teen sub-cultures (emo, punk, hunting, jocks, Young Life, mean girls, etc.). You could write on how those ideals develop and are reasserted in teen consumption (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.

I specifically want you to do **at least 5 episodes of a single television show** and not a movie—as you will be reading, television becomes part of the everyday fabric of American life and is popular culture that original was consumed in the intimate space of home life. Think about how much media enters our everyday and television became synonymous with American home geography. In Module 1, you will be choosing your show and can be in email conversation with me before the deadline for that week on ideas.

At the end of every lecture PPT, I will explain what you need to do for your research paper that week. That component is due with your critical reading questions and discussion board posts for the week by the Thursday midnight deadline. **Read ahead and don't wait until the Thursday deadline to read and do that paper component! ALWAYS email me if you are unsure of how your idea or show might work within the constructs of the paper---talking it out always helps!**

Your paper is a minimum of 12 pages, NOT including the works cited page with at least 6 sources (3 academic articles, 1 data source of the show with episode titles and air dates, and 2 theoretical on hegemony and society).

Original research paper timeline:

Module 1: Choose television show and write paper prospectus

Module 2: Draft a theoretical framework and find three academic sources

Module 3: Review at least 5 episodes and take notes as your data collection

Module 4: Outline your paper with thesis, theory, data, analysis and conclusion

Module 5: Final paper with at least 6 sources: 3 academic articles, 1 data source of show, and 2 on hegemony

Citations

Your research paper must include all sources, including your television show episodes in APA format. In the module schedule below, I have already put your sources in APA format. But here is also an online guide for APA in every possible source (websites, blogs, interviews, articles, books, etc.). It is important when you make an argument or analysis to share your sources.

APA Formatting and Style Guide. Purdue Online Writing Lab:

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/07/>

Other Assignments

Readings

Every week you will have a diversity of sociological material to read, in addition to the lecture PPT. The readings are in that week's module folder.

Critical Analysis Questions

Every week, you will answer several critical analysis questions on the readings and email the answers directly to me, your instructor. Each question should be answered in 3-5 thoughtful sentences which reveal your understanding of the reading and the other materials. This is an opportunity to share with me your insights, which I am thrilled to read! This is also the main way to prove to me you have read and worked through the materials.

Discussion Board

You must respond to the discussion board questions twice, using the materials you have read and viewed in your response. Be sure to respond to both my questions to the class and each other. Sociology is all about humans as social animals and how we communicate with each other is key!

Communication

When you are 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!

Module 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. Retrieved from <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~hfox/gramsci.html>

2. Gitlin, T. (1979). Prime Time Ideology: The Hegemonic Process in Television Entertainment. *Social Problems*, 26(3), 251-266.

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2-3. Martineau, H (1837). Newspapers from *Society in America*. London: Saunders and Otley.
Retrieved from: The Dead Sociologist's Society, Pfeiffer University
<http://media.pfeiffer.edu/lridener/DSS/Martineau/siatoc.html>

3-4. Thoreau, H.D. (1849). *Civil Disobedience*. Retrieved from: University of Virginia
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper2/thoreau/civil.html>

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Critical Writing Questions
2. Discussion Board Commentary
3. Research Paper Component 1

DEADLINE FOR MODULE 1 ASSIGNMENTS: Thursday July 13, Midnight CST

MODULE 2: Groups and Individuals

READINGS

1. Adalian, J. (2016). How Nickelodeon Got America Hooked on Cable. *Vulture*. October 24. Retrieved from: <http://www.vulture.com/2016/10/nickelodeon-got-america-hooked-on-cable.html>
2. Arendt, H. (1961) Eichmann in Jerusalem. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1963/02/16/eichmann-in-jerusalem-i>
3. Hoffner, C. and M. Buchanan. (2005). Young Adults' Wishful Identification with Television Characters: The Role of Perceived Similarity and Character Attributes. *Media Psychology*, 7, 325-351.
4. Milgram, S. (1973) The Perils of Obedience. *Harpers*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nmml.edu/academics/leadership/documents/Milgram-Obedience2.pdf>
5. Morley, D. (1986) Television in the family. *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure*. 7-28. London: Routledge Retrieved from: https://monoskop.org/images/9/97/Morley_David_Family_Television_Cultural_Power_and_Domestic_Leisure_1988.pdf
6. Reality TV: A Sociological Perspective View, SOC302 Group Project. Retrieved from: <https://sociologyjrs2012.wordpress.com> *This is a one page website from another sociology class that analyzed a few reality television shows from a few main sociological perspectives and theories: conflict theory, symbolic interactionism, social control, functionalism. This group project is well written, concise and will help inspire your paper organization and how to invoke the sociological imagination in your writing.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Critical Writing Questions

2. Discussion Board Commentary
3. Research Paper Component 2

DEADLINE FOR MODULE 2 ASSIGNMENTS: Thursday July 20, Midnight CST

MODULE 3: Power and Authority

READINGS

1. Freeman, J.E. (2011). Another Side of C. Wright Mills: The Theory of Mass Society. *Logos: A Journal of Modern Society and Culture*. Retrieved from:
<https://sociologyjrs2012.wordpress.com>
2. Hind, D. (2011). Mass media, or public media? *Al-Jazeera*. October 20.
3. Mills, C. W. (1958). The Structure of Power in American Society. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 9(1). 29-41.
4. Strauss, N. (October 6, 2016) "Why we are living in an age of fear" *Rolling Stone* Retrieved from:
<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!)

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Critical Writing Questions with Film Analysis
2. Discussion Board Commentary
3. Research Paper Component 3

DEADLINE FOR MODULE 3 ASSIGNMENTS: Thursday July 27, Midnight CST

MODULE 4: Power and Social Change

READINGS/MULTIMEDIA

Primary Sources from Anti-Hegemonic Leaders

1. Huerta, D. (2003) Two Speeches. UXL Hispanic American Reference Library. Retrieved from:
<http://ic.galegroup.com/ic/suic/PrimarySourcesDetailsPage/DocumentToolsPortletWindow?jsid=a0e14f2137865354964c84a1fd9d60e0&action=2&catId=&documentId=GALE%7CEJ2130500012&userGroupName=full19951&zid=5cf86d3caa99fcae3e1fbae383e7db8>
2. Chavez, C. (1984) Address to the Commonwealth Club of California by Cesar Chavez, President of the United Farm Workers, AFL-CIO. San Francisco, CA.

Retrieved from:

http://www.chavezfoundation.org/_cms.php?mode=view&b_code=00100800000000&b_no=16&page=1&field=&key=&n=7

3. Lorde, A. (2009). Selections from *I Am Your Sister: Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press. Retrieved from: <https://mwasicollectif.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/audre-lorde-i-am-your-sister-collected-and-unpublished-writings.pdf>
4. Carmichael, S. (1966) Black Power. Speech at the University of California, Berkley. Retrieved from; <http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/carmichael-black-power-speech-text/>
5. LaDuke, W. (2011) Seeds of Our Ancestors. TEDTalk. Minnesota. **Watch online:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHN1el72eQc>
6. Means, R. (1980) For America to Live, Europe Must Die. Speech. July 1980. Retrieved from <https://unsettlingamerica.wordpress.com/tag/russell-means/>

Secondary Source

1. Mistry, R. (1999). Can Gramsci's theory of hegemony help us to understand the representation of ethnic minorities in western television and cinema? Essay. Retrieved from <http://www.theory.org.uk/ctr-rol6.htm>

Film:

"American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs" 2014

<https://www.amazon.com/American-Revolutionary-Evolution-Grace-Boggs/dp/BooSTN7DSM>

*If you have trouble accessing this documentary, email the instructor. We have a class account and I will give the information that week.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Critical Writing Questions
2. Discussion Board Commentary
3. Research Paper Component 3

DEADLINE FOR MODULE 4 ASSIGNMENTS: Thursday August 3, Midnight CST

MODULE 5: Culture, Sub-Cultures, and Social Influence

READINGS

1. Avila-Saavedra, G. (2009). Nothing queer about queer television: televised construction of gay masculinities. *Media Culture Society* 31(5), 5-21.
2. Brasted, M. (2004). Through the Looking Glass: Class and Reality in Television. *Electronic Journal of Sociology*. Retrieved from: <https://www.sociology.org/content/2004/tier2/brasted.html>

3. Grindstaff, L. and J. Turow. (2006). Video Cultures: Television Sociology in the "New TV" Age. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 32, 103-125
4. Martinez, J. (2015). 'Game of Thrones' and the Changing Curriculum in Modern Universities. *Newsweek*. August 23. Retrieved from: <http://www.newsweek.com/game-thrones-college-class-364628>
5. Yglesias, M. (2013). How the Sopranos Changed the Television Industry Forever. *Slate*. Retrieved from: http://www.slate.com/blogs/moneybox/2013/06/20/sopranos_changed_the_television_industry.html

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Critical Writing Questions
2. Discussion Board Commentary
3. Final Research Paper

DEADLINE FOR MODULE 5 ASSIGNMENTS: Thursday August 10, Midnight CST

FINISH LINE, YOU DID IT!

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